

**ARTS AND FACTS.  
FICTION, NON-FICTION AND THE  
PHOTOGRAPHIC MEDIUM**

(EDITED VERSION - COPYRIGHT MATERIAL REMOVED)

Paloma Atencia-Linares  
UCL

Submitted for the degree of PhD in Philosophy  
September 2013

I, PALOMA ATENCIA-LINARES, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

6th September, 2013

*To the memory of  
Claudia, Consuelo and María.  
Three strong women.*

## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I deal with the rarely discussed issue of how the nature of a representational medium—in this case photography—affects or contributes to the classification of works as fiction or non-fiction, and I provide a novel view on the relation between photographs and documentary works. Part I focuses on issues concerning the nature of photographic representation, its *special* relation with the real and its purported fictional incompetence. Part II takes up issues concerning the nature of fiction and non-fiction with an emphasis on the category of non-fiction/documentary, and examines its application to photography. Firstly, I discuss the claim, put forward by Kendall Walton, according to which photographs, in virtue of being depictive, are or favour fiction. I deny that this is so, although I argue that Walton's claim is frequently misunderstood. Then, I address the more intuitive claim that photographs favour non-fiction. I argue that, if this is so, it is not because photographs are fictionally incapable. Photographs, I claim, can depict *ficta* by photographic means. However, this is consistent with saying that photographs bear a special relation with the real: (1) photographs are typically natural 'signals'; they are *handicaps* and *indices* (Green 2007, Maynard-Smith and Harper 2004)—and thereby typically factive; and (2) photographs are *documental* images, images that support an experience that preserves the particularity of the original scene. These features contribute to non-fiction/documentary. To see how, I discuss various views on the nature of documentary and I propose an alternative account based on Stacie Friend's 'Genre Theory'. Finally, I discuss the application of the categories of fiction and non-fiction to photography. I claim that although these are active genres in the medium, it is more accurate to speak about factual and non-factual photography, where the former is a more basic category. This, in turn, is a consequence of the nature of the medium itself.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	4
Table of Contents.....	5
Table of Figures.....	7
Acknowledgements.....	10
INTRODUCTION.....	12
PART I.....	22
CHAPTER 1. DEPICTION, IMAGINATION AND FICTION .....	23
1. Overview.....	23
2. Pictures as fictions.....	24
3. Imagination, fiction and pictures. Walton's legacy.....	34
4. Imagining as the default mode in pictorial representations.....	37
4.1. Imagining-seeing in films.....	38
4.2. Pictorial experience and imagined existence.....	40
5. Imaginings fit for fiction .....	45
5.1. Fictive pictures and fictional reference .....	45
5.2. Recreative imagination and fiction.....	50
6. Conclusion .....	54
CHAPTER 2. NATURAL IMAGES AND FICTIONAL INCOMPETENCE.....	56
1. Overview.....	56
2. Natural images.....	58
3. The debate on the fictional incompetence of photography.....	62
4. Photographic means .....	65
5. Objections and replies .....	70
6. Natural meaning revisited. Epistemological implications.....	78
7. Signals, indices and handicaps .....	82
8. Scope of the view .....	93
9. A stronger account? Hopkins on factivity, design and proper working.....	95
10. Conclusion .....	101
CHAPTER 3. DOCUMENTAL IMAGES.....	102
1. Overview.....	102
2. Photographs as a recognisable perceptual category. (What do we mean by special Phenomenology?).....	104

3. Transparency .....	113
4. (Depictive) Traces .....	118
5. Factive pictorial experience.....	125
6. Particularity.....	128
7. Explaining particularity.....	134
7.1 Perceptual experience and photographic experience.....	138
7.2 Photographic experience, transparency and episodic memory.....	144
8. The <i>documental images</i> view and phenomenology. Summary and clarifications..	148
9. The documental images view vs. alternative theories. ....	151
10. Conclusion .....	155
PART II .....	156
CHAPTER 4. DOCUMENTAL IMAGES AND DOCUMENTARY WORKS.....	158
1. Overview.....	159
2. From documental to documentary.....	159
3. What is a documentary work?.....	166
4. Visible Traces: photography as a necessary condition for documentary .....	168
5. Documentary without photography: Carroll's <i>Films of Presumptive Assertion</i>	181
6. The Genre Theory: photography as a standard feature .....	192
7. Conclusion .....	207
CHAPTER 5. FICTION AND NON-FICTION IN PHOTOGRAPHY .....	209
1. Overview.....	209
2. Documentary. Criteria for classification.....	210
3. Documentary. Effects on appreciation.....	213
4. Scepticism about fictional photography.....	219
5. In defense of photographic fiction.....	221
6. Factual and non-factual. Categories reconsidered .....	227
7. The nature of photography and the shaping of a genre.....	234
8. Conclusion .....	237
References .....	239

# TABLE OF FIGURES

‘ “And what is the use of a book,” thought Alice,  
“without pictures or conversations?” ’

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Figure 1 Robert Capa "Dorset. Waymouth 1-5 June" (1944).....	14
Figure 2 Agan Harahap "Cherbourg Normandy, 1944" <i>Superheroes Series</i> (2011) .....	14
Figure 3 Brian Walski "British Soldier in Basra". Published in the <i>Los Angeles Times</i> on 30th March 2003. ....	15
Figure 4 Brian Walski's other two images with which he composed the previous one.	15
Figure 5 Robert Capa "Falling Soldier" (original caption "Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death, Cerro Muriano, September 5, 1936) .....	15
Figure 6 Carol Condé and Karl Beveridge "Liberty Lost" (2010) .....	16
Figure 7 Crispin Gurholt "Sunday 17.45, Live Photo #7" (2004) .....	16
Figure 9 NASA 1993 LUNOX concept for a lunar habitat .....	32
Figure 10 Annie Leibovitz "The Sword in the Stone. Roger Federer as King Arthur" (2007) <i>Disney Dream Portraits</i> .....	33
Figure 11 "Snowwhite. Rachel Weitz" (2007) <i>Disney Dream Portraits</i> .....	33
Figure 12 Nichole Sullivan "Starry Night Sky" (National Geographic 2011).....	43
Figure 13 Marc Spijkerbosch "The Underworlds" (2009) .....	43
Figure 14 How to Draw Mickey Mouse.....	47
Figure 15 David LaChapelle "House at the End of the World" (2005) .....	48
Figure 16 Elliot Erwitt "New York Streets" (2008) .....	51
Figure 17 Elliot Erwitt "Child at Broken Window" (1969).....	51
Figure 18 Alain Resnais "Night and Fog" (1955) .....	53
Figure 19 Alain Resnais "Night and Fog" (1955) .....	53
Figure 20 Chaplin as Adolf Hitler in <i>The Great Dictator</i> (Chaplin, 1940) .....	63
Figure 21 Wanda Wulz "Io Gatto" (1932).....	69
Figure 22 Jerry Uelsmann's "Untitled" (1982).....	70
Figure 23 Eliot Elisofon "Duchamp descending a staircase" (1952).....	76
Figure 24 Gjon Mili "Picasso drawing with light" (1949) .....	76
Figure 25 Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo Archive .....	77
Figure 26 Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo Archive 2 .....	77
Figure 27 Arthur Felling (Weegee) "Draft Johnson for President" (1968) .....	88
Figure 28 Henry Peach Robinson "Fading Away" (1858).....	91

Figure 29 Southworth & Hawes, "Man Seated Beside a Window Showing the Brattle Street Church" (circa 1880) .....	98
Figure 30 Peter Henry Emerson "A Stiff Pull" (composition printing) (1886-87 printed 1888) .....	98
Figure 31 Photograph made with a pinhole camera .....	99
Figure 32 Herbert George Pointing "Distortion" (1927) .....	100
Figure 33 G.A. Canaletto "St Paul's Cathedral" (1754) .....	109
Figure 34 Photograph of St Paul's Cathedral .....	109
Figure 35 Claudia J. Morgan "St Paul's Cropped" .....	109
Figure 36: Alyssa Monk's <i>Smirk</i> (2009) [Photorealist Painting] .....	111
Figure 37 Fernand Leger "Nude on a Red Background" (1927) .....	116
Figure 38 Drawing and Icon of a Woman.....	116
Figure 39 Yusuf Karsh "Sir Winston Churchill" (1941).....	125
Figure 40 Mickey Mouse "Portrait" .....	130
Figure 41 Drawing of Barack Obama.....	130
Figure 42 Egon Schiele "Self-portrait with hand on chest" (1910).....	131
Figure 43 Photograph of Egon Schiele.....	132
Figure 44 Eugenio Recuenco vs Picasso (2012) .....	132
Figure 45 New York Times "Soldier in Afghanistan" (2011) .....	141
Figure 46 Diego Rivera "El Vendedor de Alcatraces" (1941).....	149
Figure 47 Chema Madoz "Pipa" (1999).....	151
Figure 48 Jeff Wall "The Passerby" (1996).....	162
Figure 49 Steve Klein "Bran and Angelina. Domestic Bliss" W. Magazine (2005) .....	162
Figure 50 Jeff Wall "Untitled" Ed. for Parkett (1997).....	162
Figure 51 Steve Klein "Brad and Angelina. Domestic Bliss" W. Magazine (2005) .....	162
Figure 52 Duane Michals "Dr Duanus' Famous Magic Hat" (1996).....	164
Figure 53 Doctored photograph presented in an ironic context (parody blog).....	165
Figure 54 Walker Evans "Let us Praise Famous Men" (1941).....	178
Figure 55 LIFE Magazine. "Buzz Aldrin eased down <i>Eagle's</i> ladder, paused on the last rung, and jumped the final three feet" Special Edition. August 11, 1969.....	179
Figure 56 Francis Galton "The Jewish Type" (1880) .....	179
Figure 57 Francois Michaux "Morus rubra (Red mulberry)" (1813).....	186
Figure 58 Phillis Kim "What our world will look like in 50 years. Think about your carbon footprint today!" APHA contest winner (2004) .....	187



Figure 59 Jim Bourg "George W. Bush hands back a crying baby that was handed to him from the crowd as he arrived for an outdoor dinner with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Trinwillershagen, Germany, July 13, 2006."	189
Figure 60 Tim Sloan "UNITED STATES, Washington: US president-elect Barack Obamawaves while walking with President George W. Bush after arriving at the White House NOVEMBER 10, 2008 in Washington. January 20, 2009 inauguration as the next president."	189
Figure 61 [Author undisclosed for the purposes of the test] "Dead Troops Talk (A vision after an ambush of a Red Army patrol near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986)	214
Figure 62 Image detail "Dead Troops Talk"	215
Figure 63 Cindy Sherman "Untitled Film Still #21" (1978)	222
Figure 64 Jeff Wall "Mimic" (1982)	223
Figure 65 Gregory Crewdson "Unpenitent Daughter" (2011)	223
Figure 66 Anna Gaskell "Untitled 21" (1997)	224
Figure 67 Clarence H. White "Morning" (1908)	228
Figure 68 Imogen Cunningham "On Mt Rainier 5" (1915)	229
Figure 69 May Ray "Ingres's Violin" (1924)	229
Figure 70 Jaroslav Rössler "Untitled" (1931)	229
Figure 71 Jerry Uelsmann "Symbolic Mutation" (1964)	230

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would have not been possible without the intellectual, material and emotional support of many people.

I was fortunate to be supervised by Michael G.F. Martin, Stacie Friend and Rory Madden. Mike helped me to become a better philosopher; I profited immensely from the always insightful and rich supervisions and conversations with him. His intellectual legacy is reflected in this thesis, but goes far beyond it. For this, I am extremely grateful. Stacie exceeded in all possible senses the best expectations one can have of a supervisor. Her work has greatly influenced me, and this is evident in this thesis. Her meticulous and sharp comments, both on content and structure, on every draft of every chapter were exceptionally helpful. But she has also been a mentor and a source of inspiration and support. I am indebted to her in many ways. Rory supervised me two terms and made very useful comments on early drafts of the thesis; he also provided invaluable help and advice at crucial points of my PhD. I am exceedingly grateful to him for all this.

Material for this thesis was presented at various conferences and venues, and I benefited from the comments and wisdom of many people including María José Alcaráz León, Noël Carroll, Dan Cavedon-Taylor, Gregory Currie, Manuel García-Carpintero, Robert Hopkins, Pepe Isla, Margaret Moore, Ian Phillips, Fiora Salis and Kathleen Stock. Maarten Steenhagen made extensive comments on Chapter 3, and Dominic Lopes and Diarmuid Costello provided especially useful comments on material included in Chapter 2, which has been published in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.

It was a privilege to have Robert Hopkins and Thomas Crowther as my examiners. They provided challenging questions and useful suggestions that will greatly benefit my work in the future.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the institutions that provided the material means to pursue my PhD: the British Society of Aesthetics, the AHRC and the Royal Institute of Philosophy (Jacobsen Scholarship).

Before I started my PhD at UCL, the following people instilled in me the love for philosophy and the arts and were crucial for helping me shape my interests:

Fernando Broncano and Jesús Vega were inspiring figures from the beginning. Pepe Isla transmitted me his enthusiasm about photography and taught me many things about the medium. Noël Carroll was a role model and a generous, conscientious and encouraging adviser during my first years as a postgraduate student in Philadelphia and he has remained just as supportive all these years. I have learnt from him much more than he taught me in his great classes.

My friends Ana, Franco, Pia, Juan Carlos, Camila, Dino, Moisés and Marion have been a family away from home. They made my life happier and fuller during the years I spent working on this thesis. David Teira always believed in me more than I did and he has been the most loyal and resourceful friend. He commented on various drafts of this thesis, but listing all the ways in which he has helped me would need a chapter of its own.

My parents, Diamantina and Antonio, and La-Chach have always been an example of a virtuous life, I thank them for teaching me in practice more than I could have ever learnt in Philosophy books. I am grateful to them and to my siblings Tony, Luis, Cadi (and also Javi) for being a constant source of love, encouragement and stability.

No words would be enough to express my gratitude to Mario Santos-Sousa. He read and carefully commented on many drafts of this thesis and I greatly benefited from his philosophical insight. Mario has been my bedrock; I thank him for his love, infinite patience, and ongoing support. I feel most fortunate to have him by my side.

P.A.L.  
London, 2013

# INTRODUCTION

---

MUCH has been written in the philosophical literature about the distinction between fiction and non-fiction and about the nature of photography. However, few have discussed how the nature of representational media—and, in particular, the nature of photography—affects the classification of works as ‘fiction’ or ‘non-fiction’. Moreover, there is, to my knowledge, no discussion in the philosophical literature on whether—and if so, how—the labels of ‘fiction’ and ‘non-fiction’ apply to photography.<sup>1</sup> Theorists who write about the distinction between fiction and non-fiction normally assume that these notions apply to representational works of some kind (especially narrative works), but the nature of the representational media to which these categories apply seems to be taken as irrelevant. However, it is reasonable to think that there are some media that are better or worse suited either for fiction or non-fiction; moreover, it might be the case that some media actually determine in various ways the practices of fictional and non-fictional works. On the other hand, the literature on photography has been very much focused on explaining the close relation between photographic images and reality, but not much has been said on how exactly this affects the classification of photographs (and films) as documentary or non-fictional works. Even less has been written on the relation between fiction and photography. The purpose of this thesis is to fill these gaps and to discuss the distinction between fiction and non-fiction as applied to the photographic medium.

Why should we care about these issues? Why is the distinction between fiction and non-fiction important from a philosophical point of view? And, why should we think that this categorisation is relevant for photography?

The distinction between fiction and non-fiction is not important because it carves nature at its joints. It does not. This is not a metaphysical distinction between what is real and what is not, or what exists and what does not; neither is it an epistemic distinction between what is true and what is false. As many theorists have claimed—

---

<sup>1</sup> There has been discussion on whether photographs can represent fictional entities, but as will become clear in this thesis, this is a slightly different question.

and as will become clear in this thesis as well—works of fiction can be about real people and situations, and can contain both truths and falsities. And similarly in the case of non-fictional works: they can be about non-existent objects or events and they can be entirely false. Of course metaphysical and epistemological issues can have a bearing on how we classify and understand works as fiction and non-fiction; but the distinction itself is not a metaphysical or epistemic one. If the difference between fiction and non-fiction matters, it is because it is a distinction that is grounded in our practices of understanding and appreciating representational works and affects how we respond to them. This, in turn, is a central concern in aesthetics.

Even if the distinction is aesthetically important, we might still ask how it is relevant to photography, and even whether the distinction applies to this medium—after all, we rarely use the terms ‘fiction’ and ‘non-fiction’ to describe photographs.

These are issues that will be dealt with in more detail in different chapters of this thesis, but in principle—or at least pretheoretically—it seems that just as we can distinguish fictional and non-fictional texts and films, we can also distinguish different kinds of photographs. On the one hand, there is a kind that we would be inclined to label ‘non-fiction’—or, in terms more familiar to visual media, ‘documentary’—which would include photographs such as Nick Ut’s *Vietnam Napalm*, Robert Capa’s series of photos of the Second World War (Figure 1) and also, family snapshots, scientific photography, sports photography, wildlife and nature photography, celebrity (*paparazzi*) photography, etc.<sup>2</sup> These kinds of photographs normally function as public records of events, aim to inform the viewer about certain states of affairs and are typically found in newspapers, yearbooks, family albums, factual magazines, scientific journals and other contexts related to truth-seeking practices such as history, journalism, science, etc. On the other hand, there is a different kind that we may, in principle, be led to classify as ‘fiction’ (or at any rate, ‘non-documentary’). This category would accommodate photographs such as David LaChapelle’s *The House at the End of the World*, Agan Harahap’s series of photographs of ‘superheroes’ (Figure 2), Duane Michal’s, *The journey of the spirit after death*, Cindy Sherman’s series *Fairy*

---

<sup>2</sup> I will use the terms non-fiction and documentary interchangeably. As I will mention in Chapter 4, there are ways in which these terms can be used to designate different sets of works, but there is a broader use that allows us to use them as equivalent terms.

*Tales and Disasters*, and Chema Madoz's or Jerry Uelsmann's creative photographs among others. This perhaps more heterogeneous kind of photography is associated with creative contexts of arts and entertainment,<sup>3</sup> and the photographs are typically found in art catalogues, exhibitions, and style and design magazines. As in the case of literature, the difference between these two kinds of photographs is not clear cut, but nevertheless apparent and intuitive. For this reason, and until I provide a more robust account of the classifications, I will call this the 'ordinary' distinction between fictional and non-fictional photographs.

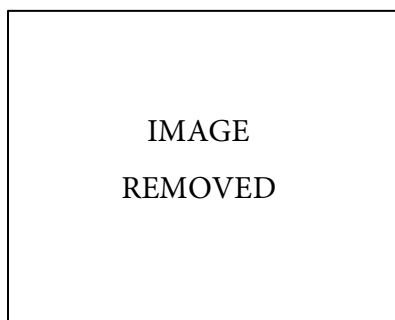


Figure 1 Robert Capa "Dorset. Weymouth 1-5 June" (1944)

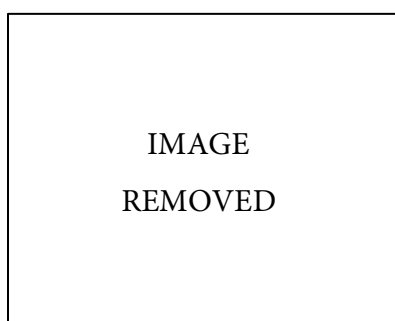


Figure 2 Agan Harahap "Cherbourg Normandy, 1944" *Superheroes Series* (2011)

Making this distinction is relevant because it has consequences for how we evaluate photographic works. If Figure 3 had not been presented as a documentary work in a well-regarded newspaper (the *Los Angeles Times*) it would not have been a scandal when it was discovered that the photograph was a composite of two different images (Figure 4). Likewise, if Robert Capa's *Falling Soldier* (Figure 5) were not a documentary photograph, all the controversy about whether it was staged would not

---

<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that non-fictional pictures are not found in artistic contexts or that they are never works of art.

have made much sense.<sup>4</sup> Compare these photographs with other ‘fictional’<sup>5</sup> ones such as Figure 6 and Figure 7. The fact that the latter photographs are staged is in no way a relevant criticism. In fact, the careful composition and creative staging is an asset. Had these photographs been categorised and presented as documentary, our responses to them would be very different.



Figure 3 Brian Walski "British Soldier in Basra". Published in the *Los Angeles Times* on 30th March 2003.



Figure 4 Brian Walski's other two images with which he composed the previous one.

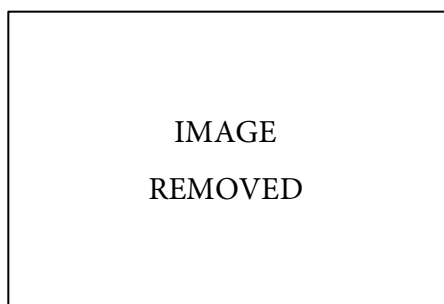


Figure 5 Robert Capa "Falling Soldier" (original caption "Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death, Cerro Muriano, September 5, 1936")

---

<sup>4</sup> For a summary (and an update) of this controversy see (Rohter 2009)

<sup>5</sup> I use inverted commas with the term ‘fiction’ because this term is not frequently applied to photographs. This may lead some people to believe that there is no such thing as fiction in photography. I will deal with this issue in detail in Chapter 5. For now, I will use ‘fiction’ (with inverted commas) to designate the set of works that I mentioned earlier in this introduction and that I called the ‘ordinary’ notion of fiction.

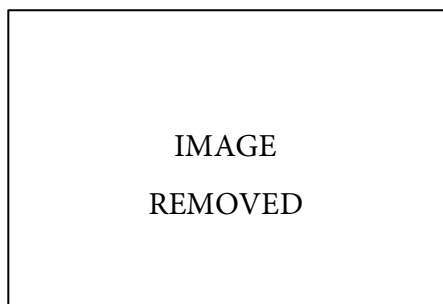


Figure 6 Carol Condé and Karl Beveridge "Liberty Lost" (2010)



Figure 7 Crispin Gurholt "Sunday 17.45, Live Photo #7" (2004)

Now, as I said earlier, the fact that the classification as fiction or non-fiction does not in itself capture a metaphysical or epistemological distinction such as real/unreal, true/false or accurate/inaccurate, does not mean that metaphysical and epistemic issues play no role in how we classify and understand works as fiction and non-fiction. In fact, this is one way in which the nature of the medium may be significant for classification. It may be that the different ways in which different media represent the real or the non-existent, their capacity to capture with accuracy facts of the world, or the degree of difficulty required to present made-up content, affect our practices of classifying and appreciating representational works as fiction or non-fiction. This is precisely what I will argue in this thesis with respect to the photographic medium. I claim that the way in which our experience of photographic images give us access to the real, the constraints on depicting fictional entities and other epistemic and phenomenological features of photography affect the classification of photographic works as fiction or non-fiction, though they do not by themselves determine it.

The chapters of this thesis are divided in two parts. Part I, comprising Chapters 1 through 3, focuses on issues concerning the nature of the photographic medium and photographic representation. Part II, comprising Chapters 4 and 5, takes up issues concerning the distinction between fiction and non-fiction.



In Chapter 1 I consider the claim that photographs, in as much as they are pictorial representations, are fictions or favour to some extent the purpose of fiction. This idea is motivated by two claims in the philosophical literature. On the one hand, some authors, most notably Kendall Walton, have claimed that understanding or engaging with pictorial representation—including photographs—involves at some significant level the exercise of the imagination. On the other hand, according to what is probably the most influential theory on the nature of fiction, an invitation to imagine is the defining mark of fictionality (Walton 1990; Currie 1990; Lamarque and Olsen 1994; Davies 2001; Stock 2011). If these two claims were true, there could be grounds to suspect that pictorial representations somehow privilege their use as fictional works. In Chapter 1 I deny that this is so. As opposed to the strategy followed by many authors, however, I claim that the problem with this argument is not so much the first but the second claim. There might be good reasons to think that many pictures—including photographs—invite some kinds of imagining, but I argue that an invitation to imagine of whatever kind does not necessarily place photographic or pictorial works in the realm of fiction. At the same time, I claim that the notion of ‘fiction’ is used in many different ways by different authors. I clarify these different uses to avoid confusion. In particular, I try to shed light on Walton’s idea that all pictures are ‘fiction’ by claiming that what Walton may mean by this is that the experience of seeing things in pictures (*make-believe* seeing), as opposed to experiencing objects face-to-face (ordinary *real* seeing), does not guarantee a connection to reality and its content is not necessarily determined by real existent objects. Although this explanation makes his view more understandable, it does not however, make it entirely convincing.

Far more popular is the idea that photographs are (intrinsically or typically) documentary or favour the purpose of non-fiction. Many philosophers claim (i) that photographs have a special epistemic and phenomenological relation with the real and partly as a result (ii) that they are ‘fictionally incompetent’, that is, that they cannot depict *ficta* or fictional entities by photographic means. In Chapters 2 and 3 I analyse these claims.

In Chapter 2 I address the issue of the purported fictional incapacity of photographs. I claim that this is not a good reason to think that photographs favour

non-fiction for, I argue, there is nothing in the nature of photographs that prevents the representation of fictional entities or events. Philosophers who argue otherwise seem to endorse a restrictive account of what counts as ‘photographic means’. But if we interpret this notion in a broad sense that is more adjusted to the photographic practices and captures the essential nature of photography, there is no reason to deny that photographs can represent fictional entities and scenes by photographic means. However, I do not deny that photographs are *typically* natural images and thereby *typically* reliable indicators of the existence and appearance of the objects and events they depict. In fact, I argue, photographs are indeed epistemically advantageous for these reasons. Following *the signalling model of communication* as put forward by Green and Maynard-Smith and Harper, I claim that photographs can be conceived of as ‘natural signals’. Photographs are the product of a mechanism that was designed—following cultural and technological pressures—to capture with accuracy the appearance of real existent objects (and, as I will add in Chapter 3, to create an image that supports a special kind of experience). Like other natural signals, photographs can be faked or manipulated, but there are robust vouchsafing mechanisms that usually prevent this from happening. In this chapter I also discuss Robert Hopkins’ view that photographs are necessarily factive. I claim that Hopkins’ view is too strong. While I agree that photographic representation is *typically* factive, I disagree that it is *necessarily* so. I claim that factivity is a contingent advantage both in digital and analogue photography.

Now, photographs, I claim, are not special only because they are typically natural images and we can thereby typically *infer* the existence and appearance of the objects and scenes they depict. In Chapter 3 I argue that photographs are also special because they allow us to *experience* these objects and scenes as concrete and existent particulars. Photographs, I maintain, are a perceptually recognisable category; i.e., what it is like to experience a photograph is different from what it is like to experience other pictorial types, and this difference is visually available *merely* by seeing photographs. Photographs support a peculiar kind of pictorial experience. Specifically, photographs are *documental* images, images that support an experience that preserves the particularity of the original scene. What is special about photographic experiences, I suggest, is their particularity; because we experience objects and scenes in

photographs as concrete particulars, we feel in close cognitive contact with them. I contrast this account with other alternatives available in the philosophical literature. In particular, I examine Walton's *transparency thesis*, Currie's and Pettersson's *trace theory* and (again) Hopkin's view on *factive pictorial experiences*. These views capture the intuition that photographic experience has something in common with ordinary perceptual experience, but they do not correctly identify the commonality. I argue that photographic experiences are more similar (in relevant ways) to memory experiences than to perceptual experiences.

The fact that photographs are documental images, in my sense, can be taken as a reason to think that photographs favour the purpose of non-fiction. But, one should be careful not to conclude that, because photographs are documental images, this entails that they are thereby documentary works. In order to see how the nature of photography contributes to non-fiction, and how the nature of the photographic medium affects classification, it is necessary to discuss the nature of documentary or non-fictional works, how they are distinguished from fictional works and whether this distinction applies to photography. All this will be discussed in Part II of this thesis.

In Chapter 4 I claim that there is indeed a close relation between the photographic medium and the documentary genre; the former plays an important role in categorisation and contributes to the purpose of the latter. However, it is important to clarify the nature of this relation. For instance, we cannot claim that being documental or photographically representing real particular objects is sufficient for a work to become documentary; being a documental, veridical natural image, I claim, is not equivalent to being a documentary work. In this chapter I consider two views that take very different positions with respect to the relation between the medium of photography and the nature of documentary: Gregory Currie's and Noël Carroll's. According to Currie, being photographic—or photographically representing the real—is a necessary condition for being a documentary work. Carroll, on the other hand, claims that there is no intrinsic connection between photography and the category of documentary. These views have been developed in the context of the philosophy of film—as I said before, there has not been any discussion about the difference between fiction and documentary in photography—but I claim that they could also be applied to photography and I explain how. I maintain, however, that neither of these theories

is satisfactory either as a theory of documentary film or as an explanation of how, if at all, photography affects the categorisation of a work as non-fiction. As a more promising alternative, I present the *Genre Theory* put forward by Stacie Friend. Although this is not specifically a theory of documentary and has not yet been applied to the visual arts, I suggest it can easily be adapted to provide a better account of documentary works. Moreover, it provides us with a more convincing view of the connection between the photographic medium and the category of non-fiction or documentary: following this view, photographically representing real existing particular objects is a *standard*<sup>6</sup>—but not a necessary—feature of documentary works.

In Chapter 5 I examine how the Genre Theory can be applied for the case of (still) photographs and I claim that it offers not only an accurate model for categorisation, but also explains how the categorisation as fiction or non-fiction affects our appreciation of photographic works. I also discuss reasons to be sceptical that the category of fiction applies to photography, but conclude that the categories of fiction and documentary are both active genres in photography. However, I also claim these are not complementary categories in photography, i.e., not all non-documentary photographic works are fictional. In photography, I suggest, it is more accurate to speak about documentary and non-documentary photography, or more conventionally, about factual and non-factual photography, where the former is the category that ‘wears the trousers’ (Austin 1964, 70). While the category of factual or documentary photography is in fact a genre in Friend’s sense, the non-factual category is not a genre. It is just a way to designate various heterogeneous genres, one of which is fictional photography. Finally, I argue that it is no coincidence that in photography, the factual genre is more basic. This is a consequence of the nature of the medium itself.

Taken together, these arguments constitute an important contribution to our understanding of several philosophical issues. Firstly, I deal with the rarely discussed issue of how the nature of a representational medium affects or contributes to the classification of works as fiction or non-fiction and provide a novel view on the relation between photographs and documentary works. Secondly, I develop an original

---

<sup>6</sup> In a sense to be explained.

view of the phenomenology of photographic images and the representational possibilities of photography. I also clarify the frequently debated association of photographic images with natural signs. Thirdly, as opposed to most discussions on the topic of fiction and non-fiction, this thesis emphasises the latter category, providing a systematic examination of the notion of documentary. In offering an alternative conception of this category based on Stacie Friend's Genre Theory, I present the first application of this theory to visual media. Finally, this thesis is, to my knowledge, the first philosophical study of the application of the categories of fiction and non-fiction to photography.

---

# PART I

---

## CHAPTER 1

---

### DEPICTION, IMAGINATION AND FICTION

IT IS FREQUENT in the philosophical literature to find the claim that understanding or engaging with pictorial representation prompts at some significant level the exercise of the imagination. If this claim is correct, photographs, in as much as they are pictorial representations, are no exception: understanding them also invites an imaginative engagement. Now another frequent claim made in the philosophical literature is that an invitation to imagine is the defining mark of fictionality (Walton 1990; Currie 1990; Lamarque and Olsen 1994; Davies 2001; Stock 2011). If this claim is also correct, there could be grounds to think that pictorial representation—including photographs—by its very nature, somehow privilege their use as fictional works or favour the purpose of fiction. The purpose of this chapter is to examine this line of thought and, ultimately, to see whether the nature of photographs—or pictures more generally—contributes or favour fiction. My general strategy as well as a brief summary of my overall argument will be put forward in what follows.

#### 1. Overview

In section 2, I will present the most radical and explicit defence of the claim that the nature of pictures is closely related to fiction. The view comes from Kendall Walton who has gone so far as to suggest that all depictions are fiction insofar as the very foundational experience of *seeing* an object *in* a picture amounts to imagining of one's actual act of looking at the picture that it is an instance of looking at the depicted object face to face (Walton 1990, 293). Many authors have denied that this is so—and some of them do so partly on the grounds that the conclusion that all pictures are fiction is unacceptable. Imagination, they claim, is not necessary for interpreting the content of pictures or for identifying what is it that the picture depicts. Now, as I will make it clear also in section 2, it is important to note that it is frequently taken for granted that Walton's notion of fiction is equivalent to the 'ordinary' one, which is not exactly the case. But even if it were so, the critics' objection leaves open the possibility

that imagination may be involved in various ways and at different levels in our engagement with pictorial representation. In sections 3, 4 and 5, I present different views on how pictures partially prompt or invite imaginings. I will argue that if we defend – as many authors do – a view of imagination according to which an invitation to imagine defines fictionality, then we would still be led to say that in as much as (some, the majority, or even all) pictures invite imaginings, they are thereby fiction or favour fictionality. Sections 3, 4 and 5 provide different argument to deny that this is so. Overall, my view is that there might be good reasons to think that many pictures invite some kinds of imagining, but an invitation to imagine of whatever kind does not make a picture fictional.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Pictures as Fictions

Kendall Walton has controversially maintained that all pictures—moving and still, including photographs—are fiction. This controversial statement is a direct consequence of two claims that lie at the core of his theory of representation. On the one hand, for Walton something qualifies as fiction if it has the function of prescribing imaginings in certain games of make-believe. No matter how minor or peripheral the mandate to imagine in a work is, if it has that function, then it is fiction—let us call this, Walton’s theory of fiction (WF). On the other hand, Walton contends that understanding pictorial representation—or understanding what pictures depict—always demands an imaginative experience (let us call this, Walton’s theory of depiction (WD)). In particular, Walton contends that *seeing-in*, or the foundational experience characteristic of the way we perceive pictures *as pictures*, is best explained as being partially imaginative.<sup>8</sup> To explain this a bit more clearly, we should remember that *seeing-in* or the experience involved in our perception of pictures, as it was introduced by Richard Wollheim, (Wollheim 1980; 1998; 1987) consists of an awareness of the marked surface of the picture (configurational aspect) and an awareness of the object or situation the picture represents (recognitional aspect).

---

<sup>7</sup> For a similar argument applied to literary works, see (Friend 2008; 2011).

<sup>8</sup> *Seeing-in* is a term coined by Wollheim—especially used in his later work. The term, however, is now widely used to name the characteristic experience of pictures even by those who disagree with Wollheim about the characterisation of this experience. Not everyone accepts that seeing-in is constitutive of pictorial experience, see (Lopes 1996).



These two elements constitute a single mental phenomenon with one distinctive phenomenology.<sup>9</sup> Now, Walton claims that imagination is involved in the recognitional aspect of this experience. The idea is that, in perceiving the picture's surface one imagines of one's seeing the surface, that it is one's seeing the depicted object face-to-face. Both experiences, (the perception of the picture's surface and the imagining), he claims, interpenetrate phenomenologically (Walton 1990, 301). So when I see Edward Hopper's *Self-Portrait*, I imagine of my act of looking at the marks on the canvas that it is my act of looking at Edward Hopper in the flesh. It is therefore *fictional* of my seeing Hopper's picture that it is my seeing of Hopper face-to-face. Hopper's picture then functions as a prop in a rich or vivid game of make-believe. This is also applicable to photographs. Although for Walton, photographs are *transparent* and so we can *literally see through* them, this seeing is *indirect* seeing—as when we see through a telescope or a microscope; so in (literally but indirectly) *seeing*, say, a soldier in Robert Capa's photograph, I imagine myself seeing the soldier *directly* or face-to-face (Walton 1984; 2008).<sup>10</sup> It is by means of imagining ourselves seeing what we see in the picture's surface that we come to be aware of what is depicted therein. All pictures, then, are props in *visual* games of make believe and this is precisely what distinguishes them from descriptions or linguistic representations—which are props in non-visual games of make-believe.<sup>11</sup> Yet, in the light of WF, it also has the consequence that all depictive works are fictional by definition. In short, what makes pictorial representations visual makes them fictional at the same time.

Read at face value, and with the ordinary distinction between fiction and non-fiction in mind, this claim is straightforwardly implausible. Clearly there are not only

---

<sup>9</sup> Although I am explaining seeing-in using Wollheim's terminology, I do not mean to embrace Wollheim's particular account of this experience. As I said in fn. 2 many theorists have adopted the term seeing-in and provided different explanations for what this experience amounts to. I am trying here to remain as neutral as possible. If I mention Wollheim and use his terminology is partly because he introduced the term *seeing-in* and partly because Walton himself uses Wollheim's terminology to provide an alternative explanation to the phenomenon of seeing-in.

<sup>10</sup> Walton's 'transparency thesis' will be developed in more detail in Chapter 2 but especially in Chapter 3.

<sup>11</sup> Given that, in this respect, Walton's account of photographs does not differ substantially from his account of hand-made pictures, the focus of this chapter will be on pictures more generally.

non-fictional pictures in general but there certainly are non-fictional photographs and films. To say the contrary would be to deny a long-standing tradition of documentary photography and film. This alone should lead us to suspect that Walton's notion of fiction may be an idiosyncratic one; after all, he cannot be denying such blatant evidence. In fact, Walton does not do so. He admits that there are some pictures that aim to inform, instruct or illustrate, but he claims that this 'serious'—non-fictional—use of pictures is parasitic on their use as make-believe (Walton 1990, 85)—in fact, he claims that 'the use of pictures in (...) make-believe is (...) prior to their possession of semantic content' (Walton 1990, 351).<sup>12</sup> From this line of reasoning it seems to follow that, for Walton, there are a set of pictorial works whose categorization will be something like fictional-fictions while others would be non-fictional-fictions. Walton's notion of fiction, we may think, seems to be broader than the ordinary one, since it covers both fictional and non-fictional pictures (in the ordinary sense).<sup>13</sup> If this is so, he would not be accounting for what it is that distinguishes both categories, and that is tantamount to saying that Walton does not account for our ordinary distinction between fictional and non-fictional pictorial works. But of course, as I suggested before, that may have not been part of his plan. This is something he suggests early on *Mimesis and Make-Believe*:<sup>14</sup>

This notion of fiction is a natural descendant of the one used by booksellers and librarians in separating fairy tales, short stories, novels, and Superman comic books from newspaper articles, instruction manuals, biographies, and histories. *This is not to say that we should expect to draw the line just where they do, however; the rough classification needs refining in order to serve our theoretical purposes* (Walton, 1990, p.72; *my italics*).

Unfortunately, Walton is not as explicit as he should be about the differences between his notion of fiction—let us call it *Waltfiction*—<sup>15</sup> and the ordinary one; in fact, he frequently invites reader's intuitions about the 'ordinary' notion of fiction<sup>16</sup> to give

---

<sup>12</sup> I will try to make sense of these obscure claims in due course.

<sup>13</sup> See (Friend 2008)

<sup>14</sup> Stacie Friend supports this view see (Friend 2008).

<sup>15</sup> I borrow this label from Stacie Friend (Friend 2008).

<sup>16</sup> From this point on I will use *fiction* to refer only to the ordinary notion.

some plausibility to his views. Similarly, many of the examples he mentions to illustrate the distinction between fiction and non-fiction—especially in the case of literature—match cases that we traditionally classify as fictional and non-fictional works. This could suggest that despite the fact that his account of fiction has some peculiarities, we could nevertheless expect it to be explicative of our ordinary way of classifying and appreciating works. But again, Walton is not clear about the extent to which his theory aims to inform ordinary classificatory practices.

As it will become clear in section 3, Walton's ambiguity and lack of clarity has led many to misunderstand his claims, and many have considered Walton's views utterly implausible, especially from the point of view of the ordinary conception of fiction. However, the motivations behind Walton's view are rarely discussed. I will not do so here in much detail, but it may be worth trying to understand, however briefly, what could be behind his claims that pictures are fictions and that depiction should be explained in terms of imaginings. It is possible that Walton's view unveils something about the nature of pictorial representations that indicates that their very nature privileges or favours their use as fictional works.

Walton's proposal that pictures are fiction—and that imagination is involved in pictorial experience—gains more plausibility if we compare pictorial experience with perceptual experience more generally.<sup>17</sup> Experiencing pictures or seeing objects in pictures, one may think, is a peculiar phenomenon. In some important respects, pictorial experience *is* a perceptual experience: we certainly use our sight and perceptual capacities to see the physical object that is in front of us (i.e. the canvas, the frame, the marks, etc.) and to identify in the patterned surface of the picture a recognisable object (i.e. a man, three women, a sunny landscape, etc.) However, the phenomenology of seeing an object face-to-face and that of seeing an object *in* a picture differ substantially: in the latter case, unlike in the former, we experience the object as being absent from our immediate environment, although somehow present in experience. This could lead one to think that, although seeing an object in a picture

---

<sup>17</sup> As it will become clear in section three, many critics have rejected the view that imagination plays a constitutive role in seeing-in in the way Walton has it. I agree with Walton's critics. However, here I am just trying to suggest what could be the motivations behind Walton's view in a way that his, in principle, indefensible views, look more plausible.

is not equivalent to seeing an object in the flesh, it is nevertheless *as if* we were seeing such object. Moreover, given that it is not, *contra* Gombrich, a case of illusory experience,<sup>18</sup> it might be tempting to think of that ‘*as if*’ as suggesting a sort of imaginative experience. After all, in (visually) imagining something, one perceives the object ‘before the mind, yet absent from one’s surroundings’ (Martin, 2002, p.414); that is precisely why imagination is sometimes conceived of as thought-in-absence (Sartre 2004, 87; Hopkins 1998). Pictorial experience, following this reasoning, would be something like *make-believe, as if*, (or fictional) seeing.

It seems plausible to think that this contrast between pictorial and perceptual experience—or between fictional and ordinary or real seeing—could be behind Walton’s claims. This assumption, at least, would help to make sense of, and give some plausibility to, two rather obscure claims Walton makes about pictures: that (real) objects are inessential to pictures (Walton 1990, 122) and that the use of pictures in make-believe is prior to their possession of semantic content (Walton 1990, 351). Here is why. Perceptual experience, one could think, always put us in direct contact with real existing objects (unless, of course, one is hallucinating; but in that case, according to some theories, it would not be a case of perception).<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the possibility of doing so seems essential to our concept of perception (even when hallucinations are possible).<sup>20</sup> In fact, the intuitive conception of perception tells us that the content of perceptual experience is partly determined by the objects and events the experience ‘picks out’, namely, the objects that are present or *given* to the subject in experience. For instance, when I have a visual experience of an apple that is in front of me, the nature of my experience is partly determined by the object—the apple—and the way it actually is.<sup>21</sup> This is why the content of perceptual experiences is frequently conceived of as being *object involving*; that is, one could not have been in that token perceptual

---

<sup>18</sup> (Gombrich 1960)

<sup>19</sup> Hallucination, according to disjunctivist theories, is *not* a case of perception. See, for instance (Hinton 1973; Snowdon 1980; McDowell 1986; Martin 2002a).

<sup>20</sup> Not all theories of perception agree with the claim that perceptual experience put us in direct contact with objects. The sense-datum theory and some intentionalists deny that this is so. See (Crane 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Not all theorists of perception think that (real) objects determine the content of perceptual experiences see (McGinn 1982; Davies 1992). However, it seems part of our concept of perception that they do so.

state, had *that* apple were not present. By contrast, one could think, pictorial experience does not guarantee a connection with reality. When we see objects in pictures, those objects are not *really* present to us; but they might have not even been present in the moment the artist made the picture. Pictures always depict things and events *as if* they existed, and thereby, *as if* they could be seen;<sup>22</sup> but this is so regardless of whether they exist or not. In fact, it seems possible for someone to have a pictorial experience of a non-existent object, which is subjectively indistinguishable from a pictorial experience of a real mind-independent object. Now if this is so, one could further claim, the essence of the pictorial experience cannot depend on real objects, since essentially the same kind of experience can occur in the absence of (real) objects—<sup>23</sup> I could have two indistinguishable pictures of, say, a dog, even if one of the dogs never existed. Moreover, it *does* seem possible to conceive of pictorial representation without the possibility of depicting real objects. Objects, then—following this line of thought—are inessential to pictures. And likewise real objects cannot determine the (semantic) content of pictorial experience, because, again, one could have the same experience in the absence of real objects. The content of pictures, therefore, cannot be determined by the objects and events we *see-in* them; that seeing is *make-believe seeing*—we cannot literally ‘pick out’ the objects in experience since they are not *really* present to us as they are in ‘ordinary’ perception; moreover, these objects might not even exist! In the case of pictorial experience then, the argument seems to go, what determines the (semantic) content are not the (real) objects that we see depicted in the picture, but the objects or events that we *make-believe we see in* them.

Support for this interpretation, and another reason to think that pictorial experience calls for an imaginative engagement, could be the kind of demonstrative remarks people make when looking at depictions. For example, when Stephen utters ‘That is a ship’, while pointing toward a ship-depiction, his utterance seems to be

---

<sup>22</sup> Depicting something *as* non-existent would require to depict something that cannot be seen, but that does not seem possible. See (Hopkins 1998, 28–30; Stock 2008, 370).

<sup>23</sup> Notice that this argument mirrors the “argument from hallucination” that is normally put forward to challenge the intuitive fact that when we have a perceptual experience we see real mind-independent objects and that real objects actually determine the content of perceptual experiences (Crane 2011).

appropriate (Walton 1990, 217). However, one could claim that we cannot take his claim literally, for it is not *literally* true that *that*—which we point—is a ship: Stephen is *really* demonstrating the object that is in front of him, namely the picture, not a real ship. However, Stephen’s claim seems appropriate because, since he is *make-believe seeing* a ship, it is also *make-believe* that he is demonstrating a ship.<sup>24</sup>

One way to summarise and interpret the spirit behind these claims could be this. Pictorial experience, in Walton’s view, is *make-believe, as if, or fictional seeing* because, unlike *real* seeing, it does not guarantee a connection with reality. In pictorial experience, it is *make-believe* that things are present to us in experience, while they are *really* absent from our surroundings; we perceive *copies* of objects (or props) and not the objects themselves, but we *make-believe* that we see the *real* things.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in pictorial experience, it is *make-believe* that some objects exist and can be seen, while they *really* do not exist and cannot be seen. In fact, nothing in the nature of pictorial experience prevents that all the things we see-in pictures could actually be non-existent: (real) objects are inessential to pictures. Moreover, the phenomenology of pictorial experience would be the same regardless of whether the depicted object exists or not.

It is certainly possible to challenge some of even all of these claims;<sup>26</sup> in fact, I will argue in chapter 3 that, at least in the case of photographs, Walton’s claims are not entirely correct—objects are indeed essential to photographs, even when they depict fictional entities (see chapter 2).<sup>27</sup> But let us grant, for the sake of the argument, that the view of pictorial experience that derives from this interpretation of Walton’s claims is plausible. Would we have any reason to think that it suggests that pictures, by their very nature, privilege their use as fictional works and, in this sense, *favour* fiction? Surely, the fact that pictures do not provide direct *in-the-flesh* access to things of the

---

<sup>24</sup> This view of the use of demonstratives with pictures has been challenged by Dominic Lopes (Lopes 2010).

<sup>25</sup> The exception, for Walton, would be the case of photographs. But in this case the contact with objects would be indirect and, as in the case of pictures more generally, there is no guarantee that all that we see depicted in the photograph are *real* objects.

<sup>26</sup> For a diametrically opposed view see (Lopes 1996).

<sup>27</sup> As a matter of fact, this is not entirely inconsistent with Walton’s view on photographs, although it is indeed in tension with his overall view that photographs are also *Waltfictions*.

world cannot be a reason. Few representational works, regardless of whether they are fiction or non-fiction, provide direct in-the-flesh experiential contact with the objects they are of or about—maybe a theatre play where an actor plays the part of himself would be an example of this, but this case is very rare—so it does not seem to be a reasonable requirement for a work, in order *not* to qualify as fiction, that the objects and events it is about are literally present to the audience.<sup>28</sup> Now, here may be a more persuasive reason. Presumably, non-fictional works aim at providing information or tell the viewer something about things and situations that actually exist in the world. But pictures, one could claim, following the line argument expressed above, do not facilitate this task: pictorial experience does not guarantee a connection with reality; upon experiencing pictures alone, viewers cannot tell whether the things exist or not—they are depicted *as if* they existed, but nothing in the nature of pictures prevent that they are *not* actually real; viewers therefore, only make-believe that things exist and are real.<sup>29</sup> This being so, in order to make the viewer think that what is shown in the picture actually exists, something extra has to be done; the viewer should be provided with some guarantee that the content actually refers to an actual existing particular object or situation. For example, the viewer has to count with some background knowledge about the process of production that leads her to believe that the picture actually captures a real object or situation or, alternatively, if the picture has an accompanying caption that indicates that the referent does exist, she may take it as testimony and believe that it exists on that basis.<sup>30</sup> Fictional works, by contrast, are typically about non-existent objects and situations and are not committed to show or give information about things that actually exist or existed. Pictures, therefore, fit

---

<sup>28</sup> This argument has not been unheard of. See Noël Carroll's criticism to Christian Metz and others, for instance (Carroll 1996a).

<sup>29</sup> As I will mention in section 4, Kathleen Stock holds a view of depiction very similar to this line of argument.

<sup>30</sup> Many philosophers claim that testimony is a basic source of knowledge and thereby one is a priori entitled to believe what people say. That is, *unless* one has reason to doubt the reliability of the testifier, one is justified to believe in the testimony of others; see for instance (Reid 1863; Evans 1982; Coady 1992; Burge 1993; Burge 1997; McDowell 1994). If this is so, if the pictures is accompanied by a caption that testifies for the referent of the picture, one would not need further reason to believe that the content of the picture actually exists: it is real because the author says so. The referential work in this case would not be made by the picture itself but by a linguistic device.

perfectly well with fiction, as nothing in the experience of the picture guarantees an object's existence. Moreover, viewers just *make-believe* that such objects exist. Fiction in pictures, therefore, comes *for free*.

I do not think this is a persuasive reason. Firstly, the fact that viewers cannot tell, just by looking, whether the object or situation depicted is real or not (or whether it actually exist or not), does not show that viewers assume *by default* that the objects *do not exist*; it is possible that, in certain circumstances—for example, depending on the style of the picture—they can presume that the object actually exists (e.g., the case of a portrait, a hyper-realist picture, or a photograph). Secondly, and more importantly, it might be true that non-fictional works are frequently about real and existing objects and situations, but they need not be; it does not seem to be a condition for non-fictional works that they depict real existing objects or that they require that the viewer recognises them as existing. Take, for instance, a picture trying to illustrate the possibility of living on the moon that depicts a not-yet-built prototype of a housing project on the moon (Figure 8). Presumably, this picture tries to inform us about what such project would look like and it is part of a research context, so it seems that it would fit better in the category of non-fictional works. Yet, it does not depict an existing object, and it does not require either that the viewer recognise the housing project as existing *in reality*. Hence, there is no reason to think that pictures necessarily hinder the purpose of non-fictional works.



Figure 8 NASA 1993 LUNOX concept for a lunar habitat

Similarly, it might be true that pictorial works that we would be inclined to call fictional are often about or of non-existing objects and situations, but they need not be. Annie Leibovitz's series of photographs 'Disney Dream Portrait Series', for instance, depict (and are both *of* and *about*) real famous people, although these famous people play the part of classic Disney characters (Figure 9 and Figure 10). To understand



these pictures, it is important that the viewer identifies the relevant real person depicted and that she believes that she is seeing *the* actual person and not some double—otherwise it would not make sense that the photograph of Roger Federer as King Arthur (Figure 9) was accompanied by the caption ‘Where you are always the King of the Court’. Similarly, it seems important for Leibovitz’s work, that the pictures lead the viewer to think that there is something real in what she sees in the picture, since the idea of the series is that viewer can easily relate the fantasy world of Disney stories to the real world where she lives.<sup>31,32</sup> But this is not an isolated case, it is not strange to find fictional films that are about or include real existing objects, places or situations and where identifying such objects or situations is important to understand the film. In cases like these, the (purported) fact that viewers cannot tell whether what they are seeing exists or not, would not *favour* the purpose of the picture or film in the sense mentioned above, even when one can say that the pictures are in fact fictional.

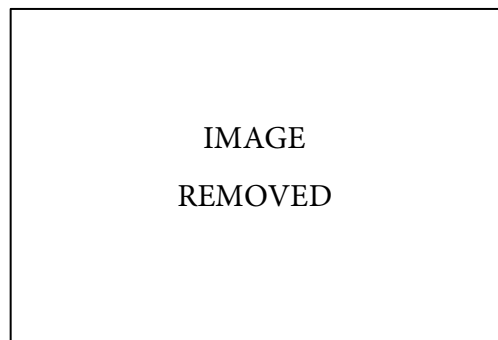


Figure 9 Annie Leibovitz "The Sword in the Stone. Roger Federer as King Arthur" (2007) *Disney Dream Portraits*

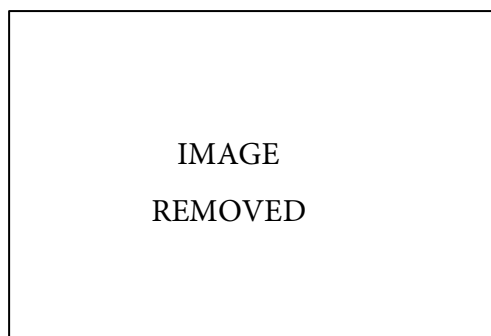


Figure 10 "Snowwhite. Rachel Weitz" (2007) *Disney Dream Portraits*

---

<sup>31</sup> In all likelihood, this is why they chose to take photographs rather than have the characters drawn.

<sup>32</sup> The *copy* (or caption) of the advertising campaign for which these pictures were produced was “When fantasies become real.”

If this is sound, even if we grant Walton's view of depiction or pictorial experience as *make-believe* seeing, there is no reason to think neither that pictures *are* fiction nor that pictures necessarily *favour* fiction. But interestingly, if the interpretation of Walton that I provided is sound, it would also suggest that the idea of fiction that derives from his account of pictorial representation, not only is not the ordinary one, but also seems to be in tension with Walton's own claims about the nature of (Walt)fiction. For Walton explicitly claims that the notion of fiction, as he conceives of it, should *not* be understood as opposed to reality but as opposed to non-fiction:

Our present concern is not with 'fiction' as opposed to 'reality', (...) [this opposition] have little to do with the intuitions on which my recent suggestions are based, and little to do, I think, with the intuitions dominant in shelving practices of booksellers and librarians. The difference we are interested in is between *works of fiction* and *works of non-fiction* (Walton 1990, 73).

However, his account of depiction makes it look as if he were contrasting fictional seeing (seeing objects in pictures) with 'real' seeing (seeing objects face to face)—precisely what he has advised not to do.

### 3. Imagination, Fiction and Pictures. Walton's legacy

Walton's conception of fiction as defined in terms of a prescription to imagine, as we have seen, is unclear at the very least: it is neither equivalent to, nor obviously relevant for, the ordinary notion of fiction; moreover, as the case of pictures show, it seems even inconsistent at some points. However, it has been extremely influential. In fact, as Peter Lamarque and Stein H. Olsen claim 'Walton's theory has revolutionized the way that philosophers think about fiction (and representation)' (Lamarque and Olsen 1994a, 47). Many philosophers, probably led by Walton's lack of clarity, have interpreted his theory as intending to shed light on the ordinary notion of fiction and, partially persuaded by Walton, they have proposed various theories of fiction that, although are not identical with Walton's, nevertheless share the core of WF: they all define fiction in terms of a prescription to imagine (Currie 1990; Lamarque and Olsen 1994; Davies 2001; Davies; Stock 2011; Stock MS). These theories of Waltonian

inspiration, moreover, are still the most prominent and widely accepted views on the nature of fiction.<sup>33</sup>

Precisely because theorists have taken Walton's ideas as being relevant to understand the fiction/non-fiction distinction, some of them have also been motivated to reject Walton's views on depiction on the grounds that the consequence that all pictures are fiction is unacceptable. Now, given that Walton's critics—and many other philosophers—have embraced implicitly or explicitly WF, they have identified the problem of Walton's view specifically in WD. A prescription to imagine, they have claimed, *does* define fictionality, but it is not the case that depiction is explained in terms of imaginings as Walton has it, so it is not the case that all pictures necessarily prompt imaginings and are thereby fiction:

If we enforce a distinction between fictional and non-fictional pictures, we concede that picturing itself cannot be explained in terms of imaginings, while holding to the view that pictures are fictional when they do mandate imaginings (Currie, 2002, 257).

I believe Kendall Walton's analysis of pretence as an activity embedded in games of make-believe provides the tool we need for an account of fictive depictions. [But] we do not need to make-believe or imagine-seeing most pictures' subjects—we just see them—therefore nothing is gained by constructing pictures as fictions (...) *Make-believe may explain only fictive pictures as it may explain only fictive words* (Lopes, 1996, p.201-2. *My italics*).

The reasons to reject WD—that depiction or seeing-in always involves an imaginative experience—are many and, I think, well grounded. I will mention them in due course, but I shall be brief given that, in the remaining of this chapter, my main purpose will be to show that the strategy of rejecting WD while accepting WF (or a version of it) does not leave us in a better position with respect to the relation between pictures and the fiction/non-fiction distinction.

---

<sup>33</sup> As I will mention in Chapter 4 and 5, Stacie's Friend *Genre Theory* (Friend 2012) is—to my knowledge—the only alternative to these theories of fiction in contemporary analytic philosophy.

Many theorists have criticised Walton's theory of depiction on the grounds that postulating an imaginative experience as a constituent of pictorial experience or seeing-in seems not only unnecessary but also unviable when it comes to explaining the peculiar phenomenology of pictorial experience. Kathleen Stock questions the possibility that the viewer can differentiate, within her act of looking at a picture, her seeing the marks on the canvas from her seeing the depicted object therein. This differentiation seems to be required in Walton's theory, since it is the awareness of the depicted object that the imagining should be explaining. But such differentiation seems phenomenologically awkward: at least with the vast majority of pictures we are not aware of seeing an undifferentiated surface previous to (or simultaneous with) our perception of the depicted object (Stock 2008). But even if this differentiation were possible, Robert Hopkins has objected that if the viewer just looks at the (undifferentiated) marked surface of the canvas and thereby imagines her seeing an object, it is not clear how such imagining could transform the viewer's visual experience of seeing the pictures' (undifferentiated) surface into an experience of *seeing* the relevant object (Hopkins 1998). In other words, no matter what one imagines as a result of being prompted by the visual experience of a marked surface, that will never be able to change the original visual experience (Wollheim, 2003, p.146); it is not clear how we are to make sense of the fusion of the perceptual input (the visual experience of the marked surface) and the imaginary output (the experience of the depicted object).<sup>34</sup> Gregory Currie has offered a further objection. He suggests that, if imagination were an entry level requirement for understanding pictorial representations, one would expect that people who have cognitive deficits on performing tasks typically acknowledged to involve imagination would also fail to see objects in pictures. But this, he claims, does not seem to be the case. According to Currie, people with autism are impaired in the performance of activities usually

---

<sup>34</sup> Malcolm Budd criticises Walton on similar grounds (Budd 1992). Bence Nanay, also has objections to Walton's view, but he does not say that Walton's view of seeing-in is necessarily wrong. He claims that either Walton's view of seeing-in is different from Wollheim's or it is inconsistent with his own general view of depiction (Nanay 2004). For other objections along these lines see (Matravers 2010).

associated with imagination, however they do not have any trouble when it comes to recognising objects in pictures (Currie 2002, p. 257; Currie and Ravenscroft 2002).<sup>35</sup>

All these objections cast serious doubts on Walton's claim that imagination is involved in the recognitional aspect of seeing-in and is thereby essential to understand depictions. I believe this is the correct conclusion. Now, as I said before, the critics who have understood Walton's claim as literally meaning that all pictures are fiction, have taken this conclusion as the solution to the purported problem posed by Walton's theory: if it is clear that seeing-in does not necessarily presuppose an imaginative engagement, then we are not committed to saying that all pictures are necessarily fictional. However, even if the critics' objections are correct, they do not rule out the possibility that imagination is involved in our engagement with pictures to a lesser degree—maybe not in all but only in some pictorial experiences—or at some other level—playing a different role in our understanding of pictures. The question is whether, if this were the case, that is, if imagination were involved at some other level or to a different degree, would that mean that, to that extent, pictures would be fictional? In what follows I will consider various ways in which it can be claimed that imagination is involved in our experience of pictures, and I will argue that even if some or all of them were correct, it does not make sense to claim that the relevant imaginative response turn them into fictions. In other words, the strategy of embracing WF while criticising WD does not leave critics in a better position with respect to the fiction/non-fiction distinction.

#### **4. Imagining as the default mode in pictorial representations**

Even if one rejects Walton's view of depiction and therefore the claim that imagining (or imagining-seeing) is involved in all pictures, one could claim that most or many pictorial representations invite or prompt imagination in various ways. As a matter of fact, one could even claim that engaging in some kind of imagination is the *default*

---

<sup>35</sup> Partial support for this claim can be found in (Allen 2009). As a matter of fact, according to Allen, autistic children do not have trouble recognising objects in pictures but they have trouble understanding the intention of the artist. So, when intentions play a crucial role in depiction—for instance when disambiguating whether a painting represents one object or an identical one—autistic people might indeed have troubles interpreting pictures.

position when it comes to (certain) pictorial representations. This is precisely the view that Kathleen Stock advocates for the case of pictures in general, and Jerrold Levinson and Murray Smith for the case of films in particular. I shall discuss Levinson and Smith's view first.

#### 4.1. *Imagining-seeing in films*

Like most critics of Walton, Jerrold Levinson and Murray Smith have denied that imagination is constitutive of pictorial experience. They nevertheless hold that a proper understanding of a great deal of cinematic representations do require an imaginative response along the lines described by Walton. Levinson has claimed, for instance, that there might be films that do not invite imaginings on the part of the viewer. However, he says, imagining seeing is the 'default norm of film viewing' (Levinson 1993, 71) because the majority of films involve resources such as continuity (or 'invisible') editing that invite such imaginative response.

With those portions of film whose style makes participatory seeing difficult to sustain we may tend to accede in the conception (...) that we simply respond to visual representations acknowledged as such, make-believing what is required in accord with their manifest content, at most 'seeing-in', but without imaginary seeing. Yet with the *vast bulk of films* or portions thereof—the domain that has been dubbed 'invisibly' edited films—it seems we can safely hold on to the idea that viewers standardly and appropriately imagine seeing the events of a cinematic story unfold in virtue of what is literally seen on screen, and that this is part and parcel of their appreciation of *a film as a fictional medium* (Levinson, 1993, p.77. *My emphasis*).

Similarly, Murray Smith has held that some frequently used shots, such as *point of view* shots (POV) prompt participative imaginings—imaginings of the sort described by Walton, namely, that involve the viewer's imagining herself seeing the scene *from the inside*. However, he claims, not all cinematic experiences involve this imaginative engagement, because clearly not all films contain this type of shots (Smith 1997, 426).

So expressed, both Levinson's and Smith's views on the role of the imagination in the experience of films is consistent with the critics' claim that imagination is not

constitutive of pictorial experience. Yet, if one were willing to endorse a theory, such as WF, that defines fiction in terms of imagination, Levinson's and Smith's accounts would predict that the *vast majority* of films are fictional since, according to them, *the vast majority of films require imaginative-seeing*.<sup>36</sup> This statement, however, does not seem to be true. On the one hand, it is very unlikely that the vast majority of films are in fact fictional;<sup>37</sup> on the other hand, judging by actual non-fictional films, there is nothing that prevents them from encouraging imagining-seeing as it is described by Smith or Levinson. Here are a couple of illustrative examples. Documentary IMAX films frequently exploit different techniques like aerial travellings and POV shots that together with the size of the screen are intended for the spectator to have an experience *as of being there*. Similarly, in many of these films, as in other documentary works, the cuts are intended to be unobtrusive ('invisible'), so as to favour the natural flow of the narrative. This, however, does not turn them into fictional films. Another example is the case of documentary films such as 'The War Tapes' (Scranton, 2006) that are mostly composed by POV shots. In 'The War Tapes' five American Soldiers serving in Iraq were given small digital video cameras to record their experiences in *first person*, the idea being to show the soldier's eye-view of the conflict. If Smith is right, the POV shots of this film encourage the viewer to imagine-seeing what the soldiers saw. However, this film is, uncontroversially, documentary.

These examples show, I think, that if advocates of this alternative view are right, and 'invisible' edition and POV shots prompt imaginings, that alone does not turn works that contain them or parts thereof into fictions. It can be doubted whether it is in fact the case that POV shots and 'invisible' edition prompt imagining-seeing; but even if it is, this does not turn films or parts thereof into fictions. Both fictional and

---

<sup>36</sup> Although it is not clear that Levinson and Smith endorse the view according to which imagination defines fictionality, there is some evidence that they do. Notice that Levinson considers (see previous quote) that imaginative-seeing is constitutive of a proper appreciation of film as a *fictional medium*. Similarly, Murray Smith presents his argument as (partially) supporting Walton's thesis, and even though his claims concern neutral technical devices such as POV shots, he holds they provide a qualitatively different kind of emotion in our experience of *cinematic fiction* (Smith 1997, 426).

<sup>37</sup> For confirmation of this point, one needs look no further than a domestic home video collection or Youtube.

non-fictional works invite such imaginative responses. Hence, there is no reason to think, in this case, that films favour fiction because they frequently invite imaginings.

#### 4.2. *Pictorial experience and Imagined Existence*

The role of imagination in our experience of pictorial representations might not be restricted to certain cinematic styles. In fact, it can play a role in pictorial experience more generally. Kathleen Stock defends this stance. As I mentioned before, she has criticised Walton's theory claiming that his view fails to account adequately for the recognitional aspect of seeing-in. However, unlike other critics, Stock has correctly pointed out that the fact that imagination is not involved in our experience and understanding of pictures in the way Walton has it, does not rule out other ways in which imaginings can play an explanatory role in seeing-in. As a matter of fact, she claims that, although not all pictures prompt imaginings, imagining is the 'default position when it comes to seeing-in' (Stock 2008, 373). But why does she say this? Briefly stated, her position is the following: when we grasp the content of a (figurative) picture we generate a propositional thought with the existential content 'there is an object O with appearance X'—or as she puts it 'an O with appearance x, exists'.<sup>38</sup> This thought is typically, although not always, an unasserted proposition (a state that represents things as being a certain way which is not a belief). And the proposition is unasserted because typically, pictures *on their own* do not put viewers in a position to believe that the content displayed by pictures is actually the case or exists in the real world as depicted.<sup>39</sup> Unasserted thoughts of this kind, she further claims, should be construed as imaginings. This, Stock contends, is the default position for pictures. However, there are certain pictures that do indeed put the viewer in a position to assert their contents; that is, to believe that *it is in fact the case* that 'an object with appearance x, exists.' Examples of this kind of pictures, she claims, are *trompe l'oeil*

---

<sup>38</sup> Even if the picture depicts a non-existent object or situation, Stock claims, I think correctly, that pictures present them as existing, that is why we can *see* them in the pictures (Stock 2008, 370).

<sup>39</sup> The viewer can have independent reasons to believe that such content is indeed the case; in fact, she can believe that 'O with appearance x, actually exists' based on other sources. But that does not change the status of the thought *derived from the picture*; that thought remains unasserted because the picture *on its own grounds* do not motivate the viewer to believe that such content is the case.



pictures, documentary photographs and some hand-made pictures—provided that, in the latter two cases, the viewer’s knowledge of its circumstances of production gives her reasons to think it is an ‘accurate guide to the visual appearance of what is depicted’ (Stock 2008, 373). In sum, for Stock, there are two types of pictures: those that prompt the viewer to (merely) imagine that the depicted content exists as it appears, and others that prompt the viewer to believe so. The majority of pictures, however, fall into the former category.

Again, as in Walton’s case, Stock’s intuition that imagining is involved in seeing-in may be traced back to a contrast between pictorial and ordinary perceptual experiences. If I see, say, an apple in front of me that looks red and round, it is likely that my perceptual experience *alone* puts me in a position to think that the apple actually exists and that it is round and red as it seems to me in experience. Of course, I can be hallucinating, but the phenomenology of my experience presents it as if it were the case that there is *in fact* a round and red apple right in front of me. Also, unless I have reason to doubt my experience, I would naturally come to believe that things are as they appear to me in experience.<sup>40</sup> The case of pictures, one may think, is different, and this may be what Stock is suggesting. The experience of pictures alone, and independently of other background information, does not normally prompt the viewer to believe that what she sees actually exists. The picture presents an object or situation as being thus and so, and so the viewer represents it in that way in her thought; but the phenomenology of her experience does not put her in a position to think that those things that she sees in the picture are actually out there in the world in the way they are depicted. The experience of the picture alone does not motivate the viewer to assert the existence of what is depicted, that is why the viewer just *imagines* that such content exists.<sup>41</sup> This way of understanding Stock’s claims also fits nicely with the case of the *trompe l’oeil* picture that Stock mentions as an example of pictures that *do* ground

---

<sup>40</sup> This claim is independent of whether perceptual experience actually justifies beliefs. This other claim (that perceptual experience justifies beliefs) might be more controversial see (Davidson 1986).

<sup>41</sup> As Stock presents it, the claim does not seem to be that pictures do not provide sufficient grounds to *justify* the belief that an object O with appearance x actually exists. Rather, it seems to be that pictures do not *lead naturally* to form beliefs, independently of whether they are justified or not. In other words, Stock’s claim does not seem to be normative.

assertive thought. Since the experience of a *tromp l'oeil* may seem to the viewer qualitatively identical to a perceptual experience with similar content, it makes sense to claim that, the phenomenology of the experience of *trompe l'oeil* pictures seems to put her in a position to form a belief.

As we have seen then, Stock's view allows for two types of pictures, those that prompt imaginings and those that do not. The question now is: does this mean that pictures that do prompt imaginings are therefore fictional? As in the case I discussed above, the predicted answer for someone who endorses a theory of Waltonian inspiration that explains fiction in terms of imaginings, would presumably be positive.<sup>42</sup> However, it seems that such predicted classification would not make much sense in the light of our ordinary distinction between fiction and non-fiction. First of all, again, it does not seem to be the case that the majority of pictures are actually fiction; and second, the extension of 'imagining-generating pictures' do not match neatly with the extension of what we intuitively would label fictional pictures. To illustrate this second point, take the following example. A star trail photograph such as Figure 11 typically found in science or astronomy publications and travel and adventure magazines, presumably do not prompt the viewer to believe that the circular trails that she can see in the photograph actually exist *as depicted*. One may believe that the photographic mechanism is reliable, and one may even believe that *real existing* stars were responsible for what is shown in the photograph; but it is not likely that the viewer straightforwardly believes that the circular trails existed in the sky as depicted—little knowledge about the photographic mechanism would be enough for the viewer to realise that the trails are an effect of the long-exposure take. If this is so, following Stock's account, such photograph would generate an unasserted thought that might well be conceived of as an imagining. However, this photograph presumably aims to illustrate and inform us about the motion of stars during certain period of time, so it seems it would better fit the non-fiction category.

---

<sup>42</sup> Kathleen Stock actually defends a theory of fiction that defines fictionality in terms of an invitation to imagine (Stock 2011; Stock ms). However, she does not explicitly claim that her theory of fiction applies to pictures or how her theory of fiction interacts or affects the view she has regarding imagination and depiction.

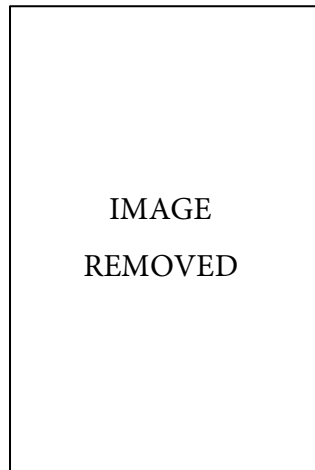


Figure 11 Nichole Sullivan "Starry Night Sky" (National Geographic 2011)

Similarly, *trompe l'oeil* pictures do not seem to be the paradigmatic cases of non-fictional pictures, even if they might prompt the viewer to believe that such scenes exist. 3D street art pictures, such as Figure 12 may fool the viewer into thinking that there is a strange hole in the middle of the sidewalk (if she sees the picture from the right angle). However, this picture is closer to being an object of curiosity, amusement or entertainment; it certainly does not seem to have the purpose of informing the viewer of a given state of affairs or even making the viewer believe anything about that depicted *underworld*. It seems, therefore, that if this picture and other similar *trompe l'oeils* fall into a category, that category would be fiction rather than non-fiction.

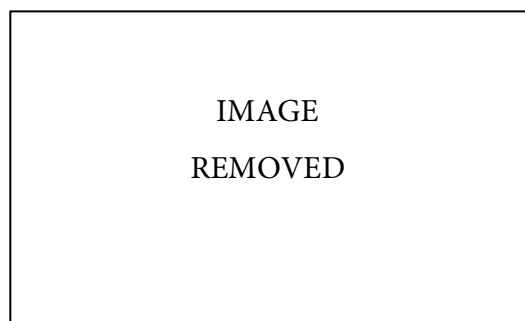


Figure 12 Marc Spijkerbosch "The Underworlds" (2009)

If these examples are illustrative, it seems that even if Stock were right and most pictorial experience involved imagining, that would not mean that most pictures are fiction; after all, there is no reason to believe that imaginings, in Stock's sense, make pictures fictional.

Now, it is possible that Stock's account suggests a way in which pictures may favour fiction along the lines I discussed in the case of Walton's view. Pictures, one could claim following Stock, do not suit the purpose of non-fiction because upon experiencing pictures alone, viewers do not typically take their contents as actually existing; in order to do so, viewers need either some background knowledge or a caption indicating that the picture refers to an actual object. With fiction, however, pictures work perfectly well, they prompt in viewers the right attitude: viewers think *by default* that depicted objects or situations do not exist – or at least they do not believe *by default* that they exist.

As I said in my response to Walton's view, I do not think this a good reason to think that pictures favour fiction. On the one hand, it is arguable that the phenomenology of the experience of many pictures *in and of itself* does not put the viewer in a position to believe that the object or situation depicted actually exists. This claim may seem persuasive in the case of hand-made pictures—although one could have serious doubts regarding many realist pictures—but it is definitely unintuitive in the case of photographs—and by no means only in the case of documentary photographs. It may be correct to say that viewers *should not* so easily believe the content of some photographs, given that they can be fake or doctored, but this does not rule out the fact that the phenomenology of photographs puts the viewer in a position to believe that what she sees in the photograph are actually existing objects (concrete particulars) and situations.<sup>43</sup> This explains why photographs are very good at misleading people and, in all likelihood, also why many theorists have claimed that photographs have a special phenomenology. One should not confuse the claim that beliefs prompted by photographs are not justified *by default* with the claim that the *default* reaction of viewers when they see photographs is to believe that what they see in them exists. I will develop this thought in more detail in Chapter 3, so I will not say anything else here.

On the other hand, as the examples I provided in section 2 show, not all non-fictional works require their viewers to recognise the depicted object as existing and,

---

<sup>43</sup> More on this in Chapter 3

conversely, some fictional pictorial works not only depict real objects, but in order to understand them, the viewer needs to identify the depicted object as existing.

If my discussion of Stock's view is sound then, it seems that even if she were right and imagination were involved in our experience of pictures in the way she describes, that would not entail that those 'imagining-generating pictures' are therefore fictions. Moreover, even if imagination were the default mode for pictorial experience and thereby pictures typically led viewers to imagine rather than to believe that their depicted objects and situations exist, that would not necessarily favour fiction, since sometimes fictional pictures require that viewers recognise at least part of their content as existing in the real world.

## 5. Imaginings fit for fiction

In the previous section I discussed two alternative ways in which imagination could play a central role in our experience of pictures (including photographs) and films. It became clear that none of them entailed fictionality in the ordinary sense, so there is no reason to think that pictures are or favour fiction even if an imaginative engagement is the default mode for pictorial or cinematic experience. However, one could claim that there is a particular kind of imagining, prompted only by some pictures, which thus turn them into works of fiction; this restricted sense of imagination does not affect all pictorial experiences but only applies to those pictorial works that are, in fact, fictional. In this section I will discuss proposals by Dominic Lopes and Gregory Currie that suggest that some pictures invite imaginings in a restricted sense and only those pictures are fiction. I will argue that neither of these proposals suggests a sense in which imagination entails fictionality.

### 5.1. *Fictive Pictures and Fictional Reference*

Dominic Lopes is one of the authors that have strongly rejected WD, partly because he thinks that to see an object in a picture, one only needs to postulate basic perceptual capacities and not imaginative experiences; and partly because he finds the idea that all depictive works are fictional unacceptable. However, he seems to explicitly accept WF (allow me to repeat his words again):

I believe Kendall Walton's analysis of pretence as an activity embedded in games of make-believe provides the tool we need for an account of *fictive depictions* (...) We do not need to make-believe or imagine-seeing most pictures' subjects—we just see them—therefore nothing is gained by constructing pictures as fictions. But since we cannot see, or refer to, objects that do not exist, it might be useful to consider pictures of non-existent objects as invoking make-believe. *Make-believe may explain only fictive pictures as it may explain only fictive words* (Lopes, 1996, p.201-2. *My italics*).

What Lopes seems to be saying is that, *contra* Walton, not all pictures are fictional because not all of them call for imaginative engagement. However, he suggests a restricted way in which pictures may prompt imaginings that does make them *fictive*:<sup>44</sup> pictures whose content is non-existent require engaging in make-believe, because we cannot refer to their objects directly (there is nothing to refer to!), so we make-believe we refer to some object; only these pictures are fictive.

Now, Lopes' account admits two readings.

If Lopes endorses WF—as the quote seems to suggest—then, fictive pictures are fictive because they prescribe imaginings; and they prescribe imaginings because, according to Lopes, they depict non-existing objects. Following this line of thought, a work which is about or of non-existent characters and/or events would be fictive because it prescribes imaginings. Non-fictive works would then presumably be those which are about or depict real things, and hence do not call for an imaginative engagement. In other words, imagination is not involved in all pictures, but those in which it is, are fictional.

Is this a satisfactory account of the ordinary difference between what we could call fictional and non-fictional pictures? I think it is not. To see why let us look at the following cases. A documentary film about Donald Duck's 75 years is about a non-existent character, and yet, it is still a non-fictional film. Similarly, I don't think that, say, a series of illustrations of Mickey Mouse intended to teach someone how to draw

---

<sup>44</sup> 'Fictive' instead of 'Fictional' is the label Dominic Lopes uses. As we will shortly see, it is possible that although these two words are synonyms in English, Lopes means something different with it.

the fictional character would be easily classified as a fictional pictorial work just because they depict a non-existent character.

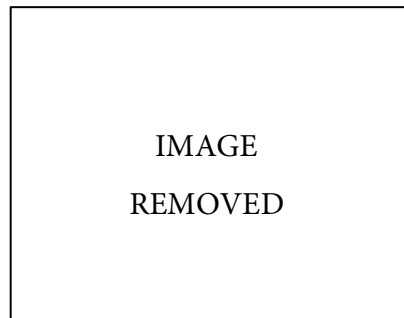


Figure 13 How to Draw Mickey Mouse.

Finally, take the case of a still photograph of the making of a film in which one of the (fictional) characters is entirely computer generated and projected holographically in three dimensions on the pro-filmic scene; the photograph is aimed to be evidence of the shooting process, and what we see in it is, say, part of the back of one member of the technical crew, and the holographic figure projected on site. The hologram in the picture is of a fictional character, but it does not seem that the photo is thereby a fictional work. It could be claimed that, in this case, the photograph is not really of a fictional character but rather of a *real* holographic figure, hence that explains why this photograph is not fictive; in fact, one could further claim that there cannot really be fictive photographs, since photographs cannot really depict non-existent objects. In Chapter 2 I will provide a proper response to the second part of this objection, arguing that photographs can indeed depict non-existent objects; but regarding the first part of the objection, it seems reasonable to say that, in the case of photographs, depicting real objects does not seem to guarantee that photographs are non-fiction or documentary. Otherwise one would have to claim that Lachapelle's *House at the End of the World* Figure 14 is a documentary or non-fictional photograph after all, but that is certainly implausible. Now, if this is granted, then the objection will not sustain.

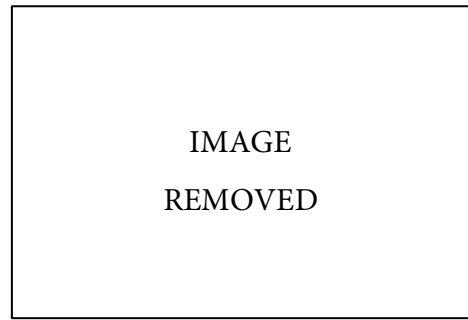


Figure 14 David LaChapelle "House at the End of the World" (2005)

If I am right in what I have been claiming so far, what these cases show is that, again, both fictional and non-fictional pictorial works may be about or depict non-existent objects; and accordingly, both fictional and non-fictional depictions may prescribe make-believe in order to make sense of how we 'refer' (or purport to refer) to them. Hence, while it might be true that not all pictures call for an imaginative engagement or make-believe, it is not the case that those that do are necessarily fictional; as we have just seen, non-fictional depictions may also prompt imaginings or make-believe.

Now, Lopes's argument admits another interpretation. In light of Lopes's own theory of depiction, we might interpret his interest in Walton's account of fiction as make-believe just as a way to explain the mechanism of reference to a non-existent entity when such an entity is part of the content of a pictorial work. In this way, he would just be using 'fictive' as a convenient label to refer only to those pictures whose content contains non-existent objects or events, and which thereby call for imaginative engagement; but this label would not be equivalent to what we ordinarily call 'fiction'. Rather, the category of 'fictive pictures' would cut across the ordinary categorization of fictional and non-fictional depictions.

This alternative reading sounds plausible to me. But two things deserve to be stated clearly. First, as we saw, *fictive*, in Lopes' sense, is not equivalent to *fiction* or *fictional* in the ordinary sense, and it is not equivalent to Walton's idiosyncratic notion of fiction either. For, even if both are defined in terms of prompting imaginings, Walton explicitly says that fictions (in his sense) can indeed be about or of real objects



(Walton 1990, 74).<sup>45</sup> So, it is good to keep in mind that we have three different ideas of fiction and that neither Lopes' nor Walton's correspond to the ordinary conception of fiction. Secondly, it should be clear that even if imagination is required for making sense of fictive reference, that does not entail that photographs or pictures that involve that kind of reference are thereby fictional in the ordinary sense. This is important for the following reason. Even if it is true that imagination does not play the role Walton assigns to it in seeing-in, someone could still argue in a Waltonian spirit (and against Lopes himself)<sup>46</sup> that pictures cannot *really* ground demonstrative reference. Demonstrative reference, one could claim, requires being in direct perceptual contact with objects, and neither hand-drawn pictures nor photographs put us in such relation. However, they very frequently prompt us to make *make-believe demonstrative reference*,<sup>47</sup> so if when in looking at a photograph in your family album you say 'That is aunt Jane' such claim is not *really* true: you are *really* demonstrating the object that is in front of you, namely the photograph, not your aunt. However, it is make-believe that you are demonstrating your aunt Jane. Since this kind of demonstrative claims are very frequent when we encounter pictures—in fact they prompt us to make such claims—one could maintain that imagination or make-believe is involved in our engagement with pictures more often than Lopes would admit. Now, even if this were the case, that would not mean that because pictures prompt this kind of 'imaginative' behaviour, they are thereby fictions.

Again, if what I have argued so far is sound, an appeal to make-believe might be useful to make sense of reference to non-existent or absent objects, but that does not mean that pictures that prompt this kind of reference are themselves fiction in the ordinary sense.

---

<sup>45</sup> Although, as we saw, his notion of fiction does not seem to be entirely consistent with his view of pictures, where he seems to make a contrast between *fictional* seeing and *real* seeing.

<sup>46</sup> Dominic Lopes claims that pictures "are vehicles of demonstrative reference because they put their perceivers in a perceptual state of the kind that grounds demonstrative reference" (Lopes 2010, p.52).

<sup>47</sup> I do not think it is entirely clear that perceptual contact is necessary for demonstrative reference; however, I think this can be a legitimate objection for those who do.

## 5.2. *Recreative Imagination and Fiction*

Another theorist who has argued against Walton's theory of depiction alluding to the 'unwanted consequence' (i.e. that all pictures are fictions) is Gregory Currie. Unlike Lopes, Currie's account clearly aims at obtaining a suitable criterion for characterising fiction in the ordinary sense. However, Currie's strategy is similar to that of Lopes: he claims that, although imagination is not an essential requirement to seeing objects in pictures, it nevertheless is the distinctive mark of fictional pictures. Currie endorses a theory of fiction strongly influenced by Walton's WF—as he himself acknowledges (Currie, 1990, p.18). Certainly, Currie's theory differs from Walton's, and it does so mainly in that Currie builds reference to intention into his account and appeals to speech act theory. For him, a fictional work is not fictional unless it was intended to prompt make-believe. Walton, in turn denies this. However, they both agree in that it is the function to prompt imaginings that ultimately explains the fictional character of a work.

So, put it briefly and in his own words, Currie's position is the following:

If we enforce a distinction between fictional and non-fictional pictures, we concede that picturing itself cannot be explained in terms of imaginings, while holding to the view that pictures are fictional when they do mandate imaginings (Currie, 2002, 257).

What is it that makes a painting, sculpture, or photograph fictional? I say it is this: that the artist intended the audience to make believe the content of what is represented (Currie 1990, 39).

According to Currie's view, then, pictures are fictional if the artist intended the audience to make-believe or imagine their content, while non-fictional pictures would be those intended to prescribe beliefs. But Currie provides a further condition to rule out many counterexamples such as the ones I have mentioned: if the content intended to be imagined is actually the case, it can only be accidentally so. But again, counterexamples can be found.

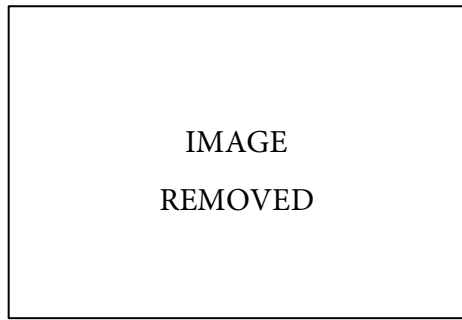


Figure 15 Elliot Erwitt "New York Streets" (2008)

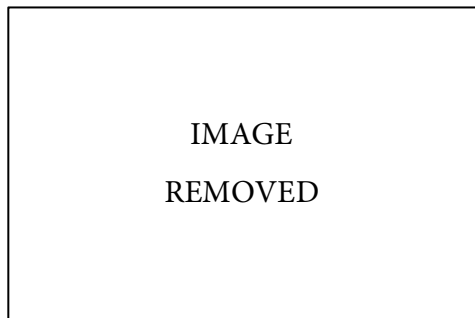


Figure 16 Elliot Erwitt "Child at Broken Window" (1969)

I think it is reasonable to say that a purportedly fictional photograph like Figure 2 invites us both to imagine that Spiderman was involved in the combat taking place at Cherbourg, Normandy in 1944 and to believe that the background of the image correctly documents the battle in Normandy; moreover, such content is not accidentally true – presumably Harahap deliberately choose the original photograph for a reason, otherwise he could have recreated or made up a ‘theatrical’ battle. Likewise, there are cases of non-fictional photography that invite make believe. Take Figure 15 and Figure 16, for example. Elliot Erwitt’s *New York Streets*, is a picture that purports to capture and document the irony of everyday life and the inhabitants of New York City.<sup>48</sup> However, it seems that it invites the viewer to imagine that the man we see in the picture is a dog; yet, at the same time it does not aim at deceiving us – the irony of the picture partly relies on the fact that it is clear that the subject of the picture is indeed a man and the author presumably relies on the viewer to recognise this and believe this is so. Similarly, Erwitt’s *Child at Broken Window*, invites us to believe a certain situation: that a child is inside a car looking out of a broken window, but also it

---

<sup>48</sup> Elliot Erwitt, the author of both photographs, is distinguished by ‘his keen eye for the comedy in everyday life’ (Johnson 2011).

invites us to make-believe either that the impact that was responsible for breaking the window actually reached the eye of the child, or that the child is, in a sense, broken himself or a fragile soul.

It seems then that even if we add a further requirement to narrow down the extension of pictorial works that invite imaginings, this extension is still broader than that of works we intuitively would call fictional. But perhaps a plausible alternative could be to find a type of imagination that does pick out the right kind of works. This alternative has also been provided by Currie. A few years after he put forward his first incarnation of his theory of fiction, he proposed that the type of imagination that is involved in our engagement with fictional pictures, is one that he calls *recreative* imagination; this is a type of imagination whose main characteristic is that it simulates other mental states; it is a psychological capacity that allows us to ‘put ourselves in the place of another, or in the place of our own future, past or counterfactual self’ (Currie and Ravenscroft, p.8).<sup>49</sup> According to Currie, the appeal to this notion of imagination avoids counterexamples raised against alternative views that define fiction in terms of imagination:

Much contemporary scepticism about the fiction/non-fiction divide, based on the claim that works of all kinds engage the imagination, collapses when we enforce the distinctions between the recreative and the creative imaginations, and between works that authorize specific imaginings and works which involve imagination in other ways (Currie 2001, p. 257).

But despite Currie’s expectations, I think this is not the case. Take the following stills Figure 17 and Figure 18 of the film *Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, 1955). It seems to

---

<sup>49</sup> In Currie’s first incarnation of his theory of fiction (Currie 1990) he does not offer a specific account of imagination or make believe. However, in his later work (Currie 2001) he makes it explicit that *recreative* imagination as he conceives of it is the kind of imagination that is involved in fiction as the passage quoted above suggests. It should be noted, though, that he may have changed his mind about the claims he made in 2001, when he published the views that I am quoting here. Evidence that this might be the case is that he has updated and made changes to his article ‘Imagination and Make Believe’ in the most recent and forthcoming edition of the Routledge Companion to Aesthetics, where this article is published. In this updated version, Currie does not deny the views on pictures and fiction that he had put forward in previous versions of this article, however, the section where he presented this view was edited out.

me that understanding these pictures and the film that contains them, goes beyond being able to recognise a man lying on a bed or a man lying handcuffed on the street. Understanding the picture on the left, for instance, involves having the capacity to see something in the man's eyes; to recognise his facial expression, and to be able to feel sympathy at the very least. This film would only be appreciated by people who can read faces and see the expressions of suffering, deprivation and humiliation; people who are able, at least in the most basic sense, to put themselves in the shoes of others; people who, if Currie were right, could imagine recreatively. Moreover, we can surely claim that it was part of the author's intention that we adopt such empathetic attitude.

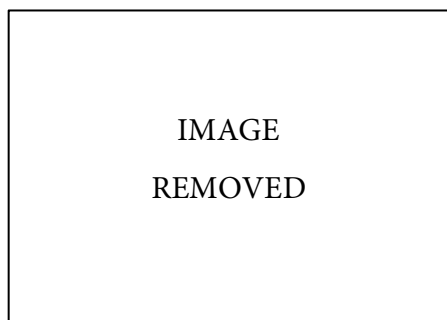


Figure 17 Alain Resnais "Night and Fog" (1955)



Figure 18 Alain Resnais "Night and Fog" (1955)

If this is right, it could not be the case that what distinguishes fiction from non-fiction is certain authorial intention—or lack thereof—to prompt in the viewer recreative imaginings. For *Night and Fog* is, I take it, uncontroversially, a non-fictional film and, if Currie were right, it would crucially require recreative imagination for understanding it. Moreover, this film is not an exception among non-fictional films in this regard. A vast number of non-fictional/documentary films and pictorial works are about social matters that require that we put ourselves in situations different from our

own and that we reason in accordance. Fictional and non-fictional films—and pictures in general—it seems to me, do not differ in this aspect.

If this is sound, Currie’s attempt to define fiction in terms of imagination, however we want to construe this notion, would also be unsuccessful, as it seems that the set of pictorial works that invite make-believe or imagining is broader than our ordinary notion of fiction.<sup>50</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have claimed that there is no reason to think that photographs—or for that matter, any picture—by their very nature favour their use as fictional works. Even if pictures prompt an imaginative engagement in some way, this would not seem to make pictures favour fiction anymore than non-fiction. The various counterexamples proposed, cast serious doubts on the viability of the claim that make-believe is a distinctive response exclusive to fictional depictive works. For, as we saw, make-believe is sometimes the appropriate response also to non-fictional pictures. Different theorists hold different views on the role make-believe plays in our engagement with depictive works; however, in none of these interpretations did the domain of works that invite make-believe map one-to-one onto the set of works that fall under our ordinary conception of fiction.

Certainly, it might be called into question that the different roles attributed by the theorists to the imagination in our experience of pictorial representations are sound. But this should be evaluated, I think, without assuming that an invitation to imagine—whatever its interpretation might be—compromises the characterisation of a work as fictional or non-fictional. I obviously do not deny that there is a connection between fiction and the imagination, and that it is an important one.<sup>51</sup> However, I do

---

<sup>50</sup> In a very recent and forthcoming article, Currie himself admits that a problem with views, such as his, that define fiction in terms of imagination is that non-fictional works sometimes also mandates imaginings (Currie and Ichino 2013).

<sup>51</sup> In Chapter 4 and 5 I will clarify to what extent an imaginative response is important for works of fiction.

not think that the relation between imagination—or a mandate to imagine—and fiction is as straightforward as it seems to be assumed.<sup>52</sup>

Another lesson that should be considered from this chapter is that the notions of fiction and non-fiction are assigned various meanings by different theorists and it is seldom stated clearly how and why they diverge from each other. Being warned about this may avoid confusion.

---

<sup>52</sup> This claim has also been subscribed by Stacie Friend and Derek Matravers (Matravers 2010; Friend 2012).

## CHAPTER 2

---

### NATURAL IMAGES AND FICTIONAL INCOMPETENCE

**I**N THE PREVIOUS chapter I dealt with the controversial claim that photographs, in as much as they are pictorial, are fiction by definition or favour the purpose of fiction. A more popular thought, however, stands at the opposite side of the dialectic and it can be stated thus: Photographs, given their *special* nature as *natural images*, have some epistemic advantages over other pictorial types and, unlike other pictorial types, they cannot represent fictional entities. Moreover, photographs are not only epistemically but also phenomenologically special. These features make photographs especially suitable for the purpose of non-fiction. Analysing and discussing these claims will be the purpose of the following chapters (Chapters 2 to 5). In this chapter, I will discuss the claim that photographs are natural images, whether this has consequences for the capacity of photographs to represent fictional entities, and to what extent this affects the purported epistemic advantage of photography. In the following chapter (Chapter 3) I will engage with the debate on the special phenomenology of photography and in chapters 4 and 5 I will discuss whether—and if so, how and to what extent—photographs affect classification or favour the purpose of non-fiction. In general, I agree with the idea that photographs are epistemically and phenomenologically special—although I provide different views from those available in the philosophical literature. But as will become clear in Part II, the relation between these features and the nature of documentary or non-fictional works is not as straightforward as it may seem.

#### 1. Overview

The relation between the photographic image and reality has arguably been the major concern of the vast bulk of the literature on photography (philosophical or otherwise) since the invention of the medium. This is understandable given that the very nature of photography has frequently been conceived of as ‘never less than the registering of an emanation, a material vestige of its subject’ (Sontag 1977, 154). This *natural* causal link between the image and ‘the real’ has undoubtedly influenced the function



photographs perform in our societies: as snapshots, photographs are records, accurate public memories of our family and social life; as legal or journalistic documents, they are reliable evidence of an event, they play the part of a public eye. However, more than a century and a half after the advent of photography, the functions, uses and possibilities of the medium have diversified and, sometimes, *pace* the recommendations of the modernists, the search for realism or the exploitation thereof has been completely abandoned. These non-realistic uses of photography have been well documented and studied by art historians and scholars from other disciplines. But they have received scarce attention from philosophers, many of whom still demonstrate a degree of scepticism about whether non-realistic uses in general, and fiction in particular, are actually an open possibility for photography.

In this chapter I will discuss the claim that photographs are natural images and how this affects their epistemic value and their capacity to represent *ficta*. In section 2 I discuss the notion of *natural images*—the idea that photographs acquire their content in a special way. This claim has led theorists to conclude that photographs are epistemically advantageous and (some other theorists) to think that photographs cannot represent *ficta*. In section 3, I will deal specifically with the latter claim: I address the debate on the purported ‘fictional incompetence’ of photography. I argue that this claim derives from a limited conception of *photographic means* and that if we provide a more true-to-practice conception of photographic means there is no reason to deny that photographs can indeed represent *ficta* (sections 4 and 5). This, in turn, shows that the traditional conception of how photographs acquire their content is overly narrow: even if photographs are usually natural images or cases of natural meaning, where intentions and the mental states of the artist do not play a crucial role in determining content, there are some cases where the intentions do indeed play a role; in these cases, photographs are instances of non-natural meaning. However, this does not mean that photographs are not *typically* natural images and thereby do not *typically* have the epistemic advantage conferred to natural signs. In sections 6 and 7, following the *signalling model of communication* (Green 2007; Maynard-Smith and Harper 2004), I defend the view that photographs are a special type of natural signal—a *handicap*, and sometimes an *index*, in Mitchell Green’s terms—that is difficult (although not impossible) to manipulate. As I make clear in section 8, this view

presents a modest or weak account of the epistemic merits of photography. Finally, in section 9 I consider a stronger view—Robert Hopkins’ theory of factive pictorial experiences—and give reasons to think that such a stronger view is not viable.

## 2. Natural Images

According to the most influential view on the nature of photographs—call it the Causal Theory of Photography (CTP)—photographs are considered *natural images*<sup>53</sup> or *natural pictures*. Photographs, this received view has it, are a special kind of picture: they acquire their content or the visual properties they display in a special way that distinguishes them from other kinds of images such as paintings, drawings or etchings. The visual properties displayed by photographic images are the effect of a ‘natural’ causal and counterfactual relation with some mind-independent object or scene—where ‘natural’ here means that this causal relation is not mediated by the photographer’s intentions or mental states. The visual properties of the photograph—the marks on its surface in virtue of which it supports pictorial experience—are causally and counterfactually dependent upon the visible properties of the photographed object. So if I see something that looks like a tree in the photograph, it is because a similarly-shaped object (in all likelihood a tree) caused the photograph in the appropriate way. That is, there was a tree in front of the camera at the moment of the shot, such that had a tree not been there and had it not looked as it did, the photograph would not have had the visual properties it currently has. Non-photographic images can also bear a causal and counterfactual relation to their subject matter: a painter might be attentively drawing the same tree in such a way that had the visual properties of the tree been different, her drawing would have looked correspondingly different. However, in the case of the drawing, the counterfactual relation between the visual appearance of the image and the subject matter crucially depends on the artist’s intentional or mental state—what she takes herself to be perceiving, whether her experience or her belief is veridical or not. This being so, if the

---

<sup>53</sup> As I will mention later on in this chapter, the term ‘natural images’ as I use it here, derives from the idea of ‘natural meaning’ coined by Grice. More generally, the idea is that there is a natural causal correlation between the visible properties of the photograph and the visual appearance of the objects photographed. Michael G.F. Martin has a different conception of ‘natural images’ (see Martin 2012, 342).

artist was hallucinating, her drawing may display the visual properties of a tree that was never in front of her even though she believed it was. The content of a photograph, by contrast, is not essentially dependent on the photographer's intentions, mental states or beliefs; it is essentially dependent only on there being a concrete object or scene reflecting (or absorbing) light onto (or away from) the camera lens. The photographer might be misperceiving or hallucinating; she might believe that she is in front of a monster instead of a tree, but the photograph will show a tree rather than a monster regardless of the mental state or beliefs that the photographer may be in or have.

Probably the best articulation of the CTP—the received view—is found in the work of Kendall Walton and Gregory Currie.<sup>54</sup> For Walton, this natural causal and counterfactual relation that photographs bear to their objects supports his view that photographs, unlike other pictorial types, are *transparent*; that is, we can literally see objects through photographic images of them. For Currie, in turn, the natural relation between the object and the photographic image shows that photographs, like footprints and death masks, are *traces*: a kind of object that registers and reliably indicates the presence or existence of its sources as well as their appearance. Other pictorial types, according to Currie, 'fall into a different category of representation'—a category he calls *testimonies*. This natural dependence of photographs on the objects they are of, according to these theorists, makes photographs a distinctive *kind* of image; but it has also been taken to give photographs a certain epistemic advantage over other pictorial types.<sup>55</sup> As Currie puts it:

As with photographs, so with footprints and death masks. These are traces left by things on the world. Anything about the person's appearance that the footprint or death mask manages to record is belief independent in the way that the photograph is: what is recorded depends on the morphology of the

---

<sup>54</sup> See (Walton 1984; Currie 1995; Currie 1999; Currie 2008; Walden 2005).

<sup>55</sup> The main aim of Walton's *Transparency Thesis* is to explain the peculiar phenomenology of photography rather than to claim an epistemic advantage. However, his view has epistemic implications as well: first, those derived from his claim that photography grounds genuine perceptual experiences, and those implied by his endorsement of Grice's view of natural meaning (see below). The phenomenological and affective side of Walton's transparency theory and Currie's trace theory will be further developed in Chapter 3.

foot or face; not on what someone thinks the morphology of the foot or face is (...) Paintings and drawings fall into a different category of representations on account of their being in the first instance records of what someone thought the facts of the matter were. (Currie 1999, 287)

Photographs can be sources of information in ways that paintings cannot (...) a photograph may well give us a minute clue to something we, including the maker, did not suspect (...) But a painter cannot represent an object she did not see and did not intend, under any description, to represent (Currie 1999, 288).

Although it is very often ignored, both Walton's and Currie's views are influenced by Grice's distinction between natural and non-natural meaning.<sup>56</sup> Acknowledging this influence will give us more clues about the epistemic implications of their views. According to Grice, occurrences of natural meaning are not only intention-independent but they also *show*, indicate<sup>57</sup> or provide direct evidence of a given state of affairs. For Grice, if *S* is said to naturally mean that *p*, what is typically perceptually available may not be *p* itself but only *S*; however, we can directly infer *p* from *S*. In other words, according to Grice, a mark of instances of natural meaning, or *showing*, is that they are *factive*: if something (a fact) naturally means that *p*, then it is the case that *p*.<sup>58</sup> For example, if the statement 'these spots (on your face) mean measles' is a statement of natural meaning, it should be the case that the fact that you have these spots (on your face) implies (that you have) measles. This contrasts with cases of non-natural meaning—the typical example of which is linguistic communication—whereby the meaning or the information to be conveyed is provided

---

<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Walton and Currie acknowledge this influence (see Walton 1984, 265; Currie 1999, n. 8).

<sup>57</sup> Dretske uses the expression 'indicating' for cases of natural meaning (Dretske 1988, 53ff. esp. 55).

<sup>58</sup> (See Grice 1989, 291, 349). Robert Hopkins emphasises the factivity of photographic images in a way that explicit followers of Grice, such as supporters of the CTP, fail to notice. However, although Hopkins does extract epistemic consequences from the factivity of photographic images, his approach is very different from Grice's: instead of approaching the issue of factivity from the perspective of communication or meaning, he takes a phenomenological approach (Hopkins 2010). Hopkins' theory will be further developed in section 9 of this chapter and in Chapter 3.

somehow *indirectly*, i.e., it crucially depends on the intentions and mental states of the speaker: the audience or the hearer has to rely on the speaker in order to access the relevant meaning or information, and the fact that a speaker *means p* by uttering certain proposition, does not imply that *p*. For this reason, non-natural meaning—or *telling*, as it is also known—according to Grice, is not factive.

The intuition that is appealed to by the advocates of the CTP then, is that photographs are bearers of natural meaning, where the meaning or, more generally in this case, the content of the photograph, is given by a natural (causal) relation between objects and scenes on the one hand, and photographs on the other. So in a similar way that the fact of having spots in the face naturally means, indicates or is direct evidence of measles, the fact that there is smoke naturally means that there is fire, or the fact that the tree has N number of rings naturally means the tree is N years old, the fact that a photograph represents S looking F naturally means—or provides direct evidence—that there is an object S that looks F. Photographs are the product of the reflection of light (or lack thereof) from an object onto a photosensitive surface – a ‘natural’, purely causal mechanism. So, if a photograph ‘means’ (or represents) that a dog looks thus and so, one can safely infer that *there was a dog* that looks thus and so. As in Grice’s view, the case of photographs contrasts, according to advocates of the CTP, with other types of representations, such as linguistic representations or hand-made pictures, whose meanings or contents crucially depend on an agent’s beliefs or intentions.<sup>59</sup> For this reason, so the argument goes, one cannot immediately infer that there is an object with certain properties just by looking at a painting or drawing displaying the visual properties of a similar object. One needs to make sure that the author actually intended to convey such a meaning and whether the author’s intentions actually correspond with the way things are. Photographs then, according to this view, in as much as they are bearers of natural images have an epistemic advantage over paintings (and other non-natural signs): they provide direct evidence of the things they represent, so that we can safely infer from whatever photographs represent

---

<sup>59</sup> For example, as I mentioned before, parallel to Grice’s distinction between *showing* (natural meaning/direct evidence) and *telling* (non-natural meaning/indirect evidence or full-fledged cases of communication), Gregory Currie distinguishes between *traces* (photographs) and *testimony* (hand-drawn pictures): ‘a photograph is a trace of its subject, while a painting is testimony of it’ (Currie 1999, 7).

that there was in fact something in the world with the appearance the photograph displays.

Now, the fact that photographs obtain their visual properties in this peculiar natural way, and the fact that the photographic content is constrained by the real objects that gave rise to the image, has not only led philosophers to claim that photographs have a certain epistemic advantage over other pictorial types; some theorists have also been prompted to conclude that photography is *fictionally incompetent*.<sup>60</sup>

In what follows, I will discuss this charge against photography. I will come back to the epistemic value of photography and the issue of natural meaning in section 6. There, I will discuss whether the potential of photographs to depict fictional entities has any effect on the purported epistemic advantages of photography as natural images or instances of natural meaning.

### 3. The Debate on the Fictional Incompetence of Photography

Here are two paradigmatic statements of what I will call the Fictional Incompetence of Photography claim (FIP):

The relation between a photograph and its subject is a causal relation (...) The photograph lacks that quality of ‘intentional existence,’ which is characteristic of painting. The ideal photograph, therefore, is incapable of representing anything unreal (Scruton 1981, 588).<sup>61</sup>

[W]ith regard to the choice of subject matter, the photographer (unlike the painter, sculptor or poet) is limited to a particular real or existing object or

---

<sup>60</sup> As will become apparent in due course, these theorists do not necessarily coincide with the main proponents of the CTP.

<sup>61</sup> The underlying idea behind Scruton’s claim that photography is fictionally incompetent is that photographs do not *represent* but *present* their content. This view has been challenged by many authors (see for instance, among others, Carroll 1996; Currie 1995; Davies 2008; Lopes 2003). In this paper, I will ignore this debate and assume that Scruton’s critics have succeeded in proving that photographs are indeed representational. I do not think that I am gratuitously weakening Scruton’s argument. If I understand him correctly, his claim that photographs are fictionally incompetent is an argument to support his claim that photographs are not representational.

state of affairs. It is usually said, as a consequence, that traditional photography is ‘fictionally incompetent’ – that is, it is a medium necessarily *incapable of representing a fictional character or state of affairs* (Friday 1997, 9).<sup>62</sup>

As I advanced before, these and other theorists claim that, given the special causal or natural relation that photographs bear to their subjects, photographs cannot represent fictional entities or *ficta*. This view, however, has been rejected by various authors, even by some supporters of the CTP. One line of defence has been to argue that there are alternative modes of representation available to photography other than the causal portrayal of its source.<sup>63</sup> According to Gregory Currie, for instance, photographs characteristically represent a certain subject or event by registering the presence of the subject or event—the *source*—that once stood before the lens. This way of representing, Currie maintains, is the only one that is *specifically photographic*. Yet this does not prevent photographs from representing fictional events or entities by other means. It is possible, for instance, that a photograph of a real subject (the source of the photo) is *used* to represent another. For example, I can use a photograph of Charles Chaplin to represent, say, Charlot or Hitler (Figure 19).

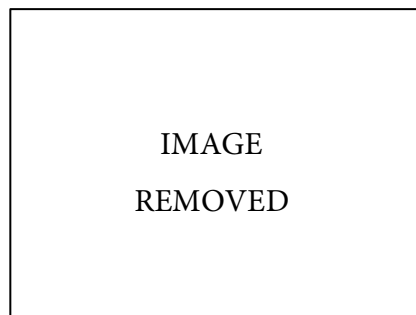


Figure 19 Chaplin as Adolf Hitler in *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin, 1940)

So whilst photography cannot represent fictions by source or by origin or by strictly photographic means, Currie maintains, it certainly can do so by use (Currie 2008).

<sup>62</sup> For a similar view see also (Hopkins 1998, 74).

<sup>63</sup> An alternative argument has been to allude to the evident fictional competence of cinema as proof of the fictional capacity of an essentially photographic medium. The *argument from cinema*, as it has been called, basically claims that since there are clearly fictional films which are photographic in nature, photography cannot be fictionally incompetent. To see why this argument does not work against FIP theorists, see (Cavedon-Taylor 2010).

Noël Carroll makes a similar argument with respect to cinematic works,<sup>64</sup> claiming that there are various modes of representation in films. The individual shots of a photographic film will always *physically portray* the concrete particulars that caused the image, but this is by no means the only possible use of shots, nor is it necessarily the essential and most important one. The photographic shot also ‘*depicts* a member of a class describable by a general term’. So a photograph of, say, Clark Gable also represents *a man*, and this second mode, in a relevant context, ‘opens up another possibility of cinematic representation’ which is what Carroll calls the *nominal portrayal*:

[The] nominal portrayal occurs when a shot represents a particular person, object or event different than its photographic provenance, due to its context as a result of factors like commentary, titles, an ongoing story or editing (Carroll 1996c, 240).

According to Carroll and Currie, then, a photograph or a cinematic shot that physically portrays Charles Chaplin—a real person—*by source* can also (nominally) represent Charlot—a fictional character—*by use*.

Certainly, Currie and Carroll agree, subjects differ in suitability when it comes to representation, even by use. As Carroll puts it, ‘it is hard to imagine how (...) a clean medium shot of Lenin [can] depict an ice cream soda’ (Carroll 1996c, 241). However, there are certain effective ways of reducing what Currie calls *representational dissonance*; that is, methods by which the viewer’s attention can be directed away from the subject represented by source while making the object represented by use more salient. Given the right conditions, then, Carroll and Currie contend, photographs can represent fictional entities.

Now, although these arguments might be right and convince us that the representation of fictional objects is indeed a possibility open to photography, it is not clear that they respond effectively to the challenge raised by FIP theorists.

---

<sup>64</sup> This argument is different from the one alluded to in fn. 63. Here Carroll talks specifically about individual photographic shots, while *the argument from cinema* alludes to the various elements comprising a film, e.g. montage, narrative, scenography, etc.



If FIP were simply a question of whether or not photographs can represent fictional entities or events *simpliciter*, these arguments would surely be enough to appease the sceptic. However, advocates of FIP do not deny that photographs can be used to represent fictions in a similar sense to that suggested by Currie and Carroll:

Of course I may take a photograph of a draped nude and call it *Venus*, but insofar as this can be understood as an exercise in fiction, *it should not be thought of as a photographic representation of Venus but rather as the photograph of a representation of Venus*. In other words, the process of fictional representation occurs not in the photograph but in the subject: it is the *subject* which represents *Venus*; the photograph does no more than disseminate its visual character to other eyes (Scruton 1981, 588. *Emphasis mine*).

The charge against photography raised by FIP advocates is stronger: what they deny photography is the capacity to represent fictions *by photographic means*, that is, through the relevant causal relation of a source (a particular object) with the camera lens or the photosensitive surface. In this sense Currie and Carroll's proposal does not offer a solution. In fact, even Currie explicitly agrees with FIP advocates that photographs cannot represent fictions by strictly photographic means.<sup>65</sup>

#### 4. Photographic Means

Certainly, the charge that FIP advocates raise against photography holds true in one trivial sense: no one, not even realists about fictional characters, would maintain that fictional entities reflect light. So it is obviously true that there cannot be photographs of *ficta* in this limited sense, for *ficta* cannot causally interact with a photosensitive material. Less obvious, however, is that their description exhausts all the possible photographic means by which photographs can represent *ficta*. In order to see what other photographic means there are available we need to review our conception of the photographic process.

---

<sup>65</sup> Carroll is not explicit with respect to his endorsement of this claim. As for Currie's view, there would still be disagreement between his view and Scruton's. Scruton maintains that if photographs cannot represent fictions it is, ultimately, because they are not representations but *presentations*. Currie denies this. For him photographs are indeed representations. See fn. 61.

Standard philosophical accounts of photography have generally provided an oversimplified view of photographic practice. By overemphasizing the distinctive capacity of photographs to record the pro-filmic scene without presupposing intentionality, theorists have often failed to account for how this record becomes an actual visual image. An alternative and more comprehensive account of photographic practice would need to account for the process between the moment light is impressed on the photosensitive material and the moment when the viewer experiences the photograph.

Developing such an account in detail is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, drawing partially on the work of Dawn Phillips (Phillips 2009, pp. 336-340), I aim to say enough about the photographic process to justify the claim that there is an alternative, broader and more accurate conception of *photographic means* that allows for the photographic representation of *ficta*.

Producing a photograph is a complex process that normally requires more than the exposure of photosensitive material to a particular scene reflecting (or absorbing) light. Certainly, this event—which Phillips calls *the photographic event*—is crucial: it is at this stage that the pattern of light is registered.<sup>66</sup> However, this by no means exhausts the whole process. In fact, as Phillips correctly indicates, at this point there is not yet a visual image; the impression of the pattern of light is still *latent*, so that a further exposure to light or to another light-reflecting scene will change the current pattern or ultimately fog or saturate the photosensitive surface. The photosensitive material has to go through further processes to (1) turn the recorded information into one or many *patent* or actually visible images—let us call this *transduction*—and (2) fixate or preserve the pattern created by the impression of light—let us call this *storage*.<sup>67</sup> It is only when all these processes are completed that we can speak of the existence of a photograph. Phillips calls our attention to a couple of things worthy of note. Firstly, the processes taking place in the production of the photograph may vary a great deal. Consequently, the information recorded might result in a final photographic image whose appearance turns out to be very different from the appearance of the pro-filmic

---

<sup>66</sup> As Phillips points out, the photographic event amounts to *the recording* of the light image but is not yet *a record* of such an image (see Phillips 2009, 337).

<sup>67</sup> I am grateful to Dominic Lopes for suggesting the labels ‘storage’ and ‘transduction’.

scene or object.<sup>68</sup> Secondly, the fact that all processes involved in the production of a photograph can be mechanically or automatically performed does not mean that this is always the case. And we do not have reasons, in principle, to believe that if those actions are performed non-mechanically, the process ceases to be photographic.<sup>69</sup>

Now it seems to me that when authors talk about photographic means, they assume that the first stage of the photographic process is the only one that deserves to be called *strictly* photographic, since it is presumably at this stage that the relevant causal relation of a source (a particular object) with the camera lens or the photosensitive surface is instantiated. But why should we think this? FIP theorists have not given us any reason why this first stage, conceived of as they do, should set the boundaries of our conception of photographic means. As a matter of fact one could argue that since, up to the first stage of the process there is not yet a visual image, it is hard to see how the photographic process could be complete. So a relevant question is why we should exclude what happens in the darkroom as photographic means. After all it is there, or then, that the latent image typically becomes the visual image we can appropriately call a photograph. Moreover, a great deal of the processing taking place in the darkroom can be said to be specific to photography or strictly photographic.

Certainly, there are some actions performed in the darkroom that do not seem to exploit strictly photographic techniques, or techniques that do not exploit any essential element of photography such as the reflection and absorption of light and its effect on a photosensitive material. Scratching or physically drawing on the film's surface, for instance, may not be strictly *photographic* processes for they exploit means different from the manipulation of light and its properties in order to create an image or parts of an image.<sup>70</sup> Likewise, physically cropping some parts of a picture with scissors may not count as a photographic technique. However, other techniques frequently described in basic manuals of photography that critics and connoisseurs consider when they appreciate photographs seem to be strictly photographic

---

<sup>68</sup> As we will see in sections 6 and 7, this has important consequences for the conception of photographs as natural images and their purported epistemic advantages.

<sup>69</sup> For a response to the view that non-automatically produced photographs move away from the real essence of photography see section 5 below.

<sup>70</sup> Although these techniques are indeed part of the practice of photography.

techniques. Some examples of these techniques are: using templates to selectively mask the reflecting light on relevant parts of the image, selective over and underexposure, combining negatives, burning or blurring parts of the image, manipulation of contrast, use of filters, various types of photosensitive papers and developing liquids to vary the quality of the image, etc.<sup>71</sup> It seems to me perfectly reasonable to consider these techniques *photographic means* for, after all, what they exploit is not any contingent aspect of photography, but its very essence: the action of light on photosensitive material. In view of this, we should adopt an alternative notion of photographic means, which could be the following:

Photographic means: any action or technique performed or taking place during the *production* of an image—including the stages of transduction and storage—that consists solely in the exploitation, manipulation or control of the incidence of light onto, and its interaction with, a photosensitive material.

It is worth adding that on this definition the currently most common form of photographic manipulation (Photoshop and similar software) may not be considered strictly photographic because (1) it is a case of post-production—occurring after a visual image is obtained and (2) it alters the image by technical means different from the projection and recording of light. But in analogue photography, there is a long-standing tradition of editing and working on prints and negatives using strictly photographic methods while the photographic image is being produced.<sup>72</sup>

I claim that these photographic techniques mentioned above, which require a high degree of skill and knowledge about the photographic process, can be used either

---

<sup>71</sup> Notice that various different processes may lead to exactly the same image, but only some of them may count as strictly *photographic*.

<sup>72</sup> Notice that in digital photography there are also procedures used to manipulate images that depend only on the control of the projection and reflection of light. Multiple exposure, long-exposure, under and over exposure, etc., are (sometimes) available in digital cameras and are examples of these techniques. These procedures or techniques, moreover, affect the image while it is still being produced, so there will be no reason, in principle, to deny that these are also strictly photographic means. Interestingly, although digital photography is normally considered more vulnerable to manipulation, strictly speaking its process of production (again, not post-production) normally allows for a much more restricted control or manipulation than the most traditional analogue photography.

to make corrections for purposes of composition, or for other creative (or deceptive) purposes such as representing *ficta*. Take for instance Figure 20.



Figure 20 Wanda Wulz “Io Gatto” (1932)

Figure 20 is a photographic image that represents a hybrid creature, a *catwoman*, we can call it, or the transformation of the photographer, Wanda Wulz, into a feline. The *catwoman* represented, or Wanda Wulz’s feline alter ego, clearly does not exist; can we not say that this photograph represents a fictional entity by photographic means? I think we can. The catwoman that we can see in the picture was created by using multiple-exposure techniques; that is, either by combining two negatives—one showing the face of a cat and the other the face of a woman—to produce one single image, or by exposing one single negative twice.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Neither multiple exposure nor the other techniques mentioned above are rare in the history of photography. As a matter of fact, many of these techniques were frequently used when digital editing software was not available, sometimes for creative purposes, and other times—especially in the case of combination printing—for practical purposes such as to compensate for the slowness of the film’s emulsion. Actually, the case of Wanda Wulz’s *Io Gatto* is a relatively simple one. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, photographers such as Henry Peach Robinson or Oscar G. Rejlander, produced images combining up to thirty negatives. More recently, photographers such as Jerry Uelsmann still work with non-digital technologies to create dream-like images that require employing up to a dozen enlargers, great control and selective use of illumination (both in the studio and outdoors), and a mastery of combination printing as well as various other darkroom techniques (see, for instance, Figure 21).

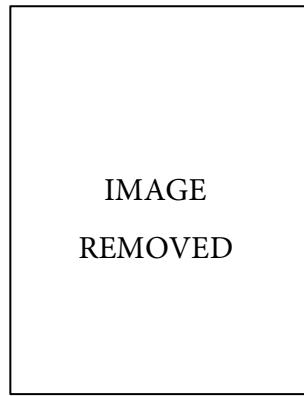


Figure 21 Jerry Uelsmann's "Untitled" (1982)

If there can be certain actions performed during the production of a photograph—other than those considered by FIP—that count as strictly photographic, then we have an alternative way by which photographs can be said to represent fictional entities by photographic means. I will defend this claim by considering some objections.

### 5. Objections and replies

The sceptic might accept that the catwoman image is fictionally competent. However, she might deny that it is a photograph, claiming instead that it should be classified as another pictorial type closer to, if not completely analogous with, painting or drawing. Scruton himself suggests this when he says that if a photographer proceeds 'to paint things out or in, to touch up, alter, or *pasticher* as he pleases [...] the photographer has now become a painter' (Scruton 1981, 593).

The argument will then be the following: Photographs are fictionally incompetent (FIP). *Io Gatto* is fictionally competent. So *Io Gatto* is not a photograph. But this argument clearly begs the question. Photographs, the argument assumes, are fictionally incompetent and, if a picture is fictionally competent, then it is not a photograph. The conclusion is only true if we assume that FIP is true. Without any further reason for why we should take images such as *Io Gatto* as non-photographic, this objection is not acceptable.

Are there further reasons to think *Io Gatto* is indeed a photograph? I think there are. Let me briefly mention two.

The first one is that the catwoman image is not inconsistent with the main claims traditionally made about the nature of photography. Firstly, there is a sense in which it is still a trace of the objects that produced it. It registers the presence of its sources: the cat and the woman, Wanda Wulz. Moreover, being aware of this fact can be important for understanding the image. Similarly, advocates of the transparency thesis would accept that one can still literally see *the* cat and *the* woman through the photograph.<sup>74</sup> Secondly, in order to produce the picture, the photographer was constrained by a particular real or existing object or state of affairs in a way that a painter would never have been. Indeed, the composition of the image depends crucially on the amount of light the different parts of the scene reflect onto the photosensitive surface. It is the task of the skilled photographer to control this element in order to obtain the desired image.

The second, and I think more powerful reason, is that *Io Gatto* is interesting precisely because it is a photographic image and not a painting. A painting of a similar creature, in all likelihood, would not surprise the spectator, but the fact that it is a photograph arguably does. Barbara Savedoff explains this phenomenon nicely (Savedoff 2008). As experienced spectators, she claims, we concede what she calls *documentary authority*<sup>75</sup> to photographs, and this prompts us to identify the *real* objects that were once in front of the camera. But when confronted with photographs such as that of our catwoman, we feel a certain tension: although we identify the objects that are the source of the image, we see them presented in an uncanny way. It is clear that we are invited to see something else, namely, a catwoman. This tension has a positive effect and makes our appreciation of photographs representing *ficta* different from our appreciation of paintings with similar content. If this is so, evaluating *Io Gatto* as a painting or as another pictorial type would be to miss the whole point of the picture.

---

<sup>74</sup> Kendall Walton himself endorses this view in his ‘Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism’, (Walton 1984). See especially pages 266-267.

<sup>75</sup> *Documentary authority* is a term Savedoff uses. I would prefer to call this *documental authority* for the reasons that I will mention in Chapter 3. But now, and to avoid confusion, I will keep her original term.

The sceptic will perhaps now concede that the picture is a photograph, but she can still insist that if it is so, then, strictly speaking, the picture does not depict a catwoman photographically; rather, it depicts two objects—a woman’s face and a cat.<sup>76</sup>

This is, I take it, no more than a sophisticated version of the former objection, for it suggests the following: Photographs can only represent their sources *photographically* (FIP); *Io Gatto* is a photograph; but there is no catwoman causally related to the image; rather, a woman and a cat are the sources of the image. Therefore, *Io Gatto photographically* represents only a woman and a cat. Again, this argument is question-begging. It assumes that the only way by which photographs are able to represent is *by source*—by being causally related to the object they are of. And, if the picture represents any other object that was not the picture’s source, then such representation cannot be photographic. In other words, the argument is true only if FIP is true, but this is precisely what is being questioned.

Now, it might be correct to say that photographs have a distinctive way of representing objects that other pictures lack: unlike other pictures, there is a sense in which photographs always represent that which they are of.<sup>77</sup> However, this does not mean that this is the *only way* by which photographs can depict their objects, or that other ways of representing available to photography are necessarily not photographic.<sup>78</sup>

Understanding *Io Gatto* may require that we identify a woman’s face and a cat as the sources,<sup>79</sup> but also, and crucially, it requires us to see one, single, whole creature in the picture which we can easily identify as a catwoman. Now, in order for us to identify or see a catwoman in the picture we do not need a label or a convention that tells us what the picture depicts, as is the case in the Chaplin picture representing Charlot. Rather, in the case of *Io Gatto*, we need only to look at the image to naturally

---

<sup>76</sup> I thank Jon Robson for this comment.

<sup>77</sup> This does not mean, however, that they necessarily *depict* the object they are of. A photograph can be of a particular train in virtue of it having appropriately caused the photographic image. However, it might not depict it if, for instance, all that we can see in the image is a blurred trail due to, say, a long exposure shot.

<sup>78</sup> (Cfr. Currie 2008).

<sup>79</sup> At least if the image is not meant to be deceptive but, say, playful, mysterious or ingenious.



generate an interpretation of a single object whose visual properties and shape can easily be associated with a creature that we may be led to call a catwoman – we clearly have an experience *as of* a catwoman. We do not have the experience of seeing two separate scenes or objects; we see an entity in the picture that resembles the figure of what could be referred to as a catwoman. That (apparent) entity, moreover, can be seen or be experienced in the picture due to the manipulation of some specifically photographic techniques.<sup>80</sup>

Now, advocates of FIP may want to leave the particular case of *Io Gatto* aside and take issue with the general framework I used to characterise the photographic process, which allowed me to extend the notion of photographic means. FIP advocates may argue, for instance, that even if some photographs are produced non-automatically following the processes described above, such photographs move away from the real essence of photography or from the *ideal* photograph, which is supposed to be a product of a fully automatic mechanism. And this ideal photograph is really what they are concerned with.<sup>81</sup> A similar and perhaps more sophisticated version of this objection would be to claim that the process I described above, where the *photographic event* is just one stage of a more complex process, is only a historical contingency and thereby does not necessarily capture the essential elements of photography. The critic may think that there could be photographic images produced in a different way, where the second and third steps described above (what I called transduction and storing), for instance, worked differently or were not present. Hence, what I take to be genuine photographic means are not so because they are not essential to photography.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> How it is that this photograph or any other picture depicts its object is a question that ultimately needs a theory of depiction. I do not aim to offer one here. I use the idea of natural generativity in the spirit of Schier (see Schier 1986). However I do not mean to commit myself to this particular theory of depiction. I think that any theory of depiction should accommodate the possibility that a photograph, such as *Io Gatto*, can depict a catwoman rather than—or in addition to—a cat and a woman. After all, it is a photographic picture that supports an experience as of a catwoman – we *see* a catwoman *in* the picture.

<sup>81</sup> (See Scruton 1981)

<sup>82</sup> I am grateful to Robert Hopkins and Dominic Lopes for making me think about this problem.

In answer to the first worry, a reasonable response would be to ask the defender of such a view to provide us with an explanation as to why we should accept that non-automatically produced photography is less essential than its automatic counterpart, and also, why achieving automatism should be an ideal of photography. Without such an explanation the objection just seems *ad hoc*. One possible reason that can be given to support this view is that the photographic mechanism *is* designed to reliably capture the appearances of real, existent objects. Hence, photographs should be used to achieve the function for which they were designed in the first place, and the best way to achieve this function is by making the process fully automatic. But as is well known, an ‘ought’ cannot immediately derive from an ‘is’. It is reasonable to think that the technology that made photography possible was developed and designed to produce realistic pictures or to accurately register the appearance of real scenes and objects, and that this purpose is most reliably achieved by automatic mechanisms.<sup>83</sup> But from this factual statement does not follow a normative one, namely, that the mechanism itself prescribes the way it should be used. The manual of instructions of the camera, for example, may recommend what you should do *if the desired goal is to obtain an accurate image* that registers the appearance of the existing object or scene; but the mechanism itself cannot dictate what the desired goal of photography as a medium should be, let alone prescribe one single goal it should perform. In and of itself, the medium is normatively neutral.<sup>84</sup>

As a response for the second version of the objection—the claim that the process described above is only a historical contingency—we can say the following: Firstly, it is not clear that the three-step process described above is merely historically contingent.<sup>85</sup> It is certainly contingent that some particular chemicals are used during the transduction process while others are used for the storage. It is also contingent that in some types of photography one or more of the processes are performed automatically while not on others. Clearly, different types of photography require different processes of transduction and storage, e.g., the process of transduction in

---

<sup>83</sup> I will argue for this claim in sections 6 and 7 of this chapter. Robert Hopkins has also held a similar view (see Hopkins 1998; Hopkins 2010).

<sup>84</sup> For arguments against the idea that the medium dictates how it should be used see Noël Carroll, (Carroll 1996b)

<sup>85</sup> I thank Stacie Friend for pointing this out to me.

Daguerreotypes employs hot mercury, in Kodachromes a solution containing phenidone and hydroquinone, and in digital photography a given digitizing algorithm is needed to allow the conversion of a pattern of light into a binary code that can be then made visible on a screen. Similarly, the process of storage or recording of the image for Daguerreotypes requires a solution of sodium thiosulphate, for other film-based photography generally ammonium thiosulphate, and if it is a digital photo what is needed is a given image file format. However, it is essential to obtain a photograph that can be properly called so, that the exposed pattern of light can become—by whatever means—a visible image (transduction), and that this visible image can be recorded or fixed (storage). If the processes of transduction or storage were not essential to photography, then latent images, ephemeral image projections or the images that we see in the LCD screen of our camera before shooting the picture, could be called photographs.

Furthermore, even if it were the case that the processes I described were a historical contingency, this would not cancel the existence of a distinctive photographic process that necessarily requires these steps to produce a photographic image. Moreover, the thrust of my argument does not only rely on whether or not the three steps are themselves essential to photography; rather the main point is that, when they are present, they are still part of the production of the image and, more importantly, that some actions performed therein exploit something which is indeed essential to photography, namely, the incidence of light onto, and its interaction with, photosensitive material.

As a last resort, advocates of FIP may try to claim that their position is stronger than I take it to be. On this interpretation, the relevant causal relation of a source with the lens or the photosensitive surface that they take to define photographic means would involve the exposure of a single continuous photosensitive surface by a bundle of light from a single spatiotemporally connected scene.<sup>86</sup> If this were so, the case of *Io Gatto* would not count as a representation of a fictional character by photographic means.

---

<sup>86</sup> I am grateful to Dominic Lopes and Diarmuid Costello for pushing me to think about this objection. John Zeimbekis raised a similar concern.

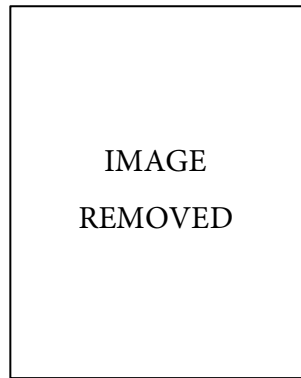


Figure 22 Eliot Elisofon “Duchamp descending a staircase” (1952)

A preliminary reaction to this revised version of FIP would be to ask the defender again what the motivation for such a restrictive account is. To my knowledge, there is no defence of a view such as that stated above in the literature on photography, and without a proper justification for this limiting notion of photographic means, it just seems a gratuitous defensive move to safeguard FIP. Moreover the view does not seem to sit well with the way we classify and appreciate photographs. I already mentioned the case of *Io Gatto*, but the objector should also explain why other images obtained using techniques such as multiple-exposure and combination printing such as Eliot Elisofon’s *Duchamp descending a staircase* (Figure 22) or Jerry Uelsmann’s *Untitled, 1982* (Figure 21 above) should not be considered strictly photographic, when both the techniques and the resulting images are part and parcel of the history of photography and its practice. It is also worth noting that, although this restrictive conception of photographic means seems tailored to rule out cases such as *Io Gatto* as an example of fictional representation by photographic means, it is not clear it will exclude other cases obtained by using techniques such as long-exposure. Take for instance, Gjon Mili’s photograph of Picasso drawing a centaur (Figure 23).

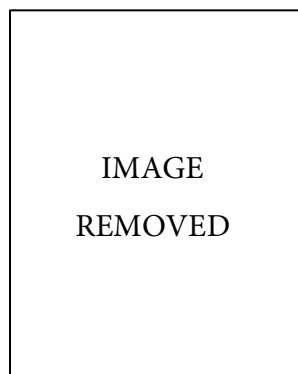


Figure 23 Gjon Mili “Picasso drawing with light” (1949)

One could argue that this picture depicts both Picasso and a centaur (a fictional entity), and that both representations qualify as photographic; they would certainly be photographic representations in my sense, but the proposed view will not rule out this possibility either. After all, the centaur that can be seen in the photograph was produced by a long-exposure of a single continuous photosensitive surface by a bundle of light—radiating from a *light pencil*—from a single spatiotemporally connected scene—Picasso’s studio.

It might well be that the objector has other reasons to revise our appreciative and classificatory practices, but in the absence of any further justification in the literature, one would rather accept a more open conception of photographic means—one that is in accordance with the way we appreciate and classify photographs. I believe I have provided this alternative conception.

Now, once our conception of photographic means is expanded, we can also see how photography can depict not only ficta but also fictive events by photographic means—fictive events, moreover, that do not necessarily contain fictive entities.

Let us have a look at this infamous photograph Figure 24.

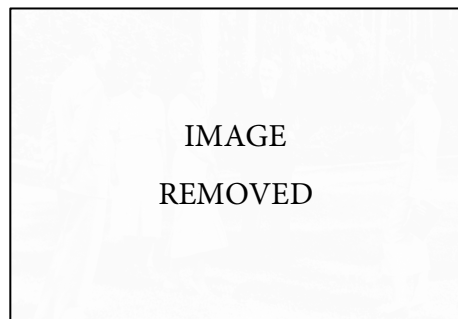


Figure 24 Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo Archive

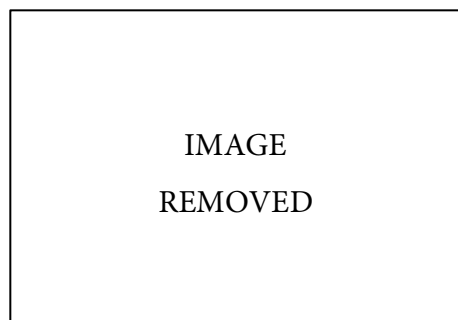


Figure 25 Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo Archive 2

Figure 24 represents an event that never occurred; not, at least, as depicted. It is therefore a fictive time slice or, at the very least, a non-veridical representation. The actual scene to have once taken place before the camera included the presence of Paul Joseph Goebbels (second from the right in Figure 25).

Could this photograph have been made by strictly photographic means? Yes, I think it could. The photographer could have subtly blocked the light selectively over the figure of Goebbels in a first exposure, and subsequently projected other sections of the negative over the underexposed part of the photosensitive surface in order to fill the deleted areas. All this would have been done before developing—or making the image patent on—the photosensitive paper.

If this is right, then photographs can indeed represent not only ficta but also fictive events by photographic means. Nothing about the nature of the medium seems to prevent photographs from representing fictional entities or events.

## 6. Natural meaning revisited. Epistemological Implications

So far I have argued that there is a better conception of photographic means that allows us to say, against FIP, that photography is indeed fictionally competent. Currie and Carroll showed us how photography can represent fictive entities by use; and, if my arguments are sound, it can also do so by photographic means.

But how does all this fit with the claim that photographs are natural images? Remember that a mark of natural images—or instances of natural meaning more generally—is that they are factive. That is, if  $S$  naturally means that  $p$ , then  $p$ . In other words, if the photograph ‘means’—or depicts—that an object  $O$  or scene  $S$  looks  $F$  then, we can infer that there is in fact an object  $O$  or a scene  $S$  that looks  $F$ . But in the case of *Io Gatto* or Figure 24 the photograph represents a catwoman, or a scene where P. J. Goebbels is absent and yet, there was—or there existed—no catwoman and no event such as that depicted in Figure 24. Granted that, as I have argued, these two pictures are photographs, does this mean that photographs are not, after all, natural images and thereby lack the epistemic value normally attributed to instances of natural meaning?

I think this would be a very hasty conclusion. A more sensible answer would be *yes and no*, but let me elaborate on this.

As I mentioned before, natural signs, behaviours or vehicles of natural meaning normally show or provide direct evidence of a certain state of affairs, in virtue of there being a robust causal or natural correlation not mediated by intentions between the relevant signal and a given state of affairs that guarantees the preservation of information: characteristic red-brown spots on the skin are direct evidence of measles, bright colouration of the skin of certain frogs is direct evidence of their being poisonous, and certain (spontaneous) facial expressions both in humans and in primates are frequently considered direct evidence of a given emotion. In none of these cases do we need to rely on others' testimony or mental states to access or interpret the relevant information. We can retrieve it by our own epistemic or rational means: we do not need to rely on others to confirm anything, we just need to see the evidence and make the relevant inference. As I said before, according to Grice, instances of natural meaning are *factive*: if *S* naturally means that *p*, then *p*. However, some of these natural signs can be intentionally exploited to emphasise or even fake the relevant meaning or state of affairs that such sign would otherwise naturally indicate. Grice himself considers this possibility. He illustrates it with the case of a frown:

If I frown spontaneously, in the ordinary course of events, someone looking at me may well treat the frown as a natural sign of displeasure. But if I frown deliberately (to convey my displeasure), an onlooker may be expected, provided he recognises my intention, still to conclude that I am displeased...[T]hough in general a deliberate frown may have the same effect (as regards inducing belief in my displeasure) as a spontaneous frown, it can be expected to have the same effect only provided the audience takes it as intended to convey displeasure. That is, if we take away the recognition of intention, leaving the other circumstances (including the recognition of the frown as deliberate), the belief-producing tendency of the frown must be regarded as being impaired or destroyed (Grice 1989, 216).

Another way to put Grice's thought is this: a spontaneous gesture, such as a frown is (by default) a natural sign of displeasure – it is a gesture that human beings in most, if not in every culture, use from an early age to indicate dissatisfaction or anger. It is

even plausible to claim that a frown is a gesture that naturally evolved to indicate a set of negative emotions (Ekman 2005). Other things being equal then, a frown naturally means, shows or reliably indicates that a person is displeased. However, a frown can be intentionally made or exaggerated. The frown does not thereby cease to be a frown, and the *means* or muscles employed for performing the gesture are very much the same as those used when the frown is spontaneous. However, according to Grice, once the behaviour has become intentional in this sense, the meaning of the otherwise natural sign becomes somehow *impaired*—there is no guarantee that the information has been preserved—so the onlooker cannot thereby directly infer that the person performing the gesture is in fact displeased. If the intentional character is mutually manifest, so that the onlooker is able to recognise that the frown is deliberate, she should interpret the frown in light of its intentional and deliberate character. It is possible that the frown still means that the person is in fact displeased, but the onlooker needs some confirmation, so to say, that the intention is still to convey displeasure—after all, the person might be joking or pretending to be sad. In other words, the voluntary or intended frown becomes a vehicle of non-natural meaning, so that one cannot thereby directly infer that the person performing the gesture is in fact displeased—even if we can see that the gesture is of someone displeased. At least, we need confirmation that her intentions are to convey such information.

Something similar occurs with photographs. Examples such as *Io Gatto* show that, at least sometimes, the production of photographs even by purely photographic means involves the intentions or mental states of an agent. As I argued in sections 4 and 5, this does not mean that the photograph ceases to be a photograph. However, given the fact that intentions play a role in the production and interpretation of the content, we cannot directly infer anymore that the sign—the photograph—is in fact direct evidence of everything it shows. Moreover, if these intentions are manifest, we should interpret the photograph in light of those intentions: does the photographer intend us to infer that there is in fact a catwoman with this appearance in the world? Or was she trying to express something else? In other words, and following Grice's distinction, given that intentions play a crucial role in the production and understanding of some photographs, photographs can sometimes be vehicles of non-natural meaning, and hence they are not necessarily factive. This in turn shows that



the distinction between natural and non-natural meaning does not map one-to-one with the difference between photographs and hand-made pictures as the CTP seems to suggest.<sup>87</sup> there seem to be genuine photographs that are better understood as cases of non-natural meaning, and there might also be some hand-made pictures that qualify as cases of natural images in this sense.<sup>88</sup> For this reason, it is true that the epistemic advantage associated with instances of natural meaning would not be applicable to all photographs. That is, we cannot infer in every case from what is represented in photographic images, that there is an entity or object in the world with the appearance displayed by the image.

Nonetheless, I will argue that it is indeed the case that photographs are *typically* natural images, i.e. images that typically indicate or provide direct evidence of the existence of objects or states of affairs with the appearance displayed by the image. More specifically, I will claim that, as is the case with other natural signs, features or behaviours found in the natural world that reliably indicate or provide direct evidence for certain state of affairs, the very nature of the photographic mechanism safeguards the reliability of photographs as indicators of the existence and appearance of certain real objects or state of affairs. Following Mitchell Green's terminology, who in turn, follows Maynard Smith and Harper's, I will claim that photographs are *indices* and *handicaps*: that is, *signals*—understood in a particular way—that can only be faked or

---

<sup>87</sup> As a matter of fact, critics of Grice have called into question that there is indeed a sharp difference between natural and non-natural meaning as Grice proposes (see Sperber and Wilson 1992; Green 2007; Wharton 2003). Rather, they suggest, there is a continuum of cases. Sometimes, critics claim, cases of *showing* or natural-meaning can also be considered speaker-meaning or non-natural meaning (see, for instance, Sperber and Wilson 1992; Green 2007). Furthermore, according to some critics, there are cases that would intuitively fall into the category of natural meaning, but fail to fully meet the conditions (e.g. some animal signals such as monkey calls, for example)—in this case, they propose that there is a sub-category of natural meaning that can be called quasi-natural meaning (Denkel 1999, esp. Ch. 4). I think these criticisms are correct but for the scope of this chapter we do not need to discuss the details of neo-Gricean theories of communication. It is important to note that none of the critics deny there being clear cases of natural meaning and clear cases of non-natural meaning.

<sup>88</sup> Dominic Lopes gives the following example: “Suppose a computer connected to a robot equipped with a paintbrush is able to replicate a pot of irises in the manner of Van Gogh.” In this case, he suggests, there will be a natural dependence between the replica painted by the robot and the original Van Gogh and yet, the image is not a photograph (Lopes 1996, 186).

manipulated with great difficulty due to limitations of the mechanism or to the cost involved in producing such (faked) signals (Green 2007; Maynard Smith and Harper 2004). Let me explain these ideas in more detail.

## 7. Signals, Indices and Handicaps

We can understand photographs as continuous with other means of transmission of information or communication that can be found in nature. One comprehensive and inclusive idea of communication frequently used in evolutionary biology and computer science is the *signalling model of communication*.<sup>89</sup> According to this theory, a *signal* is understood as a feature or behaviour of an entity that was designed<sup>90</sup> for its ability to successfully convey the information that it does—where the design in question should be understood as being the product of natural, technological or cultural selection. The fact that design is involved differentiates signals from *cues*, which are other features or behaviours that may convey information to a receiver but that were not designed for that reason. For example, our veins may visibly pop up when we are angry, but this feature—vascular dilatation—did not evolve or was not designed to express anger. Similarly, the emission of CO<sub>2</sub> by mammals may indicate to mosquitos the presence of a food source, but such a feature of mammals was not designed to convey such information to mosquitos—in fact, no mammal would find it useful to signal his availability to be bitten (Green 2007, 5; Maynard-Smith and Harper 2004, 4). By contrast, some facial expressions and muscles do indeed appear to have evolved to express and communicate basic emotions (Rinn 1984)—in fact, some of them can be *involuntarily* triggered when humans and even primates feel these

---

<sup>89</sup> This model of communication understands ‘communication’ in a more liberal way than Grice’s model. For Grice proper examples of communication only occur when non-natural meaning takes place—that is, when reflexive intentions play a role in providing and retrieving the relevant meaning or information. According to the signalling model, however, communication consists in successful signalling, and signals are frequently cases of showing or Gricean natural-meaning. The terminology and ideas mentioned in what follows are based on (Green 2007 and Maynard-Smith and Harper 2004)

<sup>90</sup> Advocates of the signalling model of communication use the terms ‘design’ or ‘designed’ to refer to features or mechanisms that developed or were selected with a particular purpose, but these terms are not associated with the suspicious idea of intelligent design.

emotions (Ekman 1997).<sup>91</sup> Similarly, the bright colouration of certain frogs evolved as a successful way to indicate to predators their noxious character.

Partly because they have been designed to convey certain information, signals robustly correlate with, and are thereby reliable indicators of, certain states of affairs. For example, if the body of a frog displays characteristically bright colours, we can normally infer just by looking at the frog's body that the frog is poisonous. The signals are thereby typically factive: they owe their efficacy, and thereby their reason for having been selected, to the fact that it is typically the case that when they indicate X, then X is the case. However, in some exceptional cases, signals can be misleading; they can convey misinformation, or be faked and thereby deceive receivers. For example, some non-poisonous frogs can in some occasions mimic the bright colouration of noxious frogs. By doing this, they succeed in deceiving their predators, who are used to associating bright colouration with toxicity, and ultimately avoid being attacked. Now, it is central to the stability of the signalling system that it is robustly reliable—if all non-poisonous frogs displayed bright colours, then the once efficient signalling system of noxious frogs would lose its efficacy. The predators would not respond anymore to the signal as an indicator of toxicity and, consequently, frogs would be eaten by predators and cease to contribute their genes to their species. For this reason, evolution or natural selection makes available ways to safeguard the reliability and veracity of the signals. Two prominent ways of doing so are (i) developing signals that can only be faked with great difficulty as a result of limitations on the structure or design of the organism (*indices*) and (ii) by making the signal somehow costly to produce (*handicaps*). Before establishing the parallelism with photography, let me illustrate what indices and handicaps are.

---

<sup>91</sup> Mitchell Green helpfully explains three senses in which we can understand what Ekman means by *involuntarily*. First, some involuntary expressions and behaviours are those that result from the functioning of the Autonomic Nervous System; second, some expressions or behaviours might be involuntary if *we cannot help but* produce these expressions or behaviours in given circumstances, e.g., we cannot help but blush when we are ashamed or, in certain extreme circumstances, we cannot help shedding tears. Finally, some expressions and behaviours are involuntary according to Ekman if they can be prevented but cannot be produced at will. For example, the so called *Duchenne Smile* can be suppressed but 'most human beings cannot produce at will the congeries of muscular configurations characteristic of it' (Green 2007, 121–2).

The idea of an index can be illustrated by the ‘vibrating game’ of funnel-web spiders (*Agelenopsis aperta*). These spiders compete against each other over webs, and their respective weight play a crucial role in determining the winner. According to Susan Riechert (1978) if one of the spiders outweighs the other by 10% or more, the lighter spider retreats, avoids the fight and thereby loses. The spiders are able to ‘know’ which of the two is heavier or lighter because they signal their weight by vibrating the web—a signal that the other spider is able to sense and interpret.<sup>92</sup> Now, given that the vibration depends on the weight, and the weight is a given feature of the structure or body of the spider, the signal (vibration) that the spider sends is constrained by its actual weight.<sup>93</sup> For this reason, the signal is an index: given the limitations of the spider’s own body, the vibration reliably indicates information about its weight. The perceived vibration of the web would be different had the weight of the spider been higher or lower, but given the limitations and constraints imposed by the spider’s actual body weight, there is not much she can do to make herself *seem* heavier—the spider cannot grow or gain a substantial amount of weight easily in the very moment when the contest is taking place. This, of course, is not to say that there is no possible way to fake the signal or send misleading information: an external agent—for example, the scientist in Riechert’s case—can *tweak* the system, or intervene in the natural functioning of it, by adding a weight to the lighter spider’s back. In this case, the signal will send misleading information to the contender and will thereby turn the *cheating* spider into a winner (Green 2007, 50–1; Maynard-Smith and Harper 2004, 4; Riechert 1978). But only in this way would it be possible to overcome the severe limitations imposed by the spider’s body structure.

As I mentioned before, in addition to there being signals that are indices, signals can also guarantee their reliability by being *handicaps*. According to the original conception of this term, a handicap is a signal that is difficult to fake because

---

<sup>92</sup> Receivers also develop the ability to understand signals. Actually, the selection and evolution of signals depend on the capacity of the signals to affect the receivers’ behaviour.

<sup>93</sup> Notice that the size of the spider in itself is not a signal, but the vibration of the web is. Indeed, according to Riechert and others, it is plausible to claim that the act of vibrating the web did evolve as a mechanism to affect the behaviour of contender spiders by means of the transmission of information about its weight (Riechert 1978; Maynard-Smith and Harper 2004, 4).

its signaller has to be able to afford a high *strategic cost* involved in the production of the signal (Zahavi and Zahavi 1997; Maynard-Smith and Harper 2004).<sup>94</sup> As a result, the reliability of the signal is secured because only the most capable organisms can produce it. A classic example of a handicap is the ostentatious tail of peacocks. Developing such tails is costly to peacocks in two ways: firstly, it involves a substantial amount of energy to grow the feathers, and secondly, displaying the tail makes them less agile and more prone to be captured by predators. However, precisely because it is costly to develop, their flashy tail gives male peacocks a sexual advantage, not only because it is visually attractive to females, but because it signals the fitness and resources of the animal. If, despite the loss of agility and the costs in energy, the male peacock is still able to afford growing the tail and survive predators, he certainly must be an excellent mating option. Displaying flamboyant tails then signals, shows or provides direct evidence of peacocks' physical power. Now, this is not the only way in which the cost of signals can prevent them from being faked or manipulated. As explained, the handicap principle predicts that honest signals should be costly for the (honest) signaller to avoid potential cheating. But according to other theorists, faking signals can be prevented with minimal costs for the honest signaller, as long as the cost of cheating is itself sufficiently high—or, at any rate, higher than the cost of sending a honest signal (Hurd 1995; Számadó 2011). For example, it might not be particularly costly for a given noxious animal to send a signal that indicates to its predators that it is poisonous—the shape or colouration of its body is already given to them by natural selection. But a non-poisonous animal may need to invest a substantially higher amount of energy and resources to change its colouration or appearance, to mimic other noxious animals and thereby be able to deceive predators. Similarly, organisms that cheat or fake a signal might have to assume the cost of being punished in the event of being caught. An example of this social or punishment cost is the case of rhesus monkeys (*Macaca mulatta*) that are harassed if they fail to give a call when they find a food source (Hauser 1992).<sup>95</sup> In sum, the fact that a signal is costly to produce or more

---

<sup>94</sup> *Strategic cost* is sometimes differentiated in the literature from *efficacy cost*. While the latter refers to the minimal cost involved in sending the signal successfully, the former refers to an *extra* cost that has to be incurred in order to prevent fakes.

<sup>95</sup> Some theorists prefer to keep the term *handicaps* to refer only to signals that strictly fall within the original definition provided by Zahavi and Zahavi, i.e., signals that involve an extra cost (*strategic cost*) on the part of the honest signaller to prevent

costly to fake than to keep honest contributes to safeguarding the reliability of the signalling system and keeping cheaters at bay.

I think we can follow this model of understanding signals when thinking about photographs. Like other natural signals, photographs are the product of a mechanism that is itself the product of selection, in this case, cultural and technological selection. It is plausible to claim that the design of such mechanism was the result of various technological developments that responded to the social pressure or demand to obtain accurate and life-like images of real objects or scenes. And plausibly, if the mechanism was (culturally) selected, it was for its capacity to reliably capture the appearance of real existing objects and scenes.<sup>96</sup> As historians and theorists of photography frequently point out, the photographic mechanism was the culmination of a series of technological refinements to record actual scenes of the world with precision in a way that did not necessarily require artistic competence. During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, many artists and scientist used the *camera obscura*—a close ancestor of the modern photographic system—to obtain lifelike, accurate representations by copying the projected image of an actual, real-world scene. Scientists had been using this technology to study natural phenomena such as solar eclipses; since they could not look at the sun with their bare eyes, they needed an alternative that was precise enough to provide them with a similar experience to that they would have if they could observe the eclipse directly. Artists, in turn, helped themselves to this technology to make fast but accurate sketches of real objects and scenes and to obtain a precise perspective on these scenes and objects. At first, these cameras did require some technical and artistic expertise,<sup>97</sup> but soon after, popular demand encouraged the production of different machines inspired by the same principles that were portable and easy to use by

---

cheating. However, I will use the term *handicap* to refer to all signals that involve a significant cost either on the part of the honest or the cheating signaller.

<sup>96</sup> Robert Hopkins also appeals to the idea of design to argue for the fact that ‘when everything work as it should,’ photographs provide *factive* seeing-in (see Hopkins 2010). I will discuss Hopkins’s view and contrast it with mine in section 9 of this chapter. I will engage further with the phenomenological implications of his theory in Chapter 3.

<sup>97</sup> The early instances of these devices produced inaccurate and blurry images, but since accuracy was desired and demanded alternative lenses were developed to correct this problem (Davenport 1999, 4–6).

amateurs.<sup>98</sup> If one follows the later development of the photographic mechanisms from the Daguerreotype to the now omnipresent smartphone cameras, it seems that there is evidence that this desire of capturing lifelike appearances of real objects and scenes of the world, in such a way that does not require much technical or artistic competence, has driven the design of probably the majority of the photographic mechanisms that are involved in the photographic process up to this date.<sup>99</sup> And as it turned out, the goal of capturing real scenes and objects with a high degree of accuracy and the aim of making photographic mechanisms easy to use by amateurs, frequently led to a common solution: making the process as automatic as possible. On the one hand, automatism – together with the development of precise lenses<sup>100</sup> and other technologies – guarantees that the information is preserved from the original scene minimizing the loss. And, on the other hand, it makes the photographic mechanism easy to use by unskilled enthusiasts.

---

<sup>98</sup> (Davenport 1999)

<sup>99</sup> This does not mean that there have not been other aims partly driving the design of photographic devices, or that the design of photographic mechanisms has always tried to maximise accuracy at all costs. This is certainly not the case. Other aims that were crucial for important developments in the history of the photographic mechanism were, for example, the need to speed the exposure times (which contributed to making Daguerreotypes preferable to alternative techniques and ultimately led to the invention of the collodion process and more modern techniques) or the aim of reproducibility or the possibility of obtaining multiple copies (which led to the invention of the calotype and later to the plastic-based photographic film). On the other hand, other elements used in photography such as filters and different types of developing papers are partly designed to correct or embellish the scenes or allow different tonalities, grain and contrast; that is, they are designed with the aim of contributing to the expressive quality of the final image which is frequently at the expense of maximal accuracy. Similarly, the aim of portability and easiness to use, together with cost, is often at odds with obtaining maximal accuracy. However, it is plausible to claim that these motivations driving the design are *complementary* to the aim of capturing the appearance of real existing scenes and objects achieving a certain (marginal but high) degree of accuracy. This latter aim, I think, is (or at least, has been) a central aim of the design of most, if not all, photographic mechanisms.

<sup>100</sup> For a detailed account of the development of lenses and how the technology evolved to keep optical aberrations to the minimum and to provide a sharp image that avoids flare and other optical defects see (Kingslake 1989). In Kingslake's book one can appreciate that the design of the lenses is the product of technical evolution driven by a social demand of accuracy. For example, the landscape lenses used for daguerreotypes frequently resulted in the appearance of *barrel distortion* in the images, so demand arose for lenses that avoided this distortion. The problem then became the correction of *astigmatism* which led to the development of lenses such as the Tessar or Dagor.

We can say then that, as a result of this cultural and technological pressure and selection, photographs have become signals that typically show or provide direct evidence of the appearance of a real existing object or scene. In consonance with the claims of the CTP, the photographic mechanism has developed in such a way as to provide a robust causal correlation between the photographic images and the visual appearance of real existent objects of the world that does not essentially depend on the mental states or intentions of an agent. This, in turn, facilitates the preservation of information from the moment of the shot until the last stage of the photographic process in a way that does not require much or any technical skill. At the same time, as is the case with other natural signals, the development of the signal has gone hand in hand with the response of receivers: viewers not only demanded and valued a process that easily and reliably captured the appearance of existing objects, they responded—and still respond—to photographic images as images that indicate the existence of real objects and scenes with a given appearances, and also capture their appearances in a way that make them look like real particular objects or scenes.<sup>101</sup>

Nonetheless, like other natural signals photographs can be faked or manipulated either for expressive or deceptive purposes. A photograph can be manipulated to inaccurately represent the appearance of a given object or event to deceive the viewer—as in the picture of the meeting of Hitler without Goebbels (Figure 24)—or, say, to make an ironic point—as in Arthur Felling's satirical *Draft Johnson for President* (Figure 26).

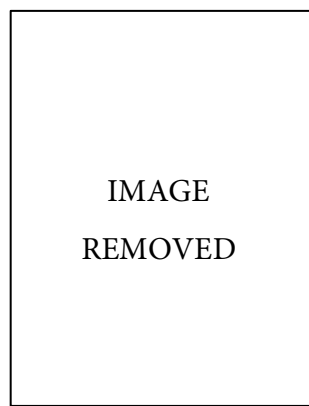


Figure 26 Arthur Felling (Weegee) "Draft Johnson for President" (1968)

---

<sup>101</sup> For an account of the phenomenology of photographic images, see Chapter 3.



Alternatively, a photograph can represent non-existing objects or entities—as in the case of *Io Gatto* (Figure 20) or Jerry Uelsmann’s *Untitled, 1984* (Figure 21). As I argued in sections 4 and 5, these manipulations do not prevent the pictures from being photographic images; not any more, at least, than a faked smile or an intentional frown ceases to be a smile or a frown. But as is the case with other signalling systems, the technological and cultural development of photographic processes has generated mechanisms to guarantee or vouchsafe the reliability, veracity and life-likeness of photographic images.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, the mechanisms that make it difficult to fake or manipulate photographs fit nicely with the idea of indices and the notion of handicaps explained above.

Remember that indices are signals that are difficult to manipulate due to limitations on the structure of the organism (the example of the ‘vibrating game’ of spiders). I think that we can say that photographs (at least some of them) are also indices in this sense: the structure of the photographic mechanism itself imposes limitations and constraints that make it difficult for photographic images to be faked or manipulated, e.g., to produce photographic images that depict non-existent objects or events or that inaccurately capture the appearance of existent objects or events.<sup>103</sup> One important limitation is that imposed by photographic devices that are either irreproducible or direct-positives, e.g., daguerreotypes, pannotypes, polaroids and diapositives. These devices do not completely avoid manipulation but restrict at least one major technique used for creating non-realistic or fictional scenes, namely, composition printing. As in the case of the spider who cannot do much to alter her weight to change the signal, there is not much that can be done in these devices to alter the signal given the constraints of the design. But apart from the limitations imposed by these particular photographic devices, there is a more pervasive and serious constraint: automatism. As is frequently mentioned in the literature of photography, many—and nowadays probably the majority—of photographic systems are in some

---

<sup>102</sup> This claim bears some resemblance to Hopkins’ notion of *proper working* (Hopkins 2010, 8–10). However, the view I put forward here is much weaker than Hopkins’s and the reason for this will be spelled out in section 9 of this chapter.

<sup>103</sup> For this point onwards, and for the sake of simplicity, I will call photographs that reliably capture the appearance of real existing objects or events *honest signals* or *honest* photographs. In turn, I will call photographs that inaccurately depict objects or events or that depict non-existent objects *fakes*.

way automatised. The fact that the system as a whole or parts of the process are automatic limits the intervention of agents. In this way, the mechanism itself guarantees to a certain extent that the information is preserved without intentional alteration throughout the process—from the exposure of light (what I called, following Phillips, *the photographic event*) to the last stage. For this reason, it can be claimed that, at least to the extent that some photographs are the product of direct-positive, automatic or semi-automatic mechanisms, photographs are *indices* in the way described: they are signals that, due to the limitations of the mechanism that produces them, make it difficult to obtain images of non-existent objects or very inaccurate images of real objects or scenes.

This way of vouchsafing the reliability and veracity of the natural signal is clearly limited to photographs that are the product of direct-positive, automatic or semi-automatic mechanisms (i.e. photographs that are indices). However, another more widespread way to make it difficult to obtain photographs of non-existent objects or scenes or to produce inaccurate or non-veridical images, is by making them *costly to produce* – or given the same resources available, much more costly than the honest signal or reliable photograph. In other words, following the notion I explained above, we can also conceive of photographs as handicaps. Although manipulated photographic images and images depicting objects and scenes that never existed or took place are abundant in the history of photography, they are normally more costly to produce than images that reliably depict the appearance of whatever was in front of the camera at the moment of the shot— where the cost here can be measured in terms of the level of technical skills, amount of technical resources, cognitive effort or time spent on the process. In the early days of photography, the *efficacy cost* or the cost of producing a photograph was itself already high. Regardless of what kind of photograph one wanted to produce, it required a minimum level of training and investing in technology (the camera, the photosensitive material and the chemicals to develop and fix the images). Buying a picture was relatively cheap,<sup>104</sup> but producing one was not; as a result, the majority of photographic images were made by professional photographers. In this context producing doctored photographs was not only virtually

---

<sup>104</sup> In the 1850s, the price of a daguerreotype was between US\$0.50 and US\$2, roughly the equivalent of US\$15 (£9.50) today (Newhall 1976).

impossible for most people but also more costly even for skilled photographers. Daguerreotypes were not impossible to manipulate but, since composition printing was not available, photographers had to find ingenious, frequently complicated and time consuming ways to mask parts of the scene and play with exposition times. But even when composition printing and negative/positive processing became an option, and photographic technology became much more accessible, photographic manipulation still required access to technical devices and a substantive amount of technical and artistic skill. For example, pictures such as Robinson’s famous doctored photograph *Fading Away* (Figure 27), Wulz’s *Io Gatto* (Figure 20) or Uelsmann’s *Untitled, 1984* (Figure 21)— all of which successfully convey a visual impression or phenomenology similar to that of any other photograph—require various technical resources (e.g., up to twelve enlargers, in Uelsmann’s case), impressive technical expertise in controlling the light, and substantial investment of time and cognitive effort in planning and imagining the final picture.

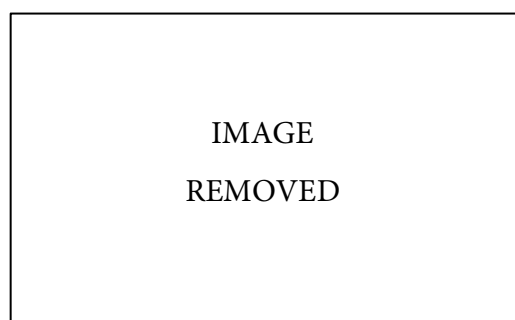


Figure 27 Henry Peach Robinson “Fading Away” (1858)

As I argued in sections 4 and 5, there is nothing in the nature of the medium that prevents photographs from representing fictional entities such as a catwoman or a house with tree roots. However, it seems reasonable to think that any of these photographs involves significantly more costs than what it would have taken to make a photograph of an existing scene or object using standard photographic mechanisms and procedures. That is part of the reason why I think we value these images highly *as photographs*.

Now, although most of my arguments in section 4 and 5 were concerned with analogue photography,<sup>105</sup> manipulation with digital technologies is also costly compared to the cost involved in taking an honest photograph with similar digital technologies. Even when the manipulation of images with digital software makes it easier and thereby less costly to obtain unreliable or *fake* images, it is still typically the case that obtaining unreliable photographs is more costly than producing an honest signal: even a child can take a photograph with a pocket camera or with a smartphone, but one still needs to have a certain degree of technical skill to competently use Photoshop or any alternative software in a way that produces an image that successfully achieves the look of a photograph. Also, it still takes more time and effort to manipulate a photograph than to obtain a fairly accurate snapshot of a real existing object or scene. If this is so then, to the extent that obtaining reliable images that accurately depict the appearance of real existing objects is typically less costly than producing an unreliable or non-factive image, photographs are also *handicaps* in the sense explained above.<sup>106</sup>

As with indices, it might be that the reliability of handicaps as a way of safeguarding the honesty of the signal is limited in scope. There might be photographic images that are not particularly costly to produce—or not more costly than a reliable image—but that still inaccurately depict the relevant scene or object. For example, it might be possible that by pure chance, and without any effort on my part, I end up obtaining a photograph that seems to depict what looks like some fairies because there were some mirrors around reflecting strange patterns of lights onto the scene I was trying to photograph. Maybe in cases like this one could say that the cost involved in obtaining an unreliable image was not higher than the cost that would have been necessary for an honest photograph. However, even if these mechanisms of

---

<sup>105</sup> Partly because it is the case that FIP advocates discuss and the strongest case for them.

<sup>106</sup> Remember that I talked about two ways in which a signal can be considered a handicap: the first was that exemplified by the peacock where the signal was a handicap because it was costly to produce, so only the most capable specimens could produce such signal. The second referred to cases where the cost of producing the honest signal was not necessarily high, but the cost of faking it was indeed high. This was exemplified with the case of the non-noxious animal that mimicked the colours of the noxious animal investing more energy. Photographs fit better with the second case.

vouchsafing the reliability and veracity of the natural signal are limited in scope, their effect is far from negligible. As with other natural signals, the efficacy of the signal does not depend on the fact that there are no cheaters. In the case of the bright-coloured frogs, for instance, it would still pay the predator to avoid eating bright-coloured frogs even when mimics have proliferated, as long as the proportion of cheaters is significantly lower than the proportion of honest signallers (Maynard-Smith and Harper 2004, 87). And this is similar in the case of photographs: viewers still take photographs as reliable indicators of the appearance of real existent objects or scenes even when they are well aware that not all photographs are reliable in this sense. And this is a reasonable thing to do. After all, there are sufficiently robust mechanisms that ensure that the non-veridical, inaccurate or manipulated images are likely to be significantly outnumbered by veridical images. Put in slightly different words: given the main drive motivating the technological evolution and design of the different devices involved in the photographic process—the aim of obtaining images that accurately present the appearance of a real existent object—and the mechanisms that vouchsafe the reliability of the signal, it is more likely that a photograph produced via this process is veridical and accurate rather than misleading or inaccurate.<sup>107</sup>

## 8. Scope of the view

So far I have claimed that photographs are typically natural images or *natural signals*: that is, images that are the product of a mechanism that has been designed, or selected by cultural and technical social demands, for its capacity to reliably indicate the existence and appearance of a real object or scene of the world. As with any other natural signal, photographs can be faked or manipulated, so that we see in photographs things that do not exist or scenes and objects that were very different from how they look in the photograph. However, the technological developments and cultural demands enforce mechanisms to vouchsafe the reliability of the signal: some photographs, I claimed, are *indices*—signals that given the structural characteristics of the mechanism and the limitations it imposes on the possibility of intentional manipulation are very difficult to fake (the examples I gave were daguerreotypes,

---

<sup>107</sup> The likelihood can be spelled out, as Catherine Abell suggests, in terms of ‘the distance between worlds in which the depictive content of pictures produced by that process is accurate, and worlds in which is not’ (Abell 2010, 86–87).

pannotypes, polaroids, diapositives and photographs that are the product of automatic and semiautomatic processes). Also, photographs are *handicaps*—signals that are costly to fake or, at any rate, more costly to manipulate than to produce an honest one. The fact that photographs are handicaps, and very often also indices, significantly contributes to securing the reliability of the signal: it makes it more likely that photographs actually show or indicate the existence of an object and accurately capture its appearance than that they are deceitful or inaccurate. In other words, it makes it likely that photographs end up being factive, so that if a photograph represents that an object *o* looks *F*, then there is (there exists) an object *o* that looks *F*.

Notice that the claim that photographs are reliable indicators of the existence and appearance of objects and scenes is limited in scope in two ways. Firstly, as I said before, the mechanisms that vouchsafe the reliability of the signal are limited: they prevent the proliferation of non-veridical photographic images but they do not guarantee their veridicality. Secondly, the reliability of photographs is a contingent matter both in traditional and in digital photography. The social, cultural or technological driving forces motivating the design of the mechanisms involved in the photographic process could have been different. But also, they are subject to change in the future. It is possible that the demand for images that capture a life-like and accurate appearance of existing objects will cease to be so pressing, or will be better satisfied by a different technology not continuous with photography. In that case, perhaps the social value of accurate images will stop being the central motivating force for designing photographic devices. Alternatively, it is possible that the signal ends up losing its efficacy, say, because the technology develops in such a way that becomes too easy to fake or manipulate photographs, so viewers end up reacting to photographs differently: even if photographs still look to them *as of* real existing objects or events, viewers will learn not to be led to infer the existence of such things just by looking at photographs. This is certainly something that happens in the natural world: when mimics proliferate or the signal becomes *too cheap* to fake by other specimens, then the animal signal loses its efficacy: predators learn to ignore the signal. Similarly, it is possible that with the development of digital processes and diversification of uses of cameras and photographic devices, photographs end up losing their efficacy as reliable

indicators of the existence and appearance of objects or scenes.<sup>108</sup> However, we do not seem to be there yet and, judging from the way photographic technologies are evolving, there is still social demand for accurate pictures of real existing objects. Moreover, the photographic systems still meet this demand quite successfully. This being so, photographs can still be considered reliable signals of the existence and appearance of objects and scenes of the world. Furthermore, given the design of the photographic devices and the vouchsafing mechanisms, it is still more likely to obtain photographs that are natural images and thereby factive—this is an epistemic mark they still have.<sup>109</sup>

### 9. A stronger account? Hopkins on factivity, design and proper working

As I presented it, the epistemic advantage of photographic images may seem rather weak or limited in scope: by being handicaps and sometimes indices, photographic representations are *very likely* to be natural images and thereby factive, so that when a photograph represents that an *S* looks *F* we can infer that there is in fact an *S* that looks *F* in the world. But the vouchsafing mechanisms do not guarantee that photographic representations are necessarily natural images or factive. This being so, one may wonder whether a stronger view could give us a more robust account of the epistemic merits of photography. Robert Hopkins provides such view and, interestingly, the ideas he employs in his arguments are similar to the ones I proposed, so we might wonder: why should we accept a weaker view instead of a stronger one? Let me first sketch Hopkins' view, then compare it with my own and give reasons to think that the stronger view is not viable.

Hopkins claims that photographs *necessarily* support a factive *pictorial experience*<sup>110</sup>—so if *S* sees in *P* that *p*, then *p*—if they are the product of the *proper working* of all the mechanisms involved in the (traditional) photographic process—where proper working should be understood in the light of the purpose the different

---

<sup>108</sup> Savedoff and Abell also make this point (see Savedoff 2008; Abell 2010). Hopkins makes a similar claim (Hopkins 2010, 14–15).

<sup>109</sup> This is not to say that this is the *only* epistemic advantage photographs may have. I will mention at least one more in Chapter 3.

<sup>110</sup> As noted in fn. 58 of this chapter, Hopkins's account is presented in phenomenological terms and has phenomenological implications. I will deal with these implications in Chapter 3.

mechanisms were designed for. Here is a summary of Hopkins's view in his own words:

[T]raditional photography is designed to sustain accurate seeing-in. That goal has guided the design and manufacture of photographic and development equipment, and our practices of taking and viewing photographs (...) [and] as a consequence of that overarching goal, each element in the complex causal chain in traditional photography is governed by a more specific notion of things working properly.

The proposal is to identify the factive pictorial experiences in these terms: they are the experiences the photographic system produces when, in terms of the norms of proper functioning, every element works as it should. The claim that the experiences so identified are factive is not trivial. Moreover, I submit, it is true (Hopkins 2010, 9).

There are some similarities between Hopkins's view and my own account: I have claimed that not all photographic representations are natural images (and thereby their 'meaning' is not always factive) but some of them are. Hopkins claims something very similar as well, i.e., not all photographs support factive pictorial experiences, but some of them do. Like Hopkins, I also appealed to the idea of design; I agree with Hopkins that the central motivating force driving the design of the photographic mechanism has been to accurately capture the appearance of real objects and scenes of the world—or as he puts it, to *sustain accurate seeing-in*. Also, although I did not appeal to the idea of *proper working*, I did say that there are some mechanisms that *vouchsafe the veracity of the signal*, where this can be read as saying that these mechanisms safeguard or make sure that the process fulfils the aim for which the photographic mechanism was designed.

Now, as I have already advanced, the main difference between my account and Hopkins's is that my view is weaker: I do not think that we can claim that when photographs are the product of the proper working of the mechanism photographic representation is factive *as a matter of necessity*. I think that, at most, we can claim that



it is contingently true that photographic representation is typically factive, or more likely to be factive. But why do I think that we cannot go for the stronger claim?

Firstly, it is unclear that in cases where we obtain non-factive pictures it is due to a faulty working of the mechanism. Presumably Hopkins's theory would predict that if a photograph such as *Io Gatto* is non-factive (or does not support a factive pictorial experience)—as I think is plausibly the case—it is because the photograph is the product of an improper functioning or misuse of the photographic mechanism. But it is not clear why this is so or what exactly is the norm that has been broken. Maybe the problem is that techniques such as composition printing or double exposure are considered deviations from the proper functioning of traditional photography, for the canonical procedure prescribes that the photosensitive material should only be exposed once—both in the camera and during the developing process.<sup>111</sup> But one may question whether there is in fact such a limited rule, especially when (a) basic manuals of photography include sections on how to *correctly* perform these techniques,<sup>112</sup> and (b) composition printing and/or double exposure are sometimes recommended to obtain an accurate and detailed image of the real scene that is being photographed. This was very frequently the case in the early days of photography, when the lenses photographers used could not simultaneously capture in detail figures that were in the foreground and in the background of the image (Figure 28), or when the photosensitive material could not capture with detail a wide range of levels of light. Composition or 'sandwich' printing is also commonly used in analogue photography to add clouds to skies that did not get enough detail due to excess of light or contrast in the original image but that very frequently were in fact part of the scene (Figure 29). Of course, one could claim that combination printing and double exposure only follow the norms of proper working when they are used as an aid to

---

<sup>111</sup> Notice that this claim would not necessarily be an objection against the view that a photograph such as *Io Gatto* qualifies as a photograph, or against the view that combination printing or double exposure are genuine photographic means. I think Hopkins can accept these two claims but still say that these are photographic means that go against the proper working of the mechanism.

<sup>112</sup> See for example the Kodak "Basic darkroom techniques" manual, the Online Guide to Photography, Hick's 'Basic darkroom and beyond' or Langford's handbook on darkroom techniques (Langford 1981; Hicks 2003; KODAK 2013; Ortwein 2013)

achieve accurate images and not when the aim is to alter reality, but this would be rather *ad hoc* and make the norms of proper working trivial.



Figure 28 Southworth & Hawes, "Man Seated Beside a Window Showing the Brattle Street Church" (circa 1880)

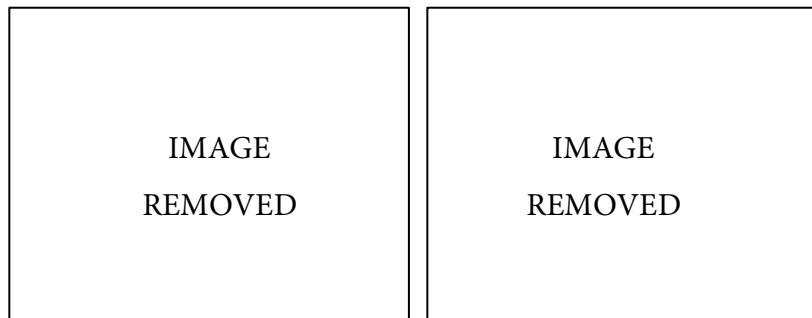


Figure 29 Peter Henry Emerson "A Stiff Pull" (composition printing) (1886-87 printed 1888)

Another case where we might be inclined to say that the mechanism is working properly, but the photograph supports a non-factive pictorial experience is this: Figure 30 was taken with a pinhole camera and it seems to represent two twins sitting on a bench, one beside the other. In reality, there were no twins, but only one man who moved from one point of the bench to the other during the long exposure time required by the pinhole camera. So, although we see in the photograph that there are two twins, in fact there is only one person. The photograph—or the photographic pictorial experience it supports—is not factive. But according to the canonical description of how a pinhole camera should be made and used that can be found in the majority of photography manuals, there does not seem to be anything working improperly. What the instructions indicate is how things have to be done *with the camera* in order for it to work properly, e.g., correct diameter of the pinhole, distance from the pinhole to the film or photosensitive material and exposure times according

to different films or papers. Also, the instructions usually indicate that the camera should stand still. However, the proper working of the mechanism does not prescribe how things have to be *in the world*—there is no indication that the subject matter should not move, or if it moves that it should do so very fast so that we can still get an accurate picture of the background. Those are decisions that the photographer has to make, knowing the possibilities of the camera and depending on the results she wants to obtain.

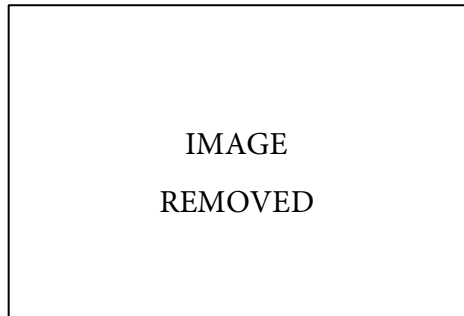


Figure 30 Photograph made with a pinhole camera

Perhaps more importantly, although I think it is right to claim that the overall goal guiding the design of the photographic mechanism in general is to obtain accurate appearances of real objects and events, there are certain elements that can be part of the photographic system that are designed with other purposes. For example, in 1927 Herbert George Pointing patented a lens attachment that he called ‘variable controllable distortograph’ which he described as a ‘system for photographing caricature or distortion’ (Fineman 2012, 105). When used attached to a correctly functioning (traditional analogue) camera, the proper working of this lens attachment is precisely to deliver distorted photographs such as Figure 31. In this case, it seems that everything in the system is working properly and yet, we do not obtain accurate seeing-in. Therefore, it is not the case that the correct functioning of the mechanism delivers by necessity factual pictorial experiences.



Figure 31 Herbert George Pointing "Distortion" (1927)

As a matter of fact, this example points to a more general problem. As I have mentioned, Hopkins claims that when everything works properly traditional photography *necessarily* delivers factive pictorial experience. With digital photography, he suggests, things might be different partly because we do not know how the mechanism will evolve, e.g., if the possibilities for manipulation expand and doctored photographs proliferate, or if certain non-information preserving mechanisms—such as interpolation—are implemented massively in different features of the system (Hopkins 2010, 16). But this division between traditional and digital photography with respect to factivity does not seem to be sufficiently justified. We do not know whether in the future there are going to be technologies that alter the current mechanism of analogue or traditional photography as well. The fact that we are now in the era of digital photography does not mean that people do not use analogue photography anymore or that there cannot be a *revival* of analogue photography at some point in the future that motivates the development of different devices that, by design, prevent photographs from supporting partially or fully factive pictorial experiences. If this is a possibility, we cannot say that traditional or analogue photography *necessarily* delivers factive pictorial experience. Given this, and the other problems or unclarities mentioned above, I think a weaker view such as mine is preferable to a stronger but less viable one such as Hopkins's.<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> I will point out other problems with the implications of Hopkins's view with respect to the special phenomenology of photography in Chapter 3.

## 10. Conclusion

Let us take stock. In the previous chapter (Chapter 1) I considered the argument according to which all photographs, in virtue of being depictions and/or inviting an imaginative engagement, are fictions or favour the purpose of fiction. In this chapter I turned to the opposite intuition: a line of thought according to which photographs, given their special nature—including their epistemic and phenomenological features—cannot represent ficta; for this reason, so the intuition goes, photographs are especially suited for non-fiction, if not documentary by default. I started to address one part of the reasoning. In particular, I claimed that the nature of photographs does not prevent the representation of fictional entities or events by photographic means. This, then, is not a good reason to think that photographs favour non-fiction. However, I argued that photographs are indeed epistemically advantageous. They are typically natural images and thereby typically reliable indicators of the existence and appearance of the objects and events they depict. This is so, I argued, because photographs, like other natural signals, are the product of a mechanism that was designed—following cultural and technological pressures—to capture with accuracy the appearance of real existent objects. Like other natural signals, photographs can be faked or manipulated, and therefore we cannot always infer the existence and appearance of the objects they depict. But there are robust vouchsafing mechanisms that make photographs very difficult to fake or manipulate: sometimes the structure of the mechanism prevents manipulation or faking, in which case photographs are indices, and most of the time photographs are handicaps because manipulation or faking is more costly than obtaining a honest signal. Now given that the epistemic advantage of photographs is dependent on the design of the system and the effectiveness of its vouchsafing mechanisms, it is a contingent advantage—both in digital and analogue photography: the driving forces motivating the design might change, so that the mechanism ceases to be robustly reliable, or the vouchsafing mechanisms might lose their efficacy. In Chapter 4 I will return to this point and to the implications of the fictional competence of photography for the classification of photographic works as fiction or non-fiction. But before doing so, in the following chapter (Chapter 3) I will take up the issue of the special phenomenology of photography which, as I said earlier, can be also thought to contribute to the purpose of non-fictional or documentary works.

## CHAPTER 3

---

### DOCUMENTAL IMAGES

PHOTOGRAPHS, we saw in Chapter 2, are fictionally competent; they can depict fictional entities by *photographic means*. However, I suggested that photographs might be a kind of image or *signal* whose very nature makes it difficult—but not impossible—to fake or manipulate. This suggestion, along with other intuitions about the intimate experiential relation with objects and events that photographs seem to afford, might give us reason to think that there is something about the nature of photographs that makes them intrinsically suited for non-fictional works or maybe even always non-fictional or documentary in some sense. In this chapter I will focus on the peculiar experience photographs afford. My purpose will be to discuss what it is about photographs that make them special in the way they connect us with objects and events. I will claim that photographs are *documental images* because they preserve the particularity of the event they depict. However, in Chapter 4 I will claim that the documental nature of photographic images does not immediately make them *documentary works*.

#### 1 Overview

In Chapter 2 we saw one way in which photographs can be said to be special or advantageous with respect to other pictorial types. Photographs are typically natural images and thereby typically reliable indicators of the existence and appearance of the objects and events they depict. This, I claimed, is an epistemic advantage (however contingent). Now if photographs have struck theorists of all times as a privileged medium to represent reality and have motivated comments such as that they are ‘mirror(s) with a memory’ (Holmes 1859), ‘portions of nature herself’, (Sobieszek and Appel-Heyne 1976) or ‘experience captured’ (Sontag 1977, 15), it not only due to this epistemic advantage. Photographic pictorial experience gives us something more: it not only allows us to safely *infer* that an object with certain appearance exists, it also allows us in some way to *experience* the object *as* existing or real—or so I will argue.

This is why philosophers have very frequently claimed that photographs have a special phenomenology. Experiencing photographs, theorists have noted, seem to put us in a particularly intimate relation with objects and events of the world in a way that other pictorial types fail to do.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore this peculiar phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience, to understand and find a correct way to account for the special relation in which photographs seem to put us with respect to objects and events. I begin with an attempt to clarify what exactly we mean by saying that photographs have a special phenomenology: identifying what kind of phenomenology we are trying to account for is the first step to assess existing theories and develop a proper view; I do this in section 2. In sections 3, 4 and 5 I examine three different theories available in the philosophical literature that try to account for the special phenomenology of photography: Walton's 'transparency thesis' (section 3), Currie and Pettersson's 'trace theory' (section 4) and Hopkins' theory of 'factive pictorial experience' (section 5). I claim that none of them is completely satisfactory. Then, in section 6, I begin sketching my own view by describing what I think is *special* about the sensory phenomenology of photography. I suggest that it is the property of particularity. In section 7, I explain in detail what it means for a thought and an experience to be particular rather than general. I compare the case of perceptual and memory experiences to the case of photographs, and I claim that, although photographs resemble perceptual experiences in various respects, they are actually more similar to episodic memories. I suggest that photographic experiences, like memory experiences *preserve* not only visual similarity but also, the particular character of the original scenes. In this sense, I claim, photographs are *documental* images. In section 8, I summarise my view and clarify some important issues. Once my proposal has been fully explained, in section 10 I put forward the advantages of my theory over alternative views. I claim that my account captures the virtues of these theories while avoiding their problems.

## 2 Photographs as a recognisable perceptual category. (What do we mean by special Phenomenology?)

The fact that photographic images have a special phenomenology is something that many authors have noted and tried to explain.<sup>114</sup> They frequently mention that photographs afford an experience of closeness or put us in a *close* or *intimate* experiential relation with the objects they are of, and it is assumed—correctly I think—that whoever has seen a photograph should know what this intimate relation with objects is like. However, in order to assess or propose any account of this purported special phenomenology of photography, it is worth clarifying first what exactly we mean when we talk about this *special phenomenology*.

Firstly, what do we mean when we say that this phenomenology is *special*? Well, it seems that the fact that the phenomenology of photographs is taken to be *special* suggests that this phenomenology is something characteristic about photographs that distinguishes them from other kinds of visual images. This is not to say that photographic experiences are *not* pictorial experiences—they are indeed: photographs as well as other pictorial types support the characteristic experience of *seeing-in*.<sup>115</sup> (Photographic experience is simply a short way to refer to photographic *pictorial* experience). But photographic experience is a peculiar and *distinctive* kind of pictorial experience.

Now, what do we mean by saying that it is the *phenomenology* that is special or distinctive? Presumably, the fact that it is the *phenomenology* of photographs that is special indicates that this distinctive property or aspect of photographs is typically available when we experience them; in other words, there is something it is like to experience a photograph. But what kind of experience or phenomenology is this? There are various kinds of phenomenology associated with different states or experiences: we can be talking about a sensory (visual) phenomenology—a phenomenology or *what-is-likeness* that is available and recognisable by merely looking at photographic images or, alternatively, we can be talking about a phenomenology associated to other cognitive states such as emotions or other non-

---

<sup>114</sup> (Walton 1984; Savedoff 2008a; Currie 1999; Hopkins 2010; Pettersson 2011)

<sup>115</sup> See Chapter 1.



sensory states such as beliefs. Confusing all these different *phenomenologies* is easy, as they may occur simultaneously. For example, imagine that I am looking at a photograph of my grandmother while wearing a jumper that she knitted sitting comfortably in the sofa of the old family house. ‘*What is like to see the photograph*’ in this context could be taken to refer to the phenomenology of the experience as a whole. That is, what it feels to see this photograph in this context and environment. Moreover, the feeling of closeness that I may feel to my grandmother could be derived from various sources or from all of them together: I can feel close to her just by the *mere* experience of looking at the photograph and seeing a vivid image of her, or by the thought that she knitted the jumper I am wearing, or by nostalgically evoking the emotions I used to feel when visited her in this very house where I am now. Also, the very act of looking at a photograph may trigger various emotions, thoughts and beliefs, some of which can be either experiential or the source of an experience; and these thoughts, beliefs and experiences may differ from the original visual experience of the photograph and can have a phenomenology of their own.

What then, are we trying to capture when we say that photographs have a special phenomenology? I think that the special phenomenology that we ascribe to photographs is primarily a sensory (visual) phenomenology—where ‘sensory (visual) phenomenology’ here is to be interpreted in the narrow sense that refers *only* to what is given to us in experience when we *look* at the photograph in the absence of other emotions, thoughts or beliefs. There is something it is like to merely *visually experience* a photograph that we find special. Or in other words, there is something special about the content of our experience itself that we are able to recognise (merely) by visually looking at photographs; and this, in turn, makes us feel in close or intimate relation to the objects we see in them.<sup>116</sup>

So in claiming that photographs have a *special phenomenology* what we mean is that there is something it is like to (merely) *visually experience* a photograph that is typically distinct from what it is like to experience other kinds of pictures.

This, however, may raise certain scepticism. After all, the sceptic can claim, there is no feature that is recognisable *only* in our visual experience of photographs

---

<sup>116</sup> I will address objections and alternatives to this view in due course.

that cannot be found in experiencing other kinds of images. This is clearly shown by the fact that there can be non-photographic images that are visually indiscernible from photographs. Hence, the sceptic claims, there is nothing distinctive about our (mere) *visual* experience of photographs. Moreover, the fact that non-photographic images can be visually indistinguishable from photographs shows that if there is indeed a distinctive phenomenology in photography, it is not, strictly speaking, something that we *recognise* by *merely* visually experiencing them. Rather, the phenomenology has its effects at the level of beliefs, i.e. it is the belief or knowledge that the image we are seeing has a distinctive property—which is not itself necessarily recognisable in merely visually experiencing it—that gives rise to the peculiar feeling of closeness. In other words, there is no *purely visual* experience that distinguishes photographs from other images; the distinctive experience has its origins in a belief—or it is not strictly speaking a purely sensory, visual, phenomenology.

This view seems to be behind Mikael Pettersson's recent view about the phenomenology of photography (Pettersson 2011). According to Pettersson, the peculiar experience of proximity that photographs afford, does not so much rest on a property of the visual experience of the image—'how the picture looks'—but on certain beliefs that the viewer has when she experiences the image.<sup>117</sup> Following Pettersson, in order to undergo the experience of proximity, the viewer needs to have certain beliefs about the kind of image she is seeing, or "certain beliefs related to taking an image as a photograph" (p. 187).<sup>118</sup> These beliefs, according to him, are beliefs related to the way photographs are produced and their epistemic status; that is, beliefs about an epistemic property distinctive of photography that is not necessarily apparent in visually experiencing the images. In particular, according to Pettersson, the

---

<sup>117</sup> Pettersson's view is actually more complex and I will develop it further in section 6. However, at this stage, this is the only aspect of his theory that should concern us.

<sup>118</sup> As I will mention in section 5, Robert Hopkins also suggests that the special phenomenology of photography depends on a belief that viewers have when they perceive photographs.

experience of closeness depends on the viewer's belief that photographs have the property of being *traces*, as he conceives of them.<sup>119</sup>

The reason why he thinks this is so, is based on the observation—famously brought forward by Walton (Walton 1984)—that there can be paintings that we cannot distinguish from photographs, but our experience of an image that we take to be a photograph, seems to transform if we learn that it is in fact a hand-drawn painting. To take Walton's example: when we learn that Chuck Close's *Self-Portrait* (a photo-realist painting) is a painting and not a photograph, we somehow come to feel 'less close' to the subject. This, according to Pettersson,

[S]hows that what matters for the proximity aspect of photography cannot solely be the amount of detail or, more generally, *how the picture looks* (...) Rather, as seems to be tacitly assumed in Walton's account, the transformation is due to a change in our beliefs about what kind of image we have before us. Or, more generally, *the phenomenology of photography seems to depend on what we believe about the images that we look at.*

If this is granted, it suggests that an explanation of phenomenological proximity should focus on certain beliefs related to taking an image as a photograph (Pettersson 2011, 187 *my italics*).

The thought is, then, something like this: a painting may look exactly like a photograph, but if it is the case that believing that an image is not a photograph is *sufficient* to block the feeling of proximity, then believing that an image is a photograph – with all the beliefs associated with this—should be *necessary* to experience the peculiar phenomenology that photographs afford.

But this clearly does not follow. The argument seems to commit the fallacy of denying the antecedent or treating a sufficient condition as a necessary condition. It might be true that if subject S has the belief *b* that *P* is *not* a photograph (antecedent), then S does not undergo the same feeling of closeness (consequent), but to claim that

---

<sup>119</sup> Pettersson's idea of *traces* will be developed in section 4. But briefly stated, he thinks that traces are states that bear reliable marks of their own beginnings, and whose counterfactual dependence on the objects they are of is relatively dense.

this entails that if S believes that *P* is a photograph (i.e. if S *does not* have belief *b*), then S will undergo the experience of closeness, is certainly a fallacy.

Fallacy:	
(i) If P then Q	(i) If S has belief <i>b</i> (“x is not a photograph”), then S does not have experience <i>e</i> .
(ii) Not P	(ii) S does <i>not</i> have the belief <i>b</i> (i.e. S believes that x is a photograph)
(c) Therefore not Q	(c) Therefore, it is <i>not</i> the case that S <i>does not</i> have experience <i>e</i> (i.e. S has experience <i>e</i> )

To see an analogous case, take the discussion of defeaters in epistemology. The presence of defeaters is a sufficient condition to block justification of a given perceptual belief. However, it does not follow immediately from this that believing that there are no defeating circumstances is a necessary requirement for justification of perceptual beliefs—one needs further argument to show that this is the case. It is logically possible to claim that one can be (*a priori*) justified in believing what one is seeing, *unless* one has reason to believe that there are overriding circumstances.<sup>120</sup> So, for instance, learning that you are seeing painted mules instead of zebras is sufficient to defeat the justification of your belief that you are seeing zebras. However, that does not immediately show that whenever you are in the presence of zebras, and thereby come to believe that you are seeing zebras, your belief would be justified *only* if you also believe that *you are not* seeing painted mules instead.

Similarly in the case of photographs, it may well be that believing that an image is *not* a photograph is sufficient to (at least partially) block the feeling of closeness. However, it is perfectly compatible with that claim to say that one *does not need* to have beliefs about the kind of image one is looking at in order to have the relevant feeling of closeness. It is reasonable to claim that the feeling of closeness is typically imposed on us, so to say, prior to our forming any beliefs about the image; we cannot help but to perceive the image *as a photograph*. Surely, it is likely that we come to form the belief that the image is a photograph—unless we have reason to doubt it; but this is as a *consequence* of the experience rather than a *requirement* for it.

The claim that one needs to have background beliefs about photography in order to undergo the peculiar experience of closeness that photographs afford, also has

<sup>120</sup> Indeed, this is an influential view available in the philosophical literature, see (Coady 1992; Burge 1993; 1997; Edwards 2000).

very unintuitive consequences. It would entail that a person who has lost her memory and thereby does not remember anything about the photographic process or about the beliefs of reliability normally associated with photographs, would not be able to distinguish experientially between a standard photograph and a standard painting; for instance, she would not be able to experience a difference—beyond the obvious differences of form, perspective, etc.—between Figure 32 and Figure 33 or between Figure 33 and Figure 34. This, however, strikes me as highly implausible.

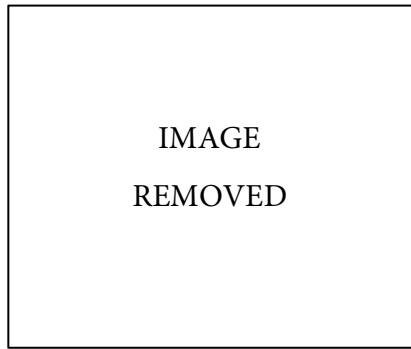


Figure 32 G.A. Canaletto "St Paul's Cathedral" (1754)

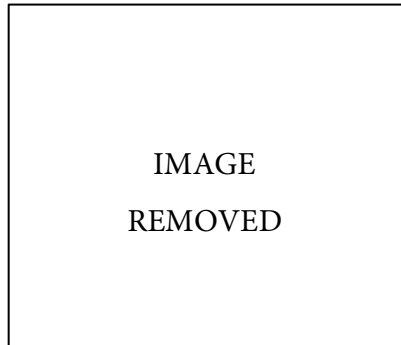


Figure 33 Photograph of St Paul's Cathedral



Figure 34 Claudia J. Morgan "St Paul's Cropped"

Likewise, it seems reasonable to think that children that are not yet familiar with the photographic process or have no beliefs about the epistemic status of photography have different experiences when they confront typical paintings and ordinary photographs. Similarly, if photographs surprised a wide variety of viewers early after the invention of the medium it is not likely that it was because (or only because) they knew about the technicalities of the photographic mechanism. It is more likely that it was the mere experience of photographs that struck them as distinct from any other pictorial image they had seen before.

It does not seem to be the case that the peculiar experience of closeness characteristic of photography depends crucially on a non-perceptual or non-visually-epistemic property that viewers believe photographs have. It may well be that beliefs such as those related to the process of production or the epistemic value of an image give rise to a further non-sensory—or non-visual—experience of closeness; an experience of closeness such as that we feel when we know or believe that a person we love—say, our grandmother—knitted a jersey that we are wearing. The jersey may look exactly like any other ordinary jersey, so there is nothing distinctively visual about it that make us feel close to our grandmother; but since we *believe* that our grandmother knitted it, we feel close to her when we see or wear the jersey. It is possible that photographs *also* give rise to this non-sensory feeling of closeness associated to beliefs about the circumstances of production. Moreover, it may well be that this further non-sensory phenomenology contributes to an overall more intense feeling of closeness. But apart from this non-sensory phenomenology, there seems to be something intrinsic to, and *distinctive* about, the visual experience of photographs that we recognise merely by looking at them and makes us feel in a more intimate contact with the depicted objects. This, I think, is what we should try to capture when we try to explain the special phenomenology of photographs.

Being a photograph, I believe, is a *recognisable perceptual category*: one can typically tell that what one is seeing is a photograph just by visually experiencing it. There is something it is like to see a picture *as a photograph* that is typically distinct

from what it is like to see other kinds of pictures.<sup>121</sup> But to say that photographs are a recognisable perceptual category does not mean that what it is to be a photograph is determined by its perceptible features, or by its distinctive look.<sup>122</sup> Being a photograph is not, in this sense, an *observational* notion, such as that of being blue or being square, whereby something cannot be blue (or squared) and visibly so and have a visually indistinguishable doppelgänger that is not also blue (or squared).<sup>123</sup> Photographs can indeed have—and actually do have—visually indistinguishable doppelgängers that are not photographs. Other kinds of images can be, in principle, visually indistinguishable from a photograph without being one (take for example, Figure 35).

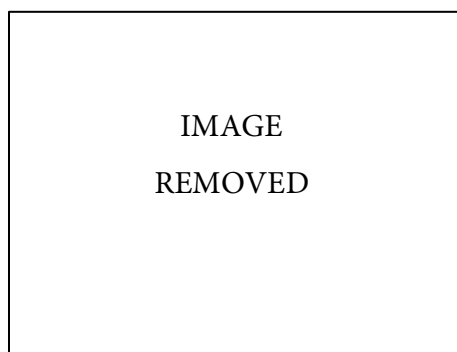


Figure 35: Alyssa Monk's *Smirk* (2009) [Photorealist Painting]

However, it is still the case that the peculiar experience photographs afford is a distinctive mark of being a photograph and not of other images. The prototypical photograph displays a distinctive look in virtue of which it can be recognised or identified, in normal circumstances, as being a photographic image. The possibility of

---

<sup>121</sup> Susanna Siegel, among other people, has claimed that kinds or categories are part of what is given or represented in the contents of visual experiences. That is, when we perceive an orange, our perceptual experience not only represents a round and orange object, it also represents the object as an orange. Hence, if the object that is in front of us is in fact a wax fake fruit, then, in seeing it as an orange we would be *misperceiving* it, rather than making a mistake at the level of beliefs (Siegel 2006). If this is so, perceiving an image as a photograph would be part of the content of our perceptual experience. If the image happened to be a photo-realist painting our experience would then be falsidical.

<sup>122</sup> Photographic pictures are *not* strictly speaking a “perceptually *distinguishable* category” in Walton’s sense; since, for Walton, a “perceptually distinguishable category” is one whose membership is determined solely by features that can be perceived in a work when it is experienced in the normal manner’ (Walton 1970, pp.338-39).

<sup>123</sup> For a more developed view of observational concepts see (Peacocke 1983, chap. 4 and Martin 2010, pp.198-208).

there being non-photographic images that can look exactly like a photograph does not prevent us from having the capacity to visually recognise in suitably propitious circumstances that a given picture is a photograph. Not any more, at least, that the possibility of there being fake wax tomatoes or counterfeit fifty-pound notes keep us from recognising tomatoes or authentic fifty pound notes. Moreover, in the same way that we would miss something about the identity of and use given to fifty-pound notes if we did not take into account the way they look, we would miss something about the category of photographs if we did not consider the special way photographs typically look to us. And this, even when neither the look of fifty-pound notes nor that of photographs essentially defines what a fifty-pound note or a photograph is. Without considering the special phenomenology of photographs, it would be difficult to explain why photographs are used, instead of other kinds of images, in pornography, official documents such as I.D.s or passports, newspapers and glossy magazines. Certainly, there may be other (not necessarily visually recognisable) ways in which photographs can be distinctive that can partly explain why they are used for all these purposes. For example, the fact that photographs are epistemically special in the way explained in Chapter 2, or the fact that photographs are easier to produce and reproduce. However, if these features of photography were not accompanied by photographs' distinctive phenomenology they, arguably, would not be as effective as they are. Take the case of pornography, for instance. In this case, epistemic concerns do not seem to matter much; what seems more important is the visual immediacy, the fact that the viewer experiences a certain intimacy with the photographed subject who she perceives as a flesh-and-blood subject.

If all I have said so far is sound, a proper account of the special phenomenology of photography should arguably meet these conditions: it should tell us (i) what is this *special* or distinctive property of photographs that is not typically present in other types of images that (ii) makes sense of the experience of closeness or intimacy with objects that we feel when looking at photographs, and that is (iii) typically recognisable by *merely* visually experiencing photographic images. Call these three conditions (i) 'distinctiveness', (ii) 'closeness' and (iii) 'pure visual recognisability'.

So what does this special phenomenology amount to? What is this distinctive property?



There are at least three proposals available in the philosophical literature. Kendall Walton claims that what is distinctive of photographic experiences is that they are transparent (Walton 1984); Robert Hopkins, in turn, proposes that it is the property of being factive that makes photographic experiences special (Hopkins 2010), and Mikael Pettersson – following Gregory Currie – suggests that what is distinctive about our experience of photographs is that they are depictive traces (Pettersson 2011). I will assess these three views in due course. Then in section 6 I will present an alternative account that I think improves on all these proposals.

### 3 Transparency

One prominent attempt to explain the peculiar phenomenology of photographs is Kendall Walton's *Transparency Thesis*. According to Walton, the property that is distinctive of photographic images that accounts for the experience of closeness that they typically afford is *transparency*; i.e. the capacity of photographs to ground perceptual experiences of the objects they are of:

I expect that most of us will acknowledge that, in general, photographs and paintings (and comparable nonphotographic pictures) affect us very differently (...) It is hard to resist describing the difference by saying that the photographs have a kind of immediacy or realism which the etchings [and comparable non-photographic pictures] lack. (...) What, then, is special about photography? (...) My claim is that we see, quite literally, our dead relatives themselves when we look at photographs of them (Walton 1984, 247–252).

Photographs, unlike paintings, drawings and other hand-made pictures, according to Walton, are *transparent*; that is, to see a photograph of *o* is to see *o* itself. Hence, if I see a photograph of my great-grandfather, Walton claims, I literally see my great-grandfather.<sup>124</sup> This does not mean that photographs are transparent in the sense that we do not see the photographic surface at all, or in the sense that we are under the illusion of seeing the object face-to-face. Rather, he claims that seeing through photographs is a case of *indirect* seeing; but indirect seeing is, according to Walton, a

---

<sup>124</sup> The transparency thesis is also endorsed by Patrick Maynard (Maynard 2005) and Dominic Lopes although Lopes does not think that transparency is a *distinctive* mark of photographs (Lopes 1996).

genuine type of visual perception. Photographs, in this regard, are similar to other prosthetic devices such as mirrors, binoculars or telescopes; they are devices available for amplifying our visual capacities. According to Walton, “there is a natural kind which includes seeing photographs of things as well as seeing them directly and through mirrors and telescopes, and so forth” (Walton 2008, 211).

Now Walton backs up his claim that photographs literally ground perceptual experiences of the objects they are of by suggesting that photographs meet the conditions necessary for seeing. Firstly, he subscribes to ‘some variety of causal theory [of perception]’ according to which ‘to see something is to have visual experiences which are caused, in a certain manner, by what is seen’ (Walton 1984, p. 261)<sup>125</sup> and he claims that photographs, and the scenes they are of, stand in a similar causal relation. In the case of perception, the causal theory holds, one has a visual experience of a scene only if the scene caused the experience in such a way that any changes in the visual appearance of the object or scene would be reflected by changes in the phenomenal character of the experience. Similarly, in the case of photographs, the same causal and counterfactual relation applies: a photograph is of a scene or object only if that scene or object caused the photograph, so that any differences in the visual properties of the scene will be correspondingly reflected in the visible properties of the photograph.<sup>126</sup> Secondly, these visual properties of photographs, like those of perceptual experience—and unlike the visual properties of descriptions or other mechanically-produced graphs—bear relations of real similarity with ‘the way the world really is’. This is reflected, according to Walton, in the way we find it easy or difficult to discriminate between two objects in experience of photographs and perception: if we are likely to confuse two objects perceptually, according to Walton, it is because there is actually a correspondent similarity among the objects themselves. The word *house* can be confused with the word *horse* or *hearse* but when we see a horse it is more likely to be confused with a donkey than with a house, because horses

---

<sup>125</sup> This is also endorsed by (Lopes 1996, p.178).

<sup>126</sup> To persuade us that looking at photographs is literally a case of perception, Walton also provides ‘the slippery-slope argument’. He tries to persuade us that it is intuitive to move from seeing object via prosthetic devices such as eyeglasses, telescopes, microscopes and mirrors, to seeing objects via close circuit television monitor and live television broadcast, to seeing objects via delayed broadcasts, and finally to seeing objects via photographs (Walton 2008).

are actually more similar to donkeys than to houses. This, Walton claims, is also true in the case of photographs: a photographed horse is more likely to be similar to a photographed donkey than to a photographed house. Finally, the causal and counterfactual relation operating in the case of photographs occurs, as in the case of perception, independently of an agent's intentions or beliefs. Photographs, Walton suggests—as we saw in chapter 2—are *natural* images—or, in Gricean terms, cases of *natural meaning* (Walton 1984, 265).

In sum, looking at objects through photographs is, for Walton, literally a case of perception because photographs preserve relations of real visual similarity with respect to the particular scenes or objects they are of in virtue of being in a causal and counterfactual dependence with those scenes and objects which is, in turn, independent of beliefs and intentions of agents.

Walton's view has many advantages. To start with, it seems to meet the three conditions required to account for the peculiar phenomenology of photographs. If photographs were indeed, as Walton contends, the only kind of transparent pictures, this would certainly be a *distinctive* property of photographs. This claim, however, has been contested by Dominic Lopes, who maintains that other kinds of pictures (e.g. paintings, drawings, etchings, etc.) are also transparent (Lopes 1996, 179–187). Sometimes Lopes seems to be suggesting that *all* pictures are transparent, so we can literally see objects through *all* of them (Lopes 1996, 179–187). But this is implausible at least for one reason: if all pictures were transparent and thus support genuine perceptual experiences, then all pictures would support experiences of particular objects—since genuine ordinary perceptual experiences are always of particulars. But this does not seem to be the case. Take for instance Figure 36 and Figure 37. These pictures do not depict any particular woman but a 'generic' one.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> This is a difference between ordinary 'seeing' and 'seeing-in' that Wollheim pointed out: he claimed that whilst it is possible to depict *a horse* which is no particular horse, perceptual experiences are always of particulars (Wollheim 1987, 64-70).

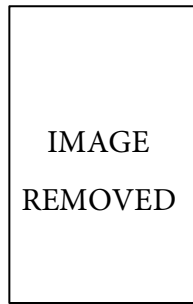


Figure 36 Fernand Leger "Nude on a Red Background" (1927)

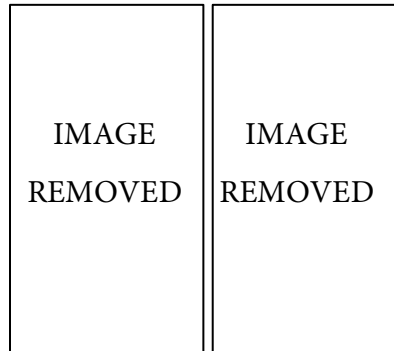


Figure 37 Drawing and Icon of a Woman

At other times, however, Lopes' view seems to be less radical. He claims that transparency is a matter of degree and that *some* hand-made pictures can also be transparent (Atencia-Linares 2011). If this were the case,<sup>128</sup> this view would not be inconsistent with the claim that transparency is a distinctive property of photographs: even if some hand-made pictures are transparent, it can still be the case that transparency is a distinctive feature of photographs and not of hand-made pictures.<sup>129</sup> Hence, the distinctiveness condition could be met. In addition, if Walton was right and we could literally see through photographs, this would definitely explain why we feel in close experiential contact with the objects they are of. After all, genuine perceptual experiences put us in cognitive and experiential contact with the objects seen. The closeness or proximity condition would be therefore met as well.

The condition of recognisability may seem, at first, more difficult to meet if we follow this view. After all, if seeing objects in photographs were genuine perceptual

---

<sup>128</sup> I not going to discuss Lopes' view that some pictures can be transparent here, but I will have more things to say later on in section 6.

<sup>129</sup> Admittedly, this is not the position that Walton himself takes. Although he does admit that transparency is a matter of degree, he claims that hand-made pictures are never transparent.

experiences of the objects, one would expect that we could recognise that we are literally seeing objects through photographs: photographic experiences would presumably look to us like other ordinary perceptual experiences. But in reality, it seems that the experience of seeing things in the flesh or even through binoculars or telescopes seems to us quite different than seeing objects in photographs. In other words, we do not recognise the experience of photographs as relevantly similar to other experiences where we genuinely see objects: what it is like to see something face-to-face is very different from what is like to see something in a photograph. Now, the fact that we do not recognise the experience of seeing through photographs as an experience of genuine seeing, cannot do as a conclusive reason to deny that the transparency thesis meets the condition of recognisability. After all, seeing through a microscope or through a magnifying glass are recognisably different experiences from seeing an object face-to-face in normal circumstances, even when all of them are genuine cases of seeing. So it might well be that seeing through photographs is a recognisably distinct and *sui generis* way of seeing and yet still a case of genuine seeing.

Things being so, it is fair to say that Walton's transparency thesis meets the three conditions required to account for the special phenomenology of photography. However, this does not mean that we can conclude that Walton's theory is correct. It is still open to question whether or not it is in fact the case that we can genuinely see through photographs and this is an idea that most philosophers have been very reluctant to accept. Critics have claimed that photographs fail to instantiate some necessary conditions for seeing. Cohen and Meskin (2004), for example, suggest that photographic experiences, unlike perceptual experiences, fail to co-vary with respect to changes and movements in the egocentric location of the depicted object: 'as I move around the world with the photograph, the egocentric location of the depictum changes, but the photographic image does not' (Cohen and Meskin 2004, p.201). In a similar spirit, Bence Nanay claims that photographs, unlike perceptual experiences, do not support sensorimotor counterfactuals: 'what is necessary for seeing is that there is at least one way for me to move such that, if I were to move this way, my view of the perceived object would change continuously as I move' (Nanay 2010, p. 468). Michael G.F. Martin, in turn, has claimed that even though there is 'nothing about the visual image (...) in itself which prevents you from seeing (...) the original object, [the

problem is] the absence of the larger process of perceptual encounter' (Martin 2012, 351).

Walton has offered imaginative ways to answer some of these objections (Walton 2008a and 2008b) but I will not engage in this discussion here. I think that unless Walton's view were able to explain something that we could not explain otherwise, we would certainly be better off if we could find an alternative account that were as explanatory as Walton's without having to commit to the highly contentious and counterintuitive claim that we literally see through photographs. Let us examine alternative views to see if they provide a more convincing account. I will return to the transparency thesis later on.

#### 4 (Depictive) Traces

The *Trace* theory is an account that seeks to capture the advantages of the transparency theory without its counterintuitive aspects. In essence, the theory embraces only the less controversial part of Walton's view—the claim that photographs are *naturally* (causally and counterfactually) dependent on the objects they are of—and takes this as the central element to explain the peculiar feeling of closeness that photographs afford.

Gregory Currie, for instance, does not think—as Walton does—that seeing objects in photographs and seeing objects in mirrors or through telescopes belong to the same natural kind. Rather, he claims, photographs belong to the same natural kind as footprints and death masks—photographs, for Currie, are *traces* of objects. Nevertheless, he endorses the core of Walton's theory in explaining his idea of what a trace is; that is, he also claims that photographs are images whose content is independent of beliefs or intentions and whose visual properties are causally and counterfactually dependent upon visible properties of the photographed object. Moreover, he also thinks that this explains the intimate relation with objects that photographs provide.

Photographs seem to have an affective capacity that hand-made pictures lack. Other things being equal, we are likely to value a photograph of a loved one over a sketch, more likely to be offended or disturbed by an offensive or

disturbing photograph than by a painting... *Possessing a photograph, death mask, or footprint of someone seems to put me in a relation to that person that a hand-made image never can* (Currie 2004, 70. *My italics*).<sup>130</sup>

Mikael Pettersson holds a similar view to Currie's. He also rejects Walton's transparency thesis but defends the view that part of what gives photographs the power to provide a feeling of proximity characteristic of their phenomenology is that they are *traces* 'in the sense that the *state* of the image—the configuration of marks on its surface—depends naturally on visible features of the photographed object' (Pettersson 2011, 191). (*Depends naturally* is a short version Pettersson borrows from Currie to mean belief-independent counterfactual dependence).<sup>131</sup>

The notion of photographs as traces seems to explain part of the proximity associated with viewing photographs, for traces of the kind photographs belong to in general seem to have a capacity to evoke closeness, as when a depressed cushion evokes proximity to one's beloved, by virtue of being a trace of her (Pettersson 2011, 191).

This view then suggests that even if Walton's idea that photographs ground perceptual experiences were wrong, the fact that photographs are traces—i.e. that there is a causal and counterfactual relation, independent of beliefs or intentions, between the photographic content and the depicted object ('natural dependence' from now on)—can nevertheless explain the peculiar phenomenology of photographs.

But does it really? Well, let us see if this account meets the three requirements. It seems plausible to say that the natural dependence on (real) objects is a distinctive property of photographs that is not typically present in other images; there might be other non-photographic images that are also naturally dependent on the objects they

---

<sup>130</sup> Currie does not explicitly refer to this intimate relation as an *experiential* relation, but he is clearly trying to compare how his own theory deals with all aspects that Walton's theory aims to explain; this presumably includes phenomenology, since this is the main concern of Walton's transparency thesis.

<sup>131</sup> This, according to Pettersson, is not the only element contributing to the special phenomenology of photographs. In addition, there is the viewers' belief that (i) photographs are traces and (ii) that they have a special epistemic status, and also (iii) the fact that photographs are *depictive traces* – that is, that they typically depict what they are traces of (Pettersson 2011).

are of,<sup>132</sup> but even if this is so, it is still true that natural dependence is typically found in most photographs and not in most hand-made pictures. If this is so, natural dependence is a distinctive mark of photographs—the condition of distinctiveness is therefore met.

What about the ‘closeness or proximity condition’? This account explains one way in which photographs make us feel close to objects. Here is Pettersson way of explaining it:

A depressed cushion (...) may be ever so romantically charged when the person who has left that trace is one’s loved one. And it is thus charged, I take it, due to the sense of proximity to one’s beloved that the cushion, and the state it is in, provides. Or to take an example from the context of aesthetics, I do not think it is an unusual experience, when standing in front of a sculpture, to enjoy a certain sense of nearness, not in relation to the subject of the sculpture, but rather to the sculptor. The state of the stone, in such cases, is a trace of the sculptor and his or her workings, and as such the state of the matter makes for a sense of proximity to the sculptor (Pettersson 2011, 190).

Now, although this explanation may be enough to fulfil the criterion of proximity, it does not meet the third condition: is not clear that this experience of closeness that Pettersson describes is in fact an experience of closeness that we recognise by merely *visually* confronting photographs. After all, being a trace of an object is a fact about the causal history of the photographs, which is not a visibly recognisable property. Certainly, according to the theory, as a result of being a trace of the object, the photograph preserves a relation of visual similarity with the object that it is a trace of, and this is indeed a visually recognisable property. However, this is not the property that is distinctive about photography: hand-made pictures also can maintain relations of visual similarity with their subjects, but what is specific or distinctive of photographs, according to this view, is that they typically do so in a way that is causally

---

<sup>132</sup> Dominic Lopes gives the following example: “Suppose a computer connected to a robot equipped with a paintbrush is able to replicate a pot of irises in the manner of Van Gogh” in this case, he suggests, there will be a natural dependence between the replica painted by the robot and the original Van Gogh and yet, the image is not a photograph (Lopes 1996, 186).



(*naturally*) dependent on the relevant object and independently of the artists' beliefs. But again, this causal dependence or belief independence is not in and of itself a perceivable or visually recognisable property. That is, the fact of being a trace or being causally dependent on objects is not something that we can *see* reflected in the content of the photograph or our experience thereof; the causal history is just an independent fact that we can access by other *non-sensory or non-experiential* means e.g. background knowledge about the production of the image. Hence, it is not clear how this fact in and of itself could explain anything about the phenomenology of photographs—provided that what we want to explain is the *sensory* phenomenology or the visually distinct and recognisable experience of photographs. At most, the feeling of closeness or proximity that natural dependence could explain would be a case of non-purely-sensory phenomenology as the one I described in section 2 with the example of the jersey that my grandmother knitted: we may feel close to the object photographed because we *know* that the photograph is causally linked to the relevant object or person. But as I said before, photographs give us something more than this—they seem to put us in a close relation with objects by visually experiencing them.

As a matter of fact, Mikael Pettersson is well aware of the fact that appealing to the natural dependence is not enough to account for the peculiar (visual) phenomenology of photographs.<sup>133</sup> That is partly why, in addition to his explanation of the experience of closeness in terms of photographs-as-traces, he also claims that photographs are *depictive* traces; that is, images that typically depict—or allow us to *see-in* them—what they are traces of (Pettersson 2011). Photographs then, are phenomenologically distinct, according to Pettersson, not only because they are traces of objects, and viewers *believe* they are so; but also, because photographs allow us to *see-in* them the objects that they are traces of. This further element is presumably intended to account for the fact that the relevant feeling of closeness is indeed perceptual or recognisable in visually experiencing photographs. Now Pettersson's way of explaining why this is so, I think, is misleading and ultimately uninformative.

His argument is the following. Photographs, he says, allow us to *see-in* them the objects they are traces of. *Seeing-in* and *real* seeing are certainly not assimilable.

---

<sup>133</sup> See Pettersson 2011, pp. 191-192.

However, the former is very much like the latter: seeing-in, he claims, is *quasi-illusionistic seeing*. Now, what makes us feel close to objects in *real face-to-face* perception, according to Pettersson, is *not* the perceptual contact *per se* but rather, that it ‘virtually always occurs in the proximity of the seen objects’. And seeing-in—in being *quasi-illusionistic seeing*—somehow exploits this connection to objects as well. Here is this idea expressed in Pettersson’s own words:

“[R]eal seeing, virtually always occurs in the proximity of the seen objects; we typically see things face-to-face. It is this aspect of perception, rather than the idea that when one perceives, one is in perceptual contact with the perceived object, which imbues perception with a sense of proximity to the perceived thing (...) Pictures, I maintain, by allowing us to see things in their surfaces, by offering quasi-illusionistic experiences of objects, trade on this connection between perception and spatial proximity, yielding, as a result, an experience of closeness to them (Pettersson 2011, p.193).

But what exactly does Pettersson mean by this? Firstly, it is not entirely clear how to understand the contrast Pettersson makes between ‘the perceptual contact with the perceived object’ and the proximity aspect of perception—the fact that (ordinary) seeing ‘virtually always occurs in the proximity of the seen objects.’ And secondly, it is also unclear what Pettersson means when he claims that ‘by offering quasi-illusionistic experiences of objects, [pictures] *trade on this connection between perception and spatial proximity*’. Let me try to offer an interpretation.

One way to construe the above mentioned contrast could be the following: by ‘perceptual contact’ Pettersson means what is represented in experience or the intentional content of the experience—<sup>134</sup> which presumably includes the (perceived) object. The ‘proximity aspect,’ on the other hand, is a fact about perception, or a fact about the conditions under which (ordinary) perception typically occurs. So Pettersson would be suggesting that (ordinary) perceptual experience makes us feel close to objects, *not* because the intentional content of the experience put us in cognitive or experiential contact with the relevant object, but because of the *fact* that

---

<sup>134</sup> Let us assume, for the sake of the argument, that ordinary perceptual experiences have intentional content.

perceptual experiences virtually always occur in the presence (or proximity) of objects. With respect to the second problem, maybe the idea Pettersson is trying to convey is that in as much as *seeing-in* is a quasi-illusionistic experience, when we see a photograph we are under the quasi-illusion of being in spatial proximity with the subject. If this is the correct interpretation, Pettersson's view could be something along these lines:

(DT1) (Ordinary) perceptual experience makes us feel close to objects due to the *fact* that perceptual experiences virtually always occur in the presence (or proximity) of objects.

(DT2) Pictorial experience (seeing-in) is *quasi-illusionistic* (ordinary) seeing.

(DT3) When we see-in pictures—or photographs—we are under the *quasi-illusion* of being in spatial proximity or in the presence of objects.

This view, however, has at least three important problems. Firstly, I do not see how (DT1) could tell us anything about the (visual) phenomenology of perceptual experiences—let alone pictorial experiences—for, presumably, the sensory phenomenology of the experience refers to something I recognise or feel by confronting the intentional content of such experience. But, strictly speaking, as it is described, the proximity aspect—what presumably explains the feeling of closeness of perceptual experiences and derivatively of pictorial experience as well—is not part of the intentional content of experience—it is not something that we have perceptual access to—but an external fact or condition under which perception normally occurs.

Now, even if the proximity aspect were indeed part of the content of experience, a second question arises: (DT3) suggests that we feel close to photographed objects because we are under the *quasi-illusion* that the objects are *spatially* close to us. This, however, seems to me completely at odds with the way we experience photographs (or pictures more generally). When we see a photograph we are always very aware that the object or person we see in the picture is not present or near the space we are presently occupying. The feeling of closeness is not, in any way, as Pettersson's view suggests, a feeling of *spatial* proximity—not even quasi-illusory or evoked. To the contrary, what seems to be characteristic of our experience of photographs is that we feel as if the

objects were present to the mind or in experience—and thereby *cognitively* close—while clearly noticing, at the same time, that they are absent from our environment. Whatever a quasi-illusion may be, it does not seem to be the case that we ever feel *as if* we were in the *spatial* presence of the objects we see in pictures. We are well aware—and indeed this is characteristic of pictorial experiences more generally—that the objects that we see in pictures are not in any sense around us; we do not feel as if objects were on our same immediate space. They only seem to be close to us cognitively.

Thirdly, I cannot see how the view that photographs are *depictive* traces improves on the view that photographs are merely *traces*, at least when it comes to explaining the special visual phenomenology of photography. Remember that the reason why Pettersson invoked the notion of *depictive* traces was because although the property of being traces picked out a distinctive property of photographs, it was not one that could be recognised in visually experiencing them. But notice that saying that photographs are *depictive* traces does not make things better. If Pettersson were right, and seeing-in were quasi-illusionistic seeing and thereby evoked (quasi-illusionistically) the feeling of spatial proximity present in ordinary seeing, this would be the case with photographs as well as with any other kind of picture, for most pictures support the experience of *seeing-in*. The account then, would not be offering any property distinctive of photography that could be typically recognisable in visually experiencing photographs. What according to the theory is distinctive of photographs is the fact that they are traces—that is, the property of being causally and counterfactually dependent on an object. But the property of being *depictive* traces does not make the property of being a trace any more visible or recognisable in experience. Hence, it is not clear how the theory can account for the fact that photographs afford a distinctive *visual* experience.

If all I have said in this section is correct, the trace theory fails to correctly explain the peculiar *visual* phenomenology of photography. It identifies a distinctive property of photographs that can explain in some way why we feel close to objects. But this feeling of closeness is one that we get by entertaining certain beliefs about the

circumstances of production of photographs and not by visually perceiving the photograph alone.<sup>135</sup>

## 5 Factive Pictorial Experience

A third attempt to account for the peculiar phenomenology of photography has been put forward by Robert Hopkins (Hopkins 2010). As we already advanced in Chapter 2, according to Hopkins, photographs support a distinctive kind of pictorial experience. Photographic pictorial experience, unlike pictorial experience more generally, he claims, is *factive*. This entails, remember, that for any token photographic (pictorial) experience, it is true that ‘if what is seen in the picture is that *p*, then *p*’. So, following Hopkins’ own example, if you experience Figure 38 and you see in the picture that the depicted man— Churchill—is fat, then the depicted man, Churchill, was indeed fat. Or put more generally, what we see in photographs is how things really were; insofar they are factive, photographs ‘cannot represent things to be other than they are’ (Hopkins 2010, 3).

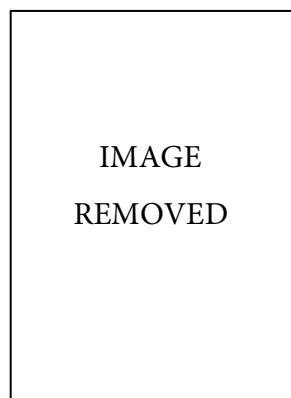


Figure 38 Yusuf Karsh "Sir Winston Churchill" (1941)

---

<sup>135</sup> As I said in section 2, it is certainly possible that the relevant belief is based on the (visual) experience of the photograph. But this does not mean that what the subject comes to believe is thereby an element of the experience itself. As Susanna Siegel correctly points out, there is a difference between ‘the contents that a perceiver comes to believe on the basis of her perception [and the] contents properly attributed to perception itself’ (Siegel 2006, 481). Presumably, we can entertain certain beliefs about the means of production of a photograph because we experience the image *as a photograph*. But what is it about the image that makes us think that it is a photograph? Presumably, it is its special (visual) phenomenology; i.e. something that is part of the experience itself. This is what the trace theory does not explain.

Hopkins, of course, is not oblivious to the fact that there are some photographs that do indeed represent things other than they are. However, he claims, these are cases where photography deviates from its *proper functioning*. If photography—and, in particular, *traditional* photography—*works as it should*, Hopkins claims, it indeed sustains factive pictorial experience. The reason why this is so, says Hopkins, is because every stage of the complex causal chain that culminates in the viewer's experience of the photograph allows only a restricted role to human agency and, hence, guarantees the preservation of information or facts. Moreover, Hopkins adds, the various stages of the photographic process are designed to guarantee the preservation of information. Hence, if every stage of the causal chain involved in the photographic process works as it should, it produces, *as a matter of necessity*, factive pictorial experiences.

As I said before, factivity is, for Hopkins, a *distinctive* property of photographic pictorial experiences. Other non-photographic images can, in certain occasions, reflect the facts, but because they allow plenty of leeway with respect to human agency, they are always vulnerable to error. Moreover, if hand-made images reflect the facts it is a contingent fact; there are no clear norms governing the process of painting and drawing so as to mark its *correct* functioning. Photographs are different in this regard: again, when they work properly according to their design, they are *necessarily* factive.

I argued in Chapter 2 that Hopkins' view is too strong. Although it is plausible to say that photographs are typically factive, claiming that they are *necessarily* factive is not. But independently of this, the relevant question now is this: can the property of factivity explain the peculiar feeling of closeness that our experiences of photographs afford? Hopkins claims that it can; here is how:

I suggest that the source of this phenomenology is that viewers [...] *know that photography aims to produce pictures in which we see things as they really were*, i.e. that it aims at accurate seeing-in. They *know* that, since it has this aim, things will have been designed in such a way as to secure it. And *they know* that, if things work as they are supposed to, that will be the result. Given all this, when they take themselves to be looking at a photograph, and take that to be the product of a photographic system in which everything has worked as it

should, they will take their pictorial experience to be accurate as a matter of necessity.

(...)What is special about our experience of photographs, I suggest, is just that we take them to be in this way guaranteed to support accurate seeing-in. That is the source of our sense that they place us in a relation to the photographed events which is specially intimate and direct (Hopkins 2010, 14, *my italics*).

According to Hopkins, then, the feeling of closeness characteristic of our experience of photographs is a feeling that we derive from certain *beliefs* about photography's design and aims. Moreover, in order to get this feeling of closeness viewers need to believe that the kind of image they are seeing is a photograph, for they have to associate this belief with other beliefs about the aims and reliability of the process of production of these images. If this is so, however, the special phenomenology of photographs as Hopkins explains it would not be one that we get by merely visually experiencing the photograph. Hopkins' theory, then, seems to have a similar problem to that of the trace theory. The property of factivity or the fact that the aim of photography is 'to produce pictures in which we see things as they really were' is not something that can be visually recognisable in experience; the mere (visual) experience, in and of itself, and in the absence of any knowledge about the aims for which photography has been designed, would not afford any special phenomenology or feeling of closeness. Hence the feeling of closeness Hopkins is accounting for does not seem to be, strictly speaking, a merely sensory—visual—phenomenology. As in the case of Currie's and Pettersson's account, it is an experience of closeness that is brought about when viewers associate their beliefs about photography to the visual experience they are having which—presumably—they have previously identified as a photograph. But why do viewers come to believe that the image is a photograph in the first place? I take it that it is because the visual experience they are having is of a special kind: is the kind of visual experience they identify as characteristic of photographs—or even if viewers do not know what a photograph is, they nevertheless recognise something characteristic in this kind of images that is not typically present in other kinds of images. Moreover, this non-doxastic experience also strikes the viewer as putting the subject in a closer or more direct cognitive relation with the subject of the image. It is

the phenomenology of this experience that I think neither the trace theorists nor Hopkins account for.

As a reply to this, Hopkins may claim that even though factivity is not a property that is recognisable in experience, it is nevertheless what makes it possible to obtain the kind of visual experiences that we get when we look at photographs. If this were so, we would expect that every (mental) state that is factive would produce a similar experience of intimacy to that we feel with photographs, but this is not the case. Knowledge—or the state of knowing that *x*—is factive and yet lacks the relevant phenomenology. Hopkins takes this objection into account, but answers that it is only when factivity combines with experiential states that we get this peculiar phenomenology. Furthermore, he mentions the case of perception and memory—both factive experiential states—as relevant evidence for this (Hopkins 2010, 17). But this is still unconvincing: presumably experiential states such as feeling pain or feeling sick can be said to be factive—e.g. if I feel pain then (I know that) I am in pain, or if I feel sick (I know that) I am sick—however, in neither of these cases the combination between factivity and experience produces a feeling of intimacy of the relevant kind.

Hopkins' intuition that there is something that perceptual and memory experiences share with photographic experiences in virtue of which they ground a characteristic feeling of intimacy, is certainly on the right track. But factivity does not seem to be the right property. In what follows I will propose an alternative property, the property of particularity.

## **6 Particularity**

So far we have seen that what is special about the (visual) phenomenology of photographs does not seem to be the fact that photographs are 'traces' in Currie and Pettersson's sense, nor is it the property of factivity. We have not yet ruled out transparency, but if we find a less controversial theory that is as explanatory as the transparency thesis, it would certainly be preferable. Here I aim to offer such a theory. Let me begin to sketch my view by describing what I think is special about the sensory phenomenology of photography—I suggest that it is the property of particularity. In



the following section I explain in detail what it means for the content of a thought and an experience to be particular.

When we confront photographs, we not only have the experience of seeing a given kind of object *in general*; it seems to us as if we were presented with particular mind-independent objects: not certain properties that resemble some object or other, but an actual singular concrete object. When I see a photograph of my nephew, I do not have the experience of being presented with someone or something that looks like my nephew but that could really be anyone sharing my nephew's appearance; I see the photograph as representing my nephew, who is a concrete particular person. This is not only the case with familiar people or objects; if I open the newspaper and see a photograph of a man whom I have never seen before, I assume that the image presents me with a particular man, *that* man whoever he happens to be. I do not have the experience of seeing a given qualitative profile displayed by the image that could match the look of some man or other. Moreover, it is not merely an experience of (accurate) likeness; my experience seems to pick out concrete mind-independent particular objects. Contrast, for example, the case of hand-drawn figures of a woman (Figure 36 and Figure 37). In these cases we *do not* perceive the pictures as presenting us with a particular mind-independent woman; it may well be that the pictures actually represent a concrete particular woman, but the point is that the *experience* of the picture just puts us in a position as of seeing *a woman*, but no woman *in particular* or no concrete particular woman. Let me try to explain this further.

Pictures can depict both particular and generic objects or scenes.<sup>136</sup> Also, it seems reasonable to claim that they can depict actual or not actual objects and scenes—a 'portrait' of Mickey Mouse, say, may depict it *as being* a particular, but it is not any concrete particular (Figure 39).

---

<sup>136</sup> (See Wollheim 1998, cf. Hopkins 1998)



Figure 39 Mickey Mouse "Portrait"

There are various ways in which pictures can be said to represent particulars, here are three:<sup>137</sup> (i) Pictures can be said to represent particulars by being sufficiently *like* the object depicted—or by resembling the object to a reasonable degree so that it can be recognised by people who *know* that the object exists or is an actual, concrete particular. An example of this could be (Figure 40). In this case particularity will not be something *given* in experience, or at least not *only* recognisable in the experience of the picture—we need to know that the depicted object is a mind-independent, existing, particular object. In this particular case, for example, we see that the picture resembles Barack Obama and we know that Barack Obama is an existent, particular person. So provided that it is in fact Barack Obama that the artist meant to draw, we assume that it represents a particular because Obama is a concrete particular individual.



Figure 40 Drawing of Barack Obama

(ii) We can also say that a picture represents a particular by stipulating or providing contextual information that makes it clear that what is depicted is a concrete particular, e.g. by adding a proper name as a title. Notice that, according to at least some theories

---

<sup>137</sup> I do not mean to provide here a theory of depiction and to explain in what consists the experience of seeing-in. I am proposing what I take to be reasonable claims of what pictures can depict that I think any good theory of depiction should be able to accommodate.

of depiction, if the picture does not resemble the object to a reasonable degree or does not make the object sufficiently recognisable, we may not be able to say that the picture *depicts* that object, although we can still say that the picture represents the object in a non-entirely pictorial way.<sup>138</sup> But there are cases where likeness is very subtle so our ability to recognise the subject might be pushed to its limits. In these cases, having a title may help to guide our vision to ‘find’ the likeness. An example of this case can be Figure 41. (To see why the likeness may not be obvious, compare with Figure 42). Finally, we can say that a picture depicts a particular (iii) because the picture supports an experience as of concrete particular real objects—that is, that in virtue of the very experience and independently any background knowledge or capacity to recognise objects or scenes that *we know* are concrete particulars,<sup>139</sup> we can tell, or be led to think, that the object or scene depicted exists.



Figure 41 Egon Schiele "Self-portrait with hand on chest" (1910)

---

<sup>138</sup> See for example Hopkins, 1998 p. 30-31; Lopes' theory of depiction also requires there to be a causal link to the particular object (Lopes 1996, 93–107); and Schier seems to recognise explicitly that the particularity does not come merely by the iconicity of the image (Schier 1986).

<sup>139</sup> Notice that I am *not* saying that we can have this experience independently of our capacity to recognise objects or scenes. This is certainly not the case. My claim is that we can have experiences as of concrete mind-independent particulars regardless of whether we know that these objects or events actually exist and we can recognise them.



Figure 42 Photograph of Egon Schiele

I claim that photographs support the third kind of experience. This is not to say that we never experience drawings or other types of hand-drawn pictures as presenting us with a particular person or object in this way. There are cases where we do perceive paintings of subjects as being concrete particulars—especially when they are very realist or hyperrealist paintings. But in the case of hand-drawn paintings the experience of seeing particulars is not by any means characteristic of the kind of pictures they are. In photographs, however, we typically *experience* singular concrete subjects, objects or events (Figure 43 might be seen as a nice illustration of this contrast).<sup>140</sup> In fact, our experience of photographs characteristically put us in a position not only to make the general existential claim that *there is some woman that looks a certain way* but also, the singular claim that *that woman* is thus and so—actually, if I have grounds for making a general existential claim it is because I am in a position to make a singular or particular judgement in the first place.

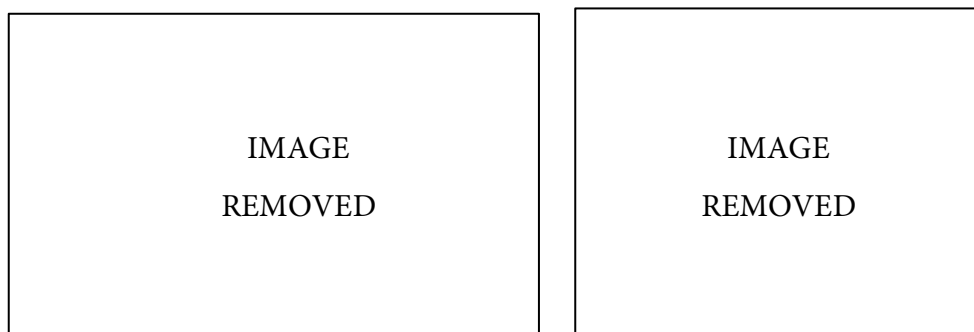


Figure 43 Eugenio Recuenco vs Picasso (2012)

<sup>140</sup> As I will mention at the end of this chapter, this does not mean that photographs cannot *represent* types or general kinds.

This is related, I think, to the idea that Barbara Savedoff tries to capture when she claims that when we see photographs our experience puts us in a position to try to identify the subject of the photograph:

In our most typical encounters, we examine photographs to see what they show and what they can reveal to us *about the world*. Basic to this task is the task of identification. (This is not to say that we are only interested in identification, but that identification or its attempt almost always underlies our response.) Before anything else, when we look at a photograph we want to know what (*in the world*) it shows (...) The drive to identify the subject of a photograph does not disappear when confronted with hard-to-identify or abstract works; in fact, the more difficult and challenging the identification, the more we may find our- selves concentrating our efforts on it (Savedoff 2008b, 121. *My italics*).

Photographic images then, seem to put us in cognitive and experiential contact with concrete particular objects that we may be led to identify, and that are given to us in experience however remote they may be. And, since what we experience are concrete particulars instead of a mere set of properties or qualitative profile we feel in an intimate or close cognitive contact with them. This particularity of experience, I suggest, is distinctive of photographic experience. We typically experience photographs as presenting concrete particular objects, and to recognise a photographic experience *as of a photograph* involves recognising it as presenting concrete, mind-independent particulars. Moreover, particularity is something intrinsic to the visual experience we undergo; it is the experience itself that seems to *pick out* the concrete particular objects we see in photographs. In other words, we feel as if the subjects of the photographs were present to us in experience in the way described independently of any contextual knowledge or beliefs. We just have to look at the photographs.

But how do our experiences—or the contents thereof—have to be in order to account for this experienced particularity? Well, the response is simple: they have to be experiences with particular content. But what this means exactly, requires some explanation, and the explanation demands a digression.

## 7 Explaining Particularity

There are two distinctive ways in which we can think about objects and events. I can think about, say, the stage director Robert Wilson by thinking *the director of 'Einstein on the Beach* (whoever he is)'. In this case, my thought would be about Robert Wilson in as much as he fits the description that I have represented in my mind. However, insofar as the content of my thought is a description, a concept or a set of properties—i.e. universals that can be, in principle, multiply instantiated—it is possible that it could be satisfied by any other person who shares such profile. Alternatively, I can think of Wilson in a more direct way—in a way that does not depend on any conception or description under which I represent him. I can remember seeing him perform on stage some years ago and think of *that* man I saw—where *that man* picks out the subject that I was attending to when I saw the performance onstage, i.e. Robert Wilson. In this way my thought—as Tim Crane puts it— ‘goes straight out to the object itself’ (Crane 2005); I can just have Robert Wilson himself—and not anybody else— *in mind*. (There should not be any mystery involved in this way of putting things—to have an *object in mind* does not amount to have the relevant object literally inside the mind, but to have the object as a constituent of a thought *content* which is itself a representation; as Kent Bach claims, ‘even though a thought is a mental occurrence, constituents of the *content* of a thought are not constituents of that occurrence. So there is nothing paradoxical about having an object in mind, at least no more than having a property or relation in mind’ (Bach 2010, 39)).

The first type of thoughts I described before are descriptive or general thoughts and they connect us to objects by means of mediating descriptions, concepts or properties in so far as the objects satisfy that description, conception or set of properties. The second type of thoughts, by contrast, are singular or particular thoughts and they provide a more direct relation with objects; they have the cognitive role of singling out particular objects which we can think about in the absence of any conception or descriptive characterisation of them.<sup>141</sup> This, of course, does not mean

---

<sup>141</sup> This is a rough account of the difference between singular and general thoughts. As such, it is incomplete and fails to account for many problematic issues concerning the characterisation of these two distinct types of thought. For a more detailed overview of the debate on singular thought see (Jeshion 2010)

that when having singular thoughts we do not ascribe properties to the objects to which our thought is directed; we certainly can do so without affecting the singular character of the thought. The point is rather that whatever predicate or properties we ascribe to the subject of the thought, we think of *that subject* in a non-descriptive way—the subject itself, as well as its ascribed properties, figure in the content of the thought.

The fact that the objects themselves figure in the contents of the thoughts, or are a constitutive part thereof, is why singular thoughts are often called *object-dependent* thoughts: these thoughts are such that their very content could only be present in virtue of the existence of the object the thought is about.<sup>142</sup> For example, if while writing this chapter I think (singularly) about Pablo (my nephew), I could not have entertained that *very* thought content if Pablo had not been born. I might have had a different nephew and I could have thought about him, but that would have been a different thought content and also, a different kind of thought.<sup>143</sup> Think about the case of two beliefs, the belief (B<sub>1</sub>) that ‘Pablo<sub>1</sub> is seven years old’ and the belief (B<sub>2</sub>) that ‘Pablo<sub>2</sub> is seven years old’—where Pablo<sub>2</sub> is a different person even if he shares the same name with my nephew. These beliefs have different contents—since in B<sub>1</sub> I am thinking about one Pablo and in B<sub>2</sub> I am thinking about another Pablo; that is, I am thinking about two different people. But also, B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub> are two different thoughts: if I entertain the belief ‘Pablo is seven years old’ (referring to my nephew) at a different occasion, I would be entertaining B<sub>1</sub> again while if I think ‘Pablo is seven years old’ (not referring to my nephew) I would be entertaining a different thought. Moreover, one could say that there is a *kind of thoughts* that are about Pablo, my nephew, in virtue of being thoughts about him. So my thoughts ‘Pablo is seven years old’, ‘Pablo visited Stockholm in 2009’, ‘Pablo is Luis and Myriam’s son’ belong to the kind of thoughts about Pablo, my nephew. Whereas other thoughts that I can have about

---

<sup>142</sup> Not everyone agrees that singular thoughts are *object-dependent* in this sense. But at any rate, what is more important is that these thoughts are linked to one single object in every possible world.

<sup>143</sup> Evans and McDowell (Evans 1982) think that if the object the subject is thinking about does not exist the subject does not think any thought at all. This is contentious, but for the purpose of this chapter it is better to leave this issue aside.

Pablo<sub>2</sub> with the same content would belong to a different kind of thoughts: thoughts about Pablo<sub>2</sub>.

This is typically the case with thoughts and propositions expressed by the use of proper names. These thoughts are grounded in a persistent cognitive capacity<sup>144</sup> to think about particular objects (potentially) on more than one occasion and over time, and they are associated with (or *point to*) information about a subject or object that we have gained over time<sup>145</sup> and or with ‘notion networks’<sup>146</sup> or naming practices. Hence, the capacity to think about one object is different from the capacity to think about another object or subject. Having this capacity, moreover, allows us to entertain the same thought with the same thought content on various occasions (and various thoughts about the same subject on various occasions). For example, I can entertain the thought ‘Pablo went to Stockholm in 2009’ today, tomorrow or in thirty years from now and it would be the same kind of thought with the same thought content.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, the thought would be about Pablo, my nephew,—and Stockholm, Sweden— and not about any other person called Pablo—or any other place called Stockholm—even if that person also went to Stockholm in 2009. And it is about Pablo, my nephew, because I am exercising my capacity to think about him alone; he is the (only) person with which I associate certain information (e.g. other encounters with him, various memory experiences about his life, etc.) and the person I know my family and friends refer to when they use the name Pablo in certain contexts. This is why thoughts about Pablo, or any other particular person or object, are sometimes called object-dependent:

---

<sup>144</sup> I am indebted here—and in most of this section—to Mike Martin (in particular Martin 2002).

<sup>145</sup> This is information that we *store* in what some philosophers have called (stable) *mental files* see for example (Recanati 1993).

<sup>146</sup> This is a term coined by John Perry (Perry 2001) and is similar in some respects to Kripke’s ‘chains of communication’ (Kripke 1991), Donnellan’s ‘referential chains’ (Donnellan 1970) or Sainsbury’s ‘name-using practices’ (Sainsbury 2005). The idea is that in using a name the user intends to co-refer with other uses of that same name by other speakers.

<sup>147</sup> To be sure, “Pablo went to Stockholm in 2009” uttered at  $t_1$  would be a different thought *occurrence* or *event* than “Pablo went to Stockholm in 2009” uttered at  $t_2$ . However, they would be an instance of the same (kind of) thought with the same content.



they depend on Pablo (or on any other particular person or object); this is the (only) subject that they *track*.<sup>148</sup>

Now, there is another type of singular thoughts that we can associate with slightly different cognitive capacities; these are demonstrative thoughts. Demonstrative thoughts are grounded on a temporary cognitive capacity that allows us to *pick out* particular objects that are present in a particular moment in a given context. This capacity does not presuppose any knowledge or association with any information about the subject on the basis of which we can identify or single out an object; in fact, it does not presuppose any previous instance of a thought about the same object—this is a capacity that allows us to think about any particular object that is appropriately located in the momentary circumstances giving rise to the functioning of said capacity. As such, there is some sense in which what is captured by exercises of this capacity is unrepeatable. This, of course, does not mean that we cannot exercise this kind of capacity more than one time, we certainly can; but, as opposed to the capacity associated to the other type of singular thoughts, each time this (demonstrative) capacity is exercised it picks out a potentially different object. In this way, the capacity *type*—let us call it—is not tied to only one object, as in the case of the capacity underlying the use of proper names, although each exercise *token* of the capacity is. In other words, these kinds of thoughts are not necessarily *object-dependent* in the sense explained above even if their actual contents are.<sup>149</sup>

Let me illustrate this with an example. Imagine that Marion is in Stockholm in 2009. She is taking a stroll in a park and is suddenly hit by a ball. She turns around and focuses her attention on a little boy, who happens to be Pablo, and thinks: ‘This boy is the one who hit me’. Marion does not know anything about Pablo, she has never seen him and/or participated in a conversation involving him or his name. However, Marion’s thought in this particular instance is about Pablo—and not about any other

---

<sup>148</sup> Again, as I said in fn. 142, not everybody agrees that singular thoughts are object-dependent in the sense that they depend on an *existing, actual* object. However, it is still the case that the capacity to think about a particular object is grounded in those objects, even if they do not exist.

<sup>149</sup> In Mike Martin’s terminology this kind of demonstrative thought would be *object-involving* but not *object-dependent*. Demonstrative thoughts always pick out singular objects—hence, are object-involving—but the capacity to have demonstrative thoughts does not depend on *any* object in particular (Martin 2002b).

boy. This is because it is he who is the object of her attention in virtue of being present at that particular moment in that particular circumstance. Even if her demonstrative thought picks out Pablo on any other occasion, the type of thought will not depend on her having demonstrated him before, it will not be a ‘Pablo-thought type’. For this reason the *kind* of demonstrative thought she is having is not necessarily *object-dependent*—there could have been another child in her surroundings at that very moment and, had this been the case, the thought ‘This boy is the one who hit me’ could have been about a different object. However, the *content* of her thought on this occasion is indeed object-dependent: it would not have been *this* very thought content had Pablo not been there. In other words, Marion could have exercised her capacity to think about a particular subject—Pablo, in this case—without presupposing a different capacity to think about Pablo on previous occasions, e.g., to be able to identify him in other contexts, to relate him with the content of other communication chain, etc. Moreover, she could have a demonstrative thought of the same kind at a different occasion picking out a different object. She could come back to the park two years after, be hit by a ball again and think again exactly the same kind of thought while looking at a child: ‘This boy is the one who hit me’. But in this case, she would be picking out a different child, so it would be a different thought content.

### 7.1 *Perceptual experience and photographic experience*

Experiences, like thoughts, can also be singular. As a matter of fact, the paradigmatic case of singular or particular experience is perceptual experience; the particularity of perceptual experience is a distinctive property of its phenomenology. Perceptual experience, as some have claimed, is in a certain way an ‘openness to the world’ (Crane 2011): we are directly aware in experience of mind-independent particular objects. Now, we can conceive of perceptual experiences along the lines of demonstrative thoughts (actually, demonstrative thoughts are closely tied to perceptual relations with particular objects). Imagine that I am learning to play tennis using a tennis ball shooter. At  $t_1$ , the machine shoots ball<sub>1</sub> and at  $t_2$ , the machine shoots ball<sub>2</sub>. I have perceptual experiences of both balls. However, at  $t_1$  my experience picks out ball<sub>1</sub> while at  $t_2$  it picks out ball<sub>2</sub>. My ability to experience ball<sub>1</sub> at  $t_1$  does not depend on my capacity to think about ball<sub>1</sub> at any other different occasion, I do not need to have seen the ball

before or associate it with any other information I know. My capacity to perceive it just depends on the possibility of picking out in experience that very object that is suitably located at that particular time; and similarly with ball<sub>2</sub>. In both cases I may be exercising the same kind of capacity—the capacity to perceive and pick out in experience what is in front of me, and such capacity does not depend on being able to pick that very object on other occasions. However, each time I exercise the capacity, what I perceive—the content of my experience—<sup>150</sup> does indeed depend on the particular object that is suitably located at that very moment. Hence, even if the capacity to undergo perceptual experiences does not depend on any object in particular, the content of each *token* perceptual experience does. Moreover, even if I can have different perceptual experiences at different times, the fact that my experience picks out *this* particular object in *this* very occasion is unrepeatable: the content of my experience in this occasion is immediately responsive to how the scene in front of me is *right now*.

If we were to model the content of perceptual experiences along the lines of propositional thoughts, then, it would be of this form:

(P<sub>E</sub>) *This* x is F<sup>151</sup>

Now, the case of perceptual experiences can provide us with a good model if we want to account for the proximity we feel to objects when experiencing photographs. It is reasonable to claim that if we feel close to a person depicted in a photograph it is because we are in cognitive or experiential contact with this *very person*. As I said before, when we confront a photograph it seems to us as if we were presented with

---

<sup>150</sup> I am assuming here that perceptual experiences have intentional content. Not everyone agrees with this. However, most agree that perceptual experiences are experiences of particulars. Even those who claim that the content of perceptual experience is general have to explain the intuition of particularity. I assume the content view because it makes it easier to explain the similarity that I want to draw with photographic (pictorial) experiences, but I do not thereby commit myself to any theory of perception.

<sup>151</sup> Clearly, perceptual experiences – as well as photographs – attribute more than one property to any given object. However, I will work with the simplifying assumption that there can be perceptual experiences (and then photographic experiences) of an object that has only one property. Also, although I think perceptual content (like photographic content) attributes properties to events, I will simplify the case talking only about objects.

concrete particular objects or scenes and not with a generic qualitative (universal) profile—if we experienced merely a qualitative profile, we would not feel in such an intimate contact with objects. If we want to capture this intuition, we should say that photographic experiences, like perceptual experiences, are singular as opposed to general in character; they are experiences that have objects themselves as constituents of their content. In fact, photographic experience is similar to perceptual experiences in important respects. They are not only particular or singular experiences—i.e. experiences that put us in contact with particular objects themselves and not merely with properties that can potentially be instantiated by various objects; but they also, like perceptual experiences, single out objects not by there being other photographs of the same object or scene or by the subject’s ability to identify the experienced object in other occasions or relate it with other cognitively stored information, but by picking out particulars that were suitably located at a given moment under given circumstances. My experience of the photograph of the man depicted in Figure 44, for instance, would be of that man even if I have not seen that man before, cannot recognise him or relate him to any previous information.<sup>152</sup> Had another object been there at the moment of the shot my experience would have been of *that* other object, subject or event. Similarly, the scene or object captured by the photograph and available for us in experience is an unrepeatable event. A different photograph depicting the same event or the same object would be a different photograph,<sup>153</sup> as a different perceptual experience of that same event or object would be a different perceptual experience. Our experiences of photographs, as our perceptual experiences, are responsive to how things are (or were) in the immediate environment at a particular time.

---

<sup>152</sup> Of course, this does not mean that we never recognise the object/subject photographed in virtue of having seen it before or in virtue of having previous knowledge about it. Certainly, I can see a photograph of Pablo, recognise him because I have seen him before and in virtue of my ability to relate other information I have of him to what I see in the image. But the point is that, *I do not need* to have these capacities to have a particular experience of him.

<sup>153</sup> Unless, of course, it is a copy of the original photograph. I will take this issue into account later on in this chapter.

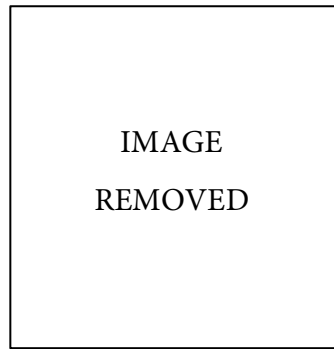


Figure 44 New York Times "Soldier in Afghanistan" (2011)

Now, this does not mean that photographic experiences are full-fledged (ordinary) perceptual experiences. There are also important differences between them. I will talk about these differences in due course but before doing so I need to clarify one important issue.

I have claimed that photographic experiences, like perceptual experiences are experiences of particulars. But some philosophers have objected to the possibility of perceptual experiences having particular content (Davies 1992; McGinn 1982). These same concerns and arguments raised against perceptual experiences can be applied to the case of photographs, so it is worth considering them before taking for granted that photographic and ordinary perceptual experiences are indeed particular.

The argument is well summarised in the following passage from Martin Davies:

[I]n the case of perceptual content, it is plausible that if two objects are genuinely indistinguishable for a subject, then a perceptual experience of the one has the same content as a perceptual experience of the other. The source of this plausibility is the thought that the perceptual content of experience is a phenomenal notion: perceptual content is a matter of how the world seems to the experiencer (...) If perceptual content is, in this sense, 'phenomenological content' (...) then, where there is no phenomenological difference for a subject, then there is no difference in content (Davies 1992, 25–26).

The idea then seems to be the following. The content of perceptual experiences (and photographic experiences, let us add) is phenomenal content: these are experiences that exploit how things look or *seem* to us. But looks, the argument assumes, trade on purely qualitative properties, on how things appear to the subject

and, as a consequence of this, individuals simply drop out—we are then only in experiential contact with universals. If two experiences (photographic or perceptual more generally)  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  are of two genuinely indistinguishable objects or events ( $o_1$  and  $o_2$  or  $e_1$  and  $e_2$ ) and thereby look exactly alike, then the experience that the subject has when she undergoes  $P_1$  should be qualitatively the same as that she has when she undergoes  $P_2$ . So how could the singularity of each object be reflected on the given perceptual/photographic content or the experience thereof? This line of argument is supported also by Colin McGinn who asserts, ‘the content of experience is not to be specified by using any terms that refer to the object of experience on pain of denying that distinct objects can seem precisely the same’ (McGinn 1982, 51). Things being this way, the content of such experiences can only be general. At most, perceptual and photographic experiences represent only that *there is an object* with the relevant properties but do not single out any object in particular. That is, the experiences would have an existentially quantified content of the form that there is an object  $x$  that has a certain property  $F$ :

$$(Pe_p) (\exists x)Fx$$

Now, if this were the case, the truth-evaluable content of the experiences in and of itself would not determine which particular object or objects are being represented. No element of the content would depend on whether we are in the (cognitive) presence of one or another particular object; strictly speaking, any object or scene that fits the qualitative profile displayed by the image could satisfy the content. In this case, the content would be accurate only if there is an object with the properties specified by the content.

But, is this argument really compelling? Are we forced to conclude that perceptual and photographic experiences are general in character? I think the answer to both questions is no.<sup>154</sup> The fact that the content of two perceptual or photographic experiences of two different objects is qualitatively indiscernible does not entail that the content of the experience is necessarily merely qualitative. That two experiences of different objects are qualitatively indiscernible is consistent with claiming that the

---

<sup>154</sup> To reject this argument I draw on the ideas of Michael G.F. Martin and Matthew Soteriou (Martin 1997; Soteriou 2000; Martin 2002b).

content of  $P_1$  is constituted by an object  $o_1$  with certain visual properties  $F$ ,  $G$ ,  $H$  that happen to be the same properties as those displayed by  $o_2$  which is a constituent of the content of  $P_2$ . Given that the objects share the same properties the two look the same to the subject, but this does not mean that the content of the experiences is only constituted by properties or universals; again, they may involve objects—individuals—that happen to have the same visual properties. The fact that the objects display the same properties explains why the contents of  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  are similar, but we still experience the individuals that share some properties.<sup>155</sup>

If this is sound, the subject may not know which object it is that she is experiencing, but she can assume it is a particular object or event. The subject may not be able to tell just by looking, which object she is looking at, whether it is  $o_1$  or  $o_2$  — she may even think that both photographs or both perceptual experiences present her with the same object. However, from the fact that two objects seem to the viewer to have the same properties, it does not follow that what the viewer takes to be the object of one picture is the same object that seems to her to be the object of the other picture. In undergoing  $P_1$ , it seems to the viewer as if *that* object [ $o_1$ ] has properties  $F$ ,  $G$  and  $H$ , while when undergoing  $P_2$ , it seems to the viewer as if *that* object [ $o_2$ ] has properties  $F$ ,  $G$  and  $H$ . In this case, we would be willing to say that the experiences of the two photographs or two perceptual experiences differ in at least one respect, namely, insofar as the content of  $P_1$  is satisfied by  $o_1$ , while the content of  $P_2$  is satisfied by  $o_2$ . So if the viewer comes to believe that the photograph or the perceptual experience of  $o_1$  presents her with  $o_2$ , there are grounds to say she would be wrong, since only  $o_1$  satisfies the conditions laid down by the content.

If this is sound, the proposed argument does not succeed in showing that perceptual experiences—and, for that matter, photographic experiences—are general in character.

I suggest then, that the content of photographic experiences—like that of perceptual experiences—is particular. It contains an irreducibly demonstrative element so that when a subject experiences an object in a photograph the demonstrative element in the content applies only to the relevant object that is seen in

---

<sup>155</sup> (Soteriou 2000).

it. According to this view, objects are constituents of the contents of photographs. That is, the contents are object-dependent in such a way that the (token) experience cannot be had, had the relevant object not been there. The content of photographic experiences then, can also be modelled on the form:

(Pe<sub>PH</sub>) *That* x is F

This being so, the accuracy conditions laid down by the experiential content would only be satisfied by one object, namely, the relevant object that is seen-in the photograph; and this object would indeed make a difference to the content and the experience it supports. Moreover, if the content of photographs is particular in this sense, our experience of photographs would not only put us in relation with properties that could be shared by various objects; it would put us in cognitive or experiential contact with a specific particular object.

## 7.2 *Photographic experience, transparency and episodic memory*

So far I have claimed that perceptual and photographic experiences are similar in one important respect. The former, like the latter, are experiences of particulars in virtue of their *capturing* or *picking out*, so to say, particular objects present at a particular moment in a particular location. This particularity, in turn, is reflected in their respective peculiar phenomenologies.

Notice that this similarity between photographic and perceptual experience may be taken as a reason to believe that Walton's transparency thesis is correct: if photographic experiences were indeed ordinary perceptual experiences it would be plausible to claim that they are particular in character, since particularity is a mark of perceptual experience. This, in turn, would explain their intimacy. So far I have not said anything that is incompatible or that is not somehow presupposed by Walton's view. To the contrary, if anything, I am bringing forward one feature—*particularity*—not emphasised by Walton's theory that further explains the intimacy with objects that perceptual and photographic experiences share. Does this mean that I am recommending that we should embrace the transparency thesis? No. I do think that if Walton's view is in any sense persuasive, it is because he captures something correctly, namely, that there is a property that ordinary perceptual experience and photographic



experience share that accounts for the feeling of proximity both experiences afford: *particularity*. Now, as other theorists, I also think that there are significant differences between photographic and ordinary perceptual experiences that should make us reluctant to accept Walton's view. I have already mentioned the differences that other philosophers have put forward (see section 3 on this chapter), but here are some other important ones.

Here is the first one. I mentioned before that both photographic and ordinary perceptual experiences, like demonstrative thoughts, are based on a capacity to pick out particulars in a given unrepeatable occasion. This one-off capacity allows us to have thoughts or experiences of particular objects in the absence of any knowledge, information or previous exposure to those particulars or their names. Now, in the case of perceptual experiences this implies that I cannot have the same perceptual experience with the same content again. My perceptual experience of ball<sub>1</sub> as it comes out of the shooting machine today will not be the same as a perceptual experience of that same ball coming out of the same shooting machine tomorrow, the day after and in the following twenty days. Perceptual experiences are unrepeatable events of unrepeatable scenes.<sup>156</sup> This is different in the case of photographs. Although photographs, like perceptual experiences, capture an unrepeatable moment in time constituted by whatever particular is suitably located therein, a subject can indeed have the same photographic experience on many occasions. Moreover, there can be many copies of the same photograph and each of these copies—provided that they are good reproductions—support the same kind of photographic experience. Surely, every time I confront a photograph, it would be a different instance of an experience, but it would be the same (type of) experience with the same content in all of the instances of

---

<sup>156</sup> This is not only because every perceptual experience is a different episode or occurrence. Compare with the case of a belief like 'Pablo was in Stockholm in 2009'. I can think this same thought at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ ; the belief entertained at  $t_1$  would be a different occurrence or belief episode, but it would be the same belief content and the same kind of belief.

looking at the same photograph.<sup>157</sup> Photographic experiences then, are repeatable events of unrepeatable scenes.

The second significant difference between perceptual experience and photographic experience is probably more obvious but not less relevant. When we perceive objects, these objects are present not only to the mind or in experience but they are also present in our surroundings. In looking at photographs, by contrast, objects are also present in experience and, in that sense, we feel cognitively close to them, but they are absent from our environment. Moreover, we are always aware of their absence when we experience them.

Related to this, there is yet another significant difference between perceptual and photographic experiences. When we perceive objects or scenes, there is a continuous interaction between the perceiver and her environment, and this ongoing process or constant interaction is reflected in our experience, since it changes *in real time* as objects of the environment change. In looking at photographs, by contrast, this ongoing interaction has ceased.

Now, one could think that the particularity of perceptual experience is somehow linked to the immediate relation we have to objects or events in the environment. So it might be pertinent to ask: do any of the differences drawn between photographs and perceptual experiences preclude photographic experiences from having particular content? Certainly not. Take, for example, the case of episodic memory. Episodic memory is frequently conceived of as yet another paradigmatic mental state with particular content. As it has been claimed, episodic memories are *retained acquaintance* (Martin 2001): they preserve or inherit the particularity of the original perceptual experience, so their content is not merely qualitative in character. When I recall some previous experience I had at some point in my life—say, the first time I saw the Angel Falls—the content of my memory is not merely existential content, what I bring to my mind is *that* particular event that I saw once; *that very* scene is present and vividly clear to my mind. And this is so regardless of the fact that

---

<sup>157</sup> I mean only the experience of *seeing* objects or events *in* the image. Certainly, in as much as perceiving a photograph - the physical object - is, in and of itself, a perceptual experience and, as such, it is unrepeatable.

the scene is not present anymore in my immediate environment and that I cannot thereby (physically) interact with it.

But if this is so, if there are cognitive phenomena different from perception that lack the immediacy with objects and yet display particularity, then the absence of objects from the immediate environment should not prevent us from thinking that experiencing objects in photographs is a cognitive experiential state with particular content different from ordinary perception. In other words, we do not have to embrace the transparency thesis, or extend our notion of 'seeing' in order to keep the intuition that photographic experiences have particular content.

In fact, in relevant respects, the case of photographic experience is similar to that of episodic memory. Episodic memories, like photographs, are also repeatable events of unrepeatable scenes and objects. I can have a memory experience of the first time I saw the Angel Falls, in many occasions and, if my memory functions well, I will remember the same unique episode with the same content in every occasion. Memories, then, unlike perceptual experiences and like photographic experiences, are repeatable events of unrepeatable scenes. Furthermore, in memories, like in photographs, the objects represented, are only present to the mind but absent from one's immediate environment: when I remember the moment when I first saw the Angel Falls, the scene is present and vividly clear to my mind, however, I do not for one minute think that I am in the Venezuelan *Gran Sabana* (I do not even have the quasi-illusion of being there). I am very aware that the Angel Falls are very far away from my surroundings. And finally, in memories, like in photographs, there is no ongoing physical interaction between the subject and the depicted object, e.g., while remembering the sights of the *Gran Sabana* I cannot look around again and touch the water, my interaction with the environment has long ceased.

I suggest then that we model photographic experience on the case of episodic memory experiences. As I have mentioned, photographic experiences are significantly different from perceptual experiences, but it makes sense to claim that the moment when the camera is in front of the object, the moment where the photograph was first taken, can indeed be assimilated to what could have been a perceptual experience. Certainly, it cannot be literally a perceptual experience because the camera is not the

kind of object that can undergo conscious experiential states. But the camera and the photosensitive material are in a similar relation to the object that the subject of a perceptual experience would be. If the camera were, say, a sophisticated robot with consciousness, it would arguably undergo a perceptual episode of the object in front of it.

Photographs, I suggest, support a sort of external memory experience: they support an experience that documents or preserves the content (or part of the content) of a perception-like event. In the same way as memory experiences not only preserve the qualitative aspect of the scenes, but their phenomenological content preserves their particular character, photographic experience not only preserve the likeness of the scenes and objects, they also preserve the *particularity* of the original perception-like episodes. In this sense, I claim, photographs are what I call *documental images*.

### **8 The *documental images* view and phenomenology. Summary and clarifications**

I have claimed that photographs are *documental images*: they support an experience that preserves the particularity of an original perception-like episode. Photographic experiences, like episodic memories, are experiences of particulars: in looking at photographs, we are in direct cognitive contact with concrete particulars, even though they are not present in our surroundings and our interaction with them has already ceased.

This proposal clearly meets the three requirements necessary to account for the peculiar phenomenology of photographs. Firstly: distinctiveness. I claimed in section 6 that particularity is a distinctive property of photographs. Even if some paintings support particular experiences in the sense explained, this feature is by no means characteristic of the kind of pictures they are. Paintings, etchings and drawings can—and very frequently do—support experiences whose content is purely general. Paintings such as *The Flower Seller* by Diego Rivera (Figure 45) or Salvador Dali's *The Great Masturbator* present us with a *general kind* of person or scene, but not one in particular. Furthermore, some paintings (or portraits) whose aim is to depict a concrete particular person or object frequently *do not* do so by supporting experiences that present us with those very particulars (or with *any* concrete particular whatsoever). Take for instance Picasso's *Dora Maar and cat*, a drawing of Obama

(Figure 40) or any drawing made by a kid of his or her mother (see, for instance, Figure 37 above). They may represent concrete particulars, but our experience *itself*, in the absence of other beliefs or background knowledge, does not seem to pick out or present us with concrete particular objects.

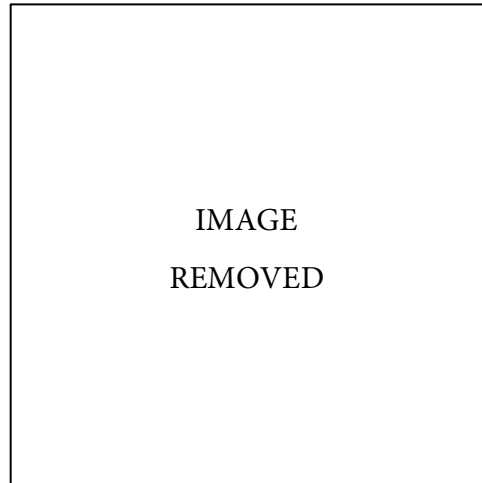


Figure 45 Diego Rivera "El Vendedor de Alcatraces" (1941)

Photographic experiences, by contrast, like memories or perceptual experiences are always of particulars. Concrete particular objects are always a constitutive part of the content of photographic experiences.

Secondly: (purely visual) recognisability. Particularity is something that is clearly recognisable in experience. The phenomenal character of one's photographic experience is determined by the actual objects or scenes (and their respective qualities) that were present at a given moment in time where the photograph was shot. As Savedoff suggests, we perceive photographs as of particulars that we are prompted to identify. These particular objects, moreover, are available for us to recognise in experiencing photographs alone. There is no need to have any beliefs about the photographic process or about the depicted subjects. It is true that in some occasions, we do not *clearly* experience particulars in photographs. In some occasions what we see in photographs may seem to us too blurry or fuzzy. But this does not mean that we are not thereby in the presence of particulars. Think about a parallel case in ordinary perceptual experiences: we can have a blurry experience when we see an object without wearing our glasses, say, or we may not fully distinguish an object when perceiving it under water. But this does not mean that objects are not present to us in experience. In

the case of ordinary perceptual experiences, as in the case of photographic experiences, this only shows that the phenomenology of the experience is not *fully* determined by these objects or scenes. There might be other aspects – such as filters, variability of lenses, etc. – that contribute to the phenomenology of the photographic experience as a whole. But again, concrete particular objects and scenes always determine part of the content of the experience, and this is reflected in the phenomenology.

This takes us to the third and final requirement: closeness. The fact that concrete particular objects determine, and are actually *given to us* in experience, generates the peculiar feeling of closeness and intimacy with objects. We feel intimate with them because we recognise them as concrete particulars and because they are cognitively present to us—even when they are absent from our surroundings.

Now an important clarification is in order. The fact that photographic experiences are always of particulars does not mean that photographs can only represent the particular objects that constitute their content or the content of our experiences. A photograph of a particular object  $o_1$ —which is constitutive of the photographic content and the experience thereof—can also depict another object  $o_2$  as well, either by stipulation or by making it somehow recognisable (this object, in turn, can be a non-existent particular). A photograph of Charles Chaplin, for instance, may be used to represent *Charlot*, by stipulation—by adding, say, a proper name as its title. Similarly, a photograph of a pipe—where the particular pipe is the constitutive element of the content—can depict a saxophone by making it somehow visibly recognisable (Figure 46). Or a photograph, whose content contains a particular cat and a particular woman, can depict a catwoman by making it also visibly recognisable. In these cases, although the photographic content and the experience thereof would be picking out a concrete particular pipe, and a particular woman and particular cat, we would not be interpreting them correctly if we only see a pipe with holes in one of the photographs and only a cat and a woman in the other photograph.

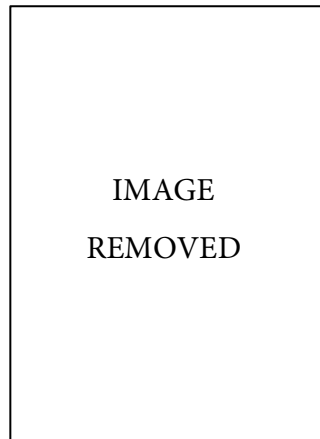


Figure 46 Chema Madoz "Pipa" (1999)

Likewise, to say that photographs and the experiences thereof have particular content does not entail that photographs can just represent particulars and not, for instance, general types. Even if photographic experiences are always particular in character, photographs can be used to represent something general, as when a photograph of a concrete particular telephone is used in a catalogue to represent all the telephones of that type, or a photograph of a particular dog is used in an encyclopaedia to represent how dogs look. The content of the photograph—or the experience thereof—will still be particular, it will still pick out only one concrete particular object, but in certain contexts the use it is given may just put emphasis in what that particular has in common with other things of its kind, namely, the qualitative aspect.

Finally, it is worth mentioning some advantages that the *documental images* view has over alternative theories. I will do so in the following section.

## 9 The documental images view vs. alternative theories

In comparison to Walton's 'transparency thesis', my view offers all the advantages of the theory without the drawbacks. Firstly, my account does justice to Walton's intuition that photographic experience shares with perceptual experiences something important that accounts for the peculiar phenomenology of both experiences. Both experiences are particular in character: in seeing photographs, as in seeing things face-to-face we seem to be in cognitive or experiential contact with (real, mind-independent) people, objects and scenes. Now, in order to account for this intuition we do not need to commit to saying that we literally see through photographs.

Instead of saying that photographs are *transparent*, we can say that they put us in cognitive contact with particulars. In confronting photographs we undergo experiences as of concrete particular objects: these concrete particulars are constituents of our experiences. This, in turn, accounts for the special feeling of closeness that photographs afford. Photographs, like memory experiences, only *preserve* or *document* the particularity of a perception-like event. But in the same way as remembering a given event is not to perceive it again, experiencing a photographed event, even when it involves perceiving the physical photograph it does not involve perceiving the photographed scene again. The cognitive access to the particular object or event is preserved, but it is not literally a perceptual experience of the object or scene.

Also, instead of saying, as Walton does, that photographs ground *indirect* seeing in order to capture the fact that photographs are a sort of ‘remote’ way of being in contact with particulars, we can say that photographs *preserve* the particular content of a past episode. In this way, in looking at photographs we have access to particular objects and scenes that are not present anymore in our surroundings. Moreover, in comparing photographs with episodic memory, instead of assimilating them with perceptual experiences, my account solves the problems that critics raised against Walton’s view. Photographic experiences, like episodic memory experiences, preserve the particularity of the original scene but they fail to co-vary with respect to changes and movements in the egocentric location of the depicted object. Our perspective on the experienced objects does not change as we move, and the events have ceased when we experience them.<sup>158</sup>

My view also offers advantages over the ‘depictive traces’ theory. Notice that, according to the trace theory, the only thing that is preserved from the original scene is

---

<sup>158</sup> In addition, my theory is consistent with the epistemic consequences that critics of Walton’s view such as Meskin and Cohen have drawn from the fact that photographs do not convey spatial egocentric information. According to Meskin and Cohen (Cohen and Meskin 2004) photographs are ‘spatially agnostic informants’ because they convey information about the visually accessible properties of representational objects in the absence of information about its egocentric location. This, in turn, can be advantageous, among other things because we can obtain some relevant information about objects remotely. My view accommodates this well.



the content of the photographic experience—and and thereby what is available to us in experience—is the ‘visual similarity’ with the relevant object or scene. That is, what we experience when we look at a photograph is a certain set of properties that resemble those of a given object. But a consequence of this is that the trace theory is consistent with saying that in looking at a photograph we are only in contact with universals (visual properties) and not with particulars.

Let me try to explain this more clearly. Consider the case of two photographs  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ , one of which is of object  $o_1$ , while the other is of object  $o_2$ . The objects are indistinguishable and are somehow intimately connected, so that if  $o_1$  changes its visual aspect, then  $o_2$  changes correlatively. Clearly, in order for both photographs to have any content at all, they need to be causally connected to a particular object that reflects light— $o_1$  in the first case and  $o_2$  in the second case. Now this only tells us how photographs acquire the visual properties they have—i.e., by a *natural* or causal process; but the causal process is neutral with respect to which *kind of content* is the correct one to attribute to a photograph (particular or general)—and correspondingly, to what it is that we experience when we confront a photograph. In other words, a causal explanation that is appealed to by the trace theory is compatible with claiming that given that  $o_1$  and  $o_2$  are exactly alike, the causal interaction gives rise to the same kind of image or the same kind of experience—an image or experience with the same kind of content—since the content merely reproduces the visual appearance of the depicted objects and, again, the appearance of the two objects is exactly the same.<sup>159</sup> In that case, one could claim, if  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  share the same content, regardless of their being caused by different objects, then the content of both images must be general in character; if we can obtain the same kind of content by being in causal contact with one object rather than the other, neither  $o_1$  nor  $o_2$  is essential to determining the

---

<sup>159</sup> This mirrors a problem that affects causal theories of representation more generally that has been called ‘the Disjunction Problem.’ Very broadly it calls into question that causal theories can account for how the content of mental states *pick out* one particular object rather than other that could have given rise to the same state (see Fodor 1984; Cummins 1991). “The Disjunction Problem” is also an issue for causal theories of perception that aim to explain the particularity of perceptual experience (see Schellenberg 2010). (*N.B.* it is important to distinguish this ‘disjunction problem’ – a problem for causal theories of (mental) representation, as it was coined by Fodor – from ‘Disjunctivism’ – a theory of perception that among other things deny that perception and hallucination are the same *kind* of mental state.)

content. On this view, *some* object is necessary but no one *in particular*. It would follow that, strictly speaking, what we experience in photographs would be universals—properties that various objects can share—not particulars or individuals. The intentional content of our experience would be then existential or general content: we would experience that *there is an object with certain properties*, but our experience itself would not single out which object it is—this would ultimately be determined by the causal history of the image; but the causal history, as I mentioned in section 4, is an external fact that would not be a constituent of the experience itself.<sup>160</sup> In a nutshell: nothing in the *trace theory* prevents photographic content—or the content of our experiences thereof—from being general rather than particular. But if this is so, how can we say that in visually confronting photographs we feel in intimate and close contact with *particular objects*?

My view, in turn, by claiming that photographic experiences, like memory experiences, preserve not only the visual properties but the particularity of the original scene or object, explains why we feel *experientially* close to a *particular* object or scene: when we look at photographs we are in cognitive contact with the very particulars and not with properties that can be instantiated by various objects. This, in turn, brings a second advantage: my theory explains why the feeling of closeness derives from the very visual experience and not from a belief. By claiming that only the particular objects that the photographs are of are constituents of our experience and thereby are present to us cognitively, my theory provides a proper account of the *visual* phenomenology of photography.

Finally, my theory shares with Hopkins's view the intuition that there is a property that perceptual and memory experiences have in common with photographic experiences that partly explains their respective phenomenologies. Also, I agree with Hopkins in that the relevant property is not transparency. However, although I also agree with him in that factivity plays an important role in photography (see Chapter 2) I do not think that this property explains the feeling of intimacy characteristic of our

---

<sup>160</sup> Notice that, in principle, this is a problem that Walton's theory also has. After all, Walton tries to justify his claim that photographs are transparent by appealing to causation and the preservation of visual similarities. However, in claiming that photographs ground genuine perceptual experiences he goes beyond the causal explanation.

experience of photographs. As I mentioned in section 5, factivity is not a property that is available in experience. Particularity, however, is indeed something that is integral to photographic experience: the objects we see in photographs are a constituent part of the content of our experience.

## 10 Conclusion

Photographs are not only special because they are natural images and we can thereby typically *infer* the existence and appearance of the objects and scenes they depict. Photographs are also special because they allow us to experience these objects and scenes as concrete and existent particulars. Arguing for the latter claim has been the purpose of this chapter. I claimed that photographs are a perceptual recognisable category, there is something it is like to experience a photograph that is different from what it is like to experience another type of picture. This does not mean that photographs do not support seeing-in; they do indeed. However, they support a distinctive type of pictorial experience. Photographs, I argued, are documental images, images that support an experience that preserves the particularity of the original scene. It is the property of particularity that explains what is special about photographic experiences that put us in close cognitive contact with objects and scenes. Other views captured the intuition that photographic experiences share something with ordinary perceptual experiences and memory experiences, but I claimed that this property is not *transparency* or *factivity*—as Walton and Hopkins claim. Also, I argued that a mere causal and counterfactual connection that preserves the visual appearance of the original scenes and objects is not enough to explain the special phenomenology of photographic experiences. Photographic experiences preserve more than the visual appearance of objects and scenes—they preserve their particularity.

Now the fact that photographs are documental images can be taken to be a further reason to think that photographs are typically documentary or that they favour the purpose of non-fiction. But in order to see whether this is in fact the case—and if it is, how or in what sense photographs contribute to non-fiction—we need to discuss the nature of documentary or non-fictional works, how they are distinguished from fictional works and whether this distinction actually applies to photography. This is something that I will do in Chapter 4 and 5.

---

## PART II

---

\* \* \*

**I**N PART I, I have taken the first steps towards elucidating whether the nature of the photographic medium affects the classification of a work as fiction or non-fiction. I introduced two lines of thought to back up the claim that the photographic medium does affect the categorisation of a work as fiction or non-fiction. The first argument, which I addressed in Chapter 1, concludes that all photographs are fiction (or favour the purpose of fiction) since (i) understanding pictorial representation—photographic or otherwise—requires engaging in an imaginative project and (ii) the nature of fiction is defined by an invitation to imagine. I claimed that the idea that fiction should be defined in terms of an invitation to imagine is based on a misinterpretation of Walton's theory of fiction. But even if engaging with pictorial representations in general, and photographic representations in particular, involves the use of imagination, there is no reason to believe that photographs thereby favour the purpose of fiction, let alone are fictions or fictional works by definition. The second line of thought is, at first, more intuitive. It suggests that there is a close connection between the photographic medium and non-fiction so that there is a sense in which photographs are typically documentary or favour the purpose of non-fiction. Two reasons to think that this is so are (i) that photographs put us in a special epistemic and phenomenological relation with the real and (ii) that given that photographs are natural images, they cannot depict ficta or fictional entities by photographic means. In Chapters 2 and 3 I addressed this second line of thought. In Chapter 2 I argued that (ii) is false and, hence, it does not provide a good reason to think that photographs favour the purpose of non-fiction. However, in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 I made it clear that I agreed with (i): photographs are indeed special in the way they put us in contact with real objects and events of the world. I offered my own view regarding the phenomenology of photography and also put forward some ways in which photographs are epistemically advantageous. The next question is whether (i) is a good reason to believe that photographs are typically documentary, or whether these phenomenological and epistemic features of photography favour the purpose of non-fiction—and if so, to what extent or in what way. I consider this question the following chapters.

## CHAPTER 4

---

### DOCUMENTAL IMAGES AND DOCUMENTARY WORKS

PHOTOGRAPHS, we have seen in the previous chapters, bear a special connection with the real. This is not because they are fictionally incompetent: as I argued in chapter 2, there is nothing in the photographic medium that prevents photographs from representing fictional entities or scenes. Rather, it is because they are *documental*, i.e. what we see in them are typically particular objects and scenes; furthermore, the photographic mechanism makes it difficult or costly to obtain manipulated images and, for this reason, photographs are typically images that represent objects that exist as they are presented in the image. Now, it seems intuitive to think that the intimate relation between photographs and reality should somehow affect the categorisation of a work as fiction or non-fiction. Or more specifically, it should favour the purpose of documentary or non-fictional works in as much as these works traffic with the real. But how exactly does the photographic medium relate to documentary or non-fictional works? One claim could be that being an honest or veridical photograph is sufficient to be documentary. And in as much as photographs are typically honest or veridical—i.e., reliably capture the appearance of the objects and scenes—, they are thereby typically documentary or non-fictional.<sup>161</sup> For, if representing fictional entities or events is the exception rather than the rule, or if photographs typically represent real rather than fictional objects, then it should be typically the case that photographic images are documentary or non-fictional. Another claim, supported by authors such as Gregory Currie, is not that photographically representing the real is sufficient for being a documentary work, but that it is nevertheless necessary. In this chapter I address these positions and I also consider a view that sees no intrinsic connection between the photographic medium and the category of documentary. My preliminary view is that the photographic medium plays an important role in classifying works as documentary

---

<sup>161</sup> I am going to use the terms ‘non-fictional’ and ‘documentary’ interchangeably. As I will mention later on in this chapter, there is a narrow and more technical way to understand ‘documentary’ that distinguishes it from the broader category of ‘non-fiction.’ However, this technical use will not be my central concern.

but is not essential for classification. But I will say something more in the following chapter.

## 1 Overview

My strategy in this chapter will be the following. I start by considering the claim that photographs are typically documentary because they typically represent real objects or scenes. I maintain that there are good reasons to doubt that this claim is correct: being a veridical documental photograph is not sufficient to be documentary (section 2). In section 3 I turn to analyse two definitions of documentary as applied to film that take very different views of the role that photography plays in classification: Gregory Currie's theory of documentary film, according to which photographs are necessary for a work to be classified as documentaries, and Noël Carroll's notion of *Films of Presumptive Assertion*, that suggests there is nothing intrinsic to the category of documentaries that connects them with the photographic medium. I claim that neither of these theories is satisfactory either as a theory of documentary or as an explanation of how, if at all, photography affects the categorisation of a work as non-fiction. I then present a more recent theory that seems more promising: the *Genre Theory* put forward by Stacie Friend. Although this is not specifically a theory of documentary and has not yet been applied to the visual arts, I suggest it can easily be adapted to provide a better account of documentary works. Moreover, it can give us a more convincing view of the connection between the photographic medium and the category of non-fiction. In the next chapter (Chapter 5) I come back to the specific case of (still) photography.

## 2 From Documental to Documentary

Photographs, I concluded in Chapter 3, are documental images: they preserve the particularity of the concrete object or event they are of. When we experience photographic images we have experiences as of particular objects and scenes. These images, in turn, are the product of a technological development that responded to cultural and social pressures and, as I argued in Chapter 2, was selected for its capacity to produce images that support experiences with particular content that function as reliable indicators of the existence and appearance of the objects and scenes they depict. None of this means that photographs cannot depict fictional characters or events. In fact,

I argued in Chapter 2, they can do so by photographic means. However, another conclusion from Chapter 2 was that it is more difficult to obtain photographs that represent fictional characters or events than to obtain what I called *honest* or veridical photographs, i.e., photographs that represents real existent objects or events and reliably capture their appearance. Hence, it is much more likely to obtain photographs that reliably represent real objects than to obtain photographs that represent ficta.

If this is so, one could conclude that (a) photographs typically represent real objects and scenes veridically; consequently, (b) they are typically documentary or non-fictional works.

Although both (a) and (b) are empirical matters that cannot be settled here, they are both very likely to be true. It is probably true that photographs typically represent real objects and scenes—it would be surprising, although certainly not impossible, that even if it would be easier and more likely to obtain photographs that accurately represent real objects, photographs typically turned out to represent fictional entities. Also, it seems very plausible to claim that the majority of actual photographs are non-fictional: just think about all the family albums, Instagram snapshots and the everyday photographs that populate people’s hard disks. However, we should be careful to conclude the latter directly from the former. That is, the fact that the majority of photographs are non-fiction is not clearly a direct consequence of the fact that photographs typically represent real objects and events in an accurate way.<sup>162</sup> To be sure, it would be surprising if standard characteristics of the photographic medium including its likelihood to accurately represent real objects, were completely unrelated to the fact that most photographs are non-fictional. Indeed I will argue that there is indeed a close connection between the photographic medium and the category of non-fiction. However, the connection is not established by the fact that photographs typically accurately represent real objects. Theorists who have been concerned with the nature of both fiction and non-fiction have been keen on insisting that referential and semantic relations do not by themselves determine the category of a work.<sup>163</sup> I think they are

---

<sup>162</sup> Since these claims are ultimately empirical matters, they are strictly speaking ‘purported’ facts, but I will assume that they are facts.

<sup>163</sup> (Walton 1990a; Currie 1990; Currie 1995; Lamarque and Olsen 1994a; Carroll 1996a; Friend 2008; Friend 2012).



right: we do not classify a work of literature as fiction, just because it refers to or represents fictional characters, or because they misrepresent real events: a biographical film about Walt Disney is not fictional just because it makes reference to or its images represent Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse and Goofy; the book *Physical Education* published in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century by the physician J.J. Becher is not classified as fiction just because it presents the theory of phlogiston, a chemical element that does not exist, and neither is Claudius Ptolemy's *Almagest*, even if it misrepresents the Earth as being the centre of the universe. Similarly, the fact that *War and Peace* refers to Napoleon and accurately represents some aspects of the French invasion of Russia, and the film *Intervista* represents Federico Fellini and Anita Ekberg playing themselves, does not make *War and Peace* and *Intervista* documentary works. As Lamarque and Olsen point out with respect to literary works, we should clearly distinguish between the referential or representational dimension of a work (which includes what the work is *of* or about) and the pragmatic dimension (which, for Lamarque and Olsen, indicates the category under which the work falls, its function and the relevant attitude the audience should take towards the content) (Lamarque and Olsen 1994a, 229–233). If this is so for literature and films, why should we think it is different for photographs?

Consider the following cases: (1) One might take a still photograph of the making of a film in which one of the (fictional) characters is entirely computer generated and projected holographically in three dimensions on the pro-filmic scene. The photograph is intended to be evidence of the shooting process, and what we see in it is, for example, part of the original stage where the film was shot and the holographic figure projected on site. This photograph presumably depicts a fictional character—or at least one could plausibly claim that it does so—<sup>164</sup>and yet it would be awkward to classify it as a fictional photograph.

---

<sup>164</sup> Clearly if one is a FIP advocate, one would not easily accept this example as a good case to prove my point. But even the FIP advocate should be able to accept that the photograph can represent a fictional entity by non-photographic means – say theatrical means. This, I think is sufficient for my example to go through. If this still does not convince the sceptic, I provide further cases below.

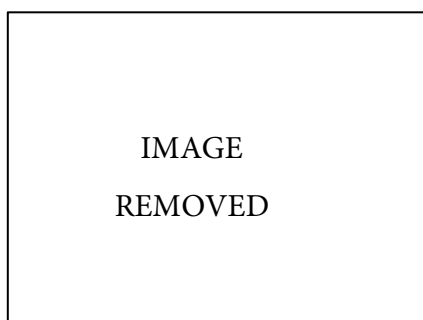


Figure 47 Jeff Wall "The Passerby" (1996)

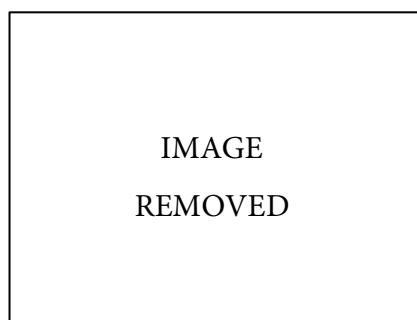


Figure 49 Jeff Wall "Untitled" Ed. for Parkett (1997)

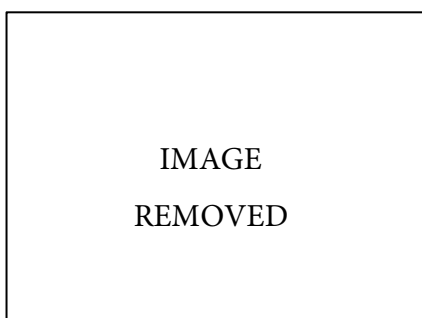


Figure 48 Steve Klein "Brad and Angelina. Domestic Bliss" W. Magazine (2005)

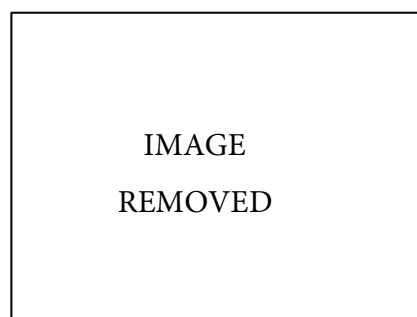


Figure 50 Steve Klein "Brad and Angelina. Domestic Bliss" W. Magazine (2005)

(2) Jeff Wall's photographs *The Passerby* (Figure 47) and *Untitled* (Figure 49), and Steve Klein's series of photographs *Brad and Angelina. Domestic Bliss* (Figure 48 and Figure 50) all represent real people, objects and scenes. In fact, in the case of Klein's series, the real names of the people depicted figure in the title. However, it would not be appropriate to categorise any of these photographs as non-fictional. Wall's *The Passerby* intentionally adopts a style that is associated with documentary photography: the photograph is in black and white and the scene seems to be very spontaneous and natural. But the photograph is not meant to inform us about or to document an everyday situation. Rather, it is meant to create a certain air of mystery and suspense typical of cinematic night scenes, which is common in some of Jeff Wall's work. Similarly with Figure 49. This photograph is not meant to inform the viewer about a given part of the anatomy of a woman's body or to make people aware of a certain state of affairs of the world. Rather, in line with some of the author's work, it is meant to evoke in the viewer a certain kind of story reminiscent of (fictional) film noir scenes. Classifying them as non-fiction or documentary would lead us to interpret and appreciate them incorrectly.

(3) Another perhaps more contentious case to support the view that reference and truth do not determine the classification of fiction or non-fiction in photography is deceptive photography. Take for instance the Hitler-without-Goebbels image that I talked about in Chapter 2 (Figure 24). As I have claimed, this image represents a fictive or non-veridical event, something that never happened as such, and yet, the photograph is presented as a visual report of a given event. It is intended to make the audience believe that the (fictive) representational content was the case. That is, to make the viewers think that Goebbels was not present at that precise moment in time. Hence, it seems reasonable to say that this, as well as similar deceptive photographs, are non-fictional even if they depict fictive entities or events.<sup>165</sup>

It could be claimed, however, that cases of deception should be better classified as fictional. The fact that they try to misguide viewers into believing that non-existent things actually exist or that scenes happen in a different way than actually happened, does not change the fact that non-existent things do not exist and things happened the way they happened and not otherwise.

This complaint probably derives from a frequent colloquial and disparaging use of the term ‘fiction’ as equivalent to ‘what is not true’ or ‘what is invented’. But, as theorists of fiction have been also keen to insist, one should be careful not to confuse the category of fiction as applied to representational works with false or made up content.<sup>166</sup> In fact, there are good reasons why deceptive works, including deceptive photographs, should be categorised as non-fictional – and hence, why a good theory should not count these works as fictional.

---

<sup>165</sup> I do not mean to imply that the intention to make the audience believe that a given content was the case is a sufficient condition for documentary works. As I will argue in section 5, this is not the case. However, this seems to be a reason to support the claim that the picture is not correctly appreciated and classified as a fiction.

<sup>166</sup> (Walton 1990a; Currie 1990; Lamarque and Olsen 1994a; Friend 2012) In all likelihood the term ‘fiction’ as applied to the classification of representation comes from the same roots as the term ‘fiction’ used colloquially as a synonym of ‘untrue’ or ‘invented’, but the point that theorists of fiction have been keen on clarifying is that fictional works can be truthful in many ways, in fact, the stories they tell might (or turn out to be) completely true. Similarly, although fictional works frequently contain invented stories or characters, they can be wholly based on true events. Made up elements can be minimal or perhaps nonexistent and the story can still be fictional.

One reason is that characterising photographic (or other) non-fictional or documentary works in the way suggested conflates the ontological question, “what are non-fictional/documentary works?” with the epistemic question, “how successful are they in conveying the truth?” The problem with this is that it does not allow for there being defective documentary works, since only those which are good can be called “documentary,” but clearly, the history of documentary photography is replete with cases of error and deception.

More importantly, perhaps, the idea of ‘deception’ would be unintelligible if what is being called deceptive were not judged against a certain legitimate expectation of truthfulness or commitment to the facts. For example, we can blame someone for lying to us only if we recognise that she had clearly made an assertion or if we can assume by the context of her utterance that the information was put forward as true. It would not make sense to blame someone called John of being a liar because he utters “my name is Luca” while singing in the shower. By the same token, if we are told that the photograph *Dr. Duanus’ Famous Magic Hat* (Figure 51), is part of Duane Michals’ series of fantasy photography, it would certainly be misguided to criticise it just because it is not true that there is a man emerging from the top hat. Being deceitful or false is not frequently an appropriate criticism for fictional works.<sup>167</sup>



Figure 51 Duane Michals "Dr Duanus' Famous Magic Hat" (1996)

By contrast, to say of a non-fictional work that it is false or deceitful is indeed and almost always a legitimate criticism. And it is, because classifying a work as a documentary typically sets the expectations of accuracy. Notice that what sets the

---

<sup>167</sup> This is not always the case with all fictional works. Historical novels or films also raise expectations of truthfulness or accuracy, for example. However, it seems that creating expectations of accuracy and commitment to the truth are more pervasive and characteristic features of non-fictional works.

relevant expectations is not the fact that the work is photographic. It is true, as I claimed in Chapter 2, that we typically take photographs as reliable indicators of the existence of the objects and scenes they depict and we typically expect that there is an object or event in the world with the appearance shown by the photograph. This is actually something that both fictional and non-fictional works exploit (take the case of Annie Leibovitz's photographs shown in Chapter 1 (Figure 9, Figure 10)). However, as experienced spectators, we also know that photographs can be put to various uses. We do not evaluate the photographic manipulation of the Hitler-without-Goebbels image as a defect just because it is a photograph and therefore it should be accurate. There is nothing in the medium that dictates what its correct use should be, as Figure 51 shows. Again, the medium is normatively neutral (see Chapter 2 section 5). Rather, we seem to find the photograph defective because it is put forward as non-fictional. If this same photograph were presented as fictional or in a clearly ironic context, our assessment of it would presumably be very different; the manipulation might not be considered a defect. Take for example Figure 52. Considering the context of this image (it was published in a blog devoted to parodies and comedy) it would be inappropriate to criticise this image as deceptive because it misrepresents a scene or presents us with an event that never took place.<sup>168</sup> However, if the photograph were presented as a documentary photograph, say, on the front cover of the New York Times, we would certainly blame the editors for trying to deceive us.

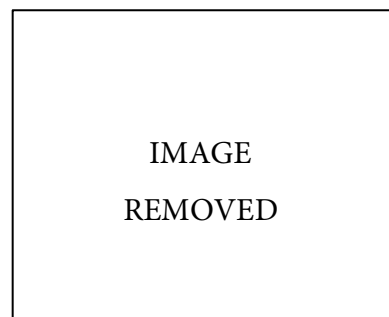


Figure 52 Doctored photograph of Osama Bin Laden and Barack Obama presented in an ironic context (parody blog)

It seems then, that there are strong reasons to think that photographs are not an exception to the claim that referential or semantic relations do not determine on

---

<sup>168</sup> One could object that the image is of bad taste, but that is a different criticism.

their own the classification of a work as fiction or non-fiction. The fact that the majority of photographs are non-fictional or documentary does not follow directly from the claim that photographs typically represent real things as they are and put us in contact with particulars. Accurately representing real objects or scenes is not sufficient for photographs to become non-fictional works. And likewise, it is not sufficient for photographs to become fictional works that they represent fictional entities or events.

None of this is to deny that the fact that photographs are documental and that they typically indicate the existence of real objects and events can affect the categorisation of a work. But in what ways, if at all, photography affects or contributes to the non-fiction status is an issue that has not been discussed in the philosophy of photography. Neither has the issue of the proper nature of documentary (and fictional) works with respect to visual media. These are issues that have been dealt with mostly in the philosophy of film. For this reason I analyse, in sections 4 and 5, two prominent definitions of documentary that have been put forward in the philosophy of film that propose very different views on the role that the photographic medium plays in classification. This will help us to elucidate what is the relationship between photography and the classification of a work as non-fiction or documentary. And ultimately, in as much as film is for the most part a photographic medium, and the definitions of documentary can be extended to other visual media, they will help us obtain a proper response to what makes a photograph documentary or non-fiction as opposed to fiction. But let me say something about the category of documentary works first.

### **3 What is a Documentary Work?**

Discussion of the classification of works as fiction or non-fiction in pictorial works or visual media more generally has taken place almost exclusively in the philosophy of film.<sup>169</sup> However, the discussion in this area does bring forward how theorists see the influence of the photographic medium in categorisation. Since the intuition that I have

---

<sup>169</sup> Exceptions are Walton 1990 and very briefly in Atencia-Linares 2012. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, however, Walton's theory is not aimed at capturing the distinction we ordinarily make between fiction and non-fiction.

explored so far in this chapter is that the nature of photography favours the purpose of non-fiction, I will focus on theories of documentary—a most common label used for non-fictional visual works in general, and particularly for films. But before delving into the analysis of the nature of documentary works and the role of photography in it, it is worth taking a moment to clarify what is ordinarily understood by the term ‘documentaries’ and the extension of works that tend to be categorised within that label.

The coinage of the term ‘documentary’ has been attributed to the Scottish filmmaker John Grierson: he first used the term in his review of Flaherty’s film *Moana* (1926) and later on he described it as the ‘creative treatment of actuality’ (Grierson 1933, 8). Grierson and his followers used this label for their films, which were frequently focused on social, political and educational issues. The idea Grierson and his followers had in mind was to vindicate a more artistic and crafted form of capturing reality than that of the ordinary newsreels and *actualités*. The tradition of ‘documentary’ so conceived and practiced by filmmakers had its influence beyond the medium of film during the 20s and 30s, and ‘documentary’ works flourished in other artforms such as photography and literature.<sup>170</sup> The documentary practice became a Modernist reaction against the distance from social reality of fiction films and literature and the superficial reporting supported by the unsophisticated style of newsreels, early factual photography and journalistic writing. Understood in this way, the category of documentary is a sub-category of non-fiction: that is, a category that distinguishes more crafted and sophisticated works (‘documentaries’ in the Griersonian sense) from ordinary and unrefined factual works (non-fictional works in general). However, as time passed, the differences between the technical and exclusive conception of ‘documentary’ works and the more general notion of non-fictional works started to blur and the term ‘documentary’ became equivalent to ‘non-fictional’ or ‘factual’ representations.<sup>171</sup> Or more specifically, it became the term used for non-fictional or factual works in *visual* representations. This non-technical and broad

---

<sup>170</sup> For the case of photography see (Marien 2010, 279–296) and for the case of literature see Bercovitch’s *Documentary Literature and the Disarming of Dissent* in (Bercovitch and Bercovitch 2013).

<sup>171</sup> Perhaps ‘factual’ is a better term since it suggests a positive characterisation and not merely a negative one, namely, that which is *not fiction*.

notion of documentary is more widely used nowadays—since the 1940s, probably only specialists have in mind exclusively the narrow extension of Griersonian and modernistic works when they discuss and talk about documentary works.<sup>172</sup> It is the broader category of works that people normally consider when they talk about documentary films, so the range of works that the category captures goes from Lumière-style *actualités* to Michael Moore’s documentaries, including Grierson’s *Drifters* and National Geographic reportages.

Having clarified the general usage of the term ‘documentary’ we can proceed to discuss two philosophical theories that try to capture the proper nature of documentary in the broad sense and how each of them accounts for the role of photography in the category. Moreover, in so far as these theories do not impose explicit restrictions on their application to other visual media, they may help us to shed light on how to understand the categories of fiction and non-fiction in visual works more generally and not only in film. Let us start with Gregory Currie’s definition of documentary works, which contends that photographs (or more specifically, *traces*) are necessary for these works.

#### **4 Visible Traces: Photography as a necessary condition for Documentary<sup>173</sup>**

For Gregory Currie “[t]he invention of photography and then of film did not simply create a new medium within which the category of non-fictional representation could find a place;” rather, it created a new possibility for the representation of reality (Currie 2000, 307). In line with this thought, Currie defines the notion of documentary in terms of his conception of *visible traces*, which emphasises the causal relation between photographic images and their objects. According to Currie, documentary works are “narratives of a special kind. They are narratives in which traces of real events play a distinctive role” (Currie 2004, 64). In order for a work to count as

---

<sup>172</sup> As Mary Warner Marien points out, this is also the case in photography (Marien 2010, 279).

<sup>173</sup> The account of Currie’s view that I will put forward here is fundamentally based on the second, revised version of his theory (Currie 2004). I will make reference to some aspects that are from an earlier version (Currie 1999) or from earlier responses to his critics (Currie 2000) when appropriate.



documentary it must meet the following three necessary conditions (which presumably are jointly sufficient):<sup>174</sup>

- i. It must involve traces of its subject matter ('trace content')
- ii. It must involve a (an asserted) narrative ('narrative content')
- iii. The 'trace content' should cohere with the narrative content.

Let us briefly consider each of these conditions.

Although, strictly speaking, condition (i) could be met by audio recordings, fossils or death masks,<sup>175</sup> it is clear by the context of discussion that Currie talks about photographs. Photographs, as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, are conceived of by Currie as traces: their visual properties are the product of a causal and counterfactual relation with their subject matter that is independent of the mental states of an agent. For Currie, the nature of documentary works is closely related to the nature of photography. So much so that photographs are, in his account, a necessary condition for documentary works. Something cannot be a documentary work if it does not contain photographs of the individuals or events the documentary is about. So, if the subject matter of a documentary work is Winston Churchill, for example, the work should contain photographs of Churchill himself. Painted portraits of Churchill or re-enactments cannot do the job. Why does Currie think photographs are a constitutive element of documentary works? Not surprisingly, for their epistemic and affective (or phenomenological) advantages. Currie suggests that the reason why we value documentaries and why they are taken to be an interesting category is because they offer us epistemic and emotional access to the things they are of, and this is nicely explained by the appeal to the underlying photographic nature of documentaries.

Being a photographic trace of its subject matter, however, is not sufficient to become a documentary (hence, Currie agrees with what I argued in section 2). In Currie's view, documentaries must have a narrative, or more specifically, an asserted

---

<sup>174</sup> As I will mention shortly these conditions are necessary for an *ideal* documentary.

<sup>175</sup> Remember that, according to Currie, all these things are *traces* in his sense (see chapters 2 and 3).

narrative, as opposed to a narrative that invites imaginings.<sup>176</sup> This element is fundamentally aimed at capturing the fact that documentaries involve intentionality or are the product of an agent. Currie is not explicit about what counts as a narrative in his account but he sets some restrictions: (a) “it is not sufficient, in order to have narrative, that we have a record of temporal processes” (Currie 2000, 306) and (b) the narrative content should be conceptual content, where conceptual content is defined in the following way:

For any picture with representational content, S, S has conceptual content iff a subject X's having made S entails that X possesses the concepts that appear in a specification of what it is that S represents.

Photographs [alone] do not have conceptual content, because it is true of any photograph that it could have had the content it does have without the person who took the photograph being able to conceptualize that content in any way (...) But if we say that the photograph or film image has also a distinct narrative content, that must be because there is some association between the image and the narrative, and that association must be an intended one (...) But then the content of the narrative is describable only in terms constrained by information about the concepts possessed by or at least available to the narrating agent. (Currie 2004, 79)<sup>177</sup>

---

<sup>176</sup> In the second, revised version of his theory, Currie is not very explicit about the “asserted” nature of the narrative. In the first incarnation of the theory, however, it does seem to play a more significant role. Admittedly, Currie does not put too much emphasis on the fact that the narrative should be assertive there either, but when he talks about what it means to be a documentary *part* of a documentary *work*, he gives the following definition:

D2(A,B) iff (i) A is a part of B; (ii) A is a filmic trace of P, and as such contributes to the provision of information about P in the (*asserted*) narrative of B; (iii) the filmic parts of B consist predominantly of parts like A in this respect (Currie 1999, 293 *my italics*).

In Currie’s second version of the theory he also mentions briefly the importance that the works are asserted (when he concedes to Noël Carroll part of his claims).

<sup>177</sup> The inference Currie seems to make from the claim that narratives should be intentional to the claim that narratives *then* are conceptual does not seem entirely justified. However, I am not going to develop this issue further. I am going to take the Paloma Atencia-Linares

Having a narrative is also a necessary condition for being documentary, but again, not sufficient. Fictional films contain both traces (photographs) and narratives but what they lack is what Currie calls ‘coherence’ between the two elements. In documentary, he claims, the trace content (the purely causal content of photographs) should maintain a high level of coherence with the narrative content. Currie does not define what ‘coherence’ means for him or what exactly is a ‘high degree’ of coherence in his view (Currie 2004, 71). However, he gives the following example:

If the documentary unfolds in such a way that, at this point, Nixon’s resignation is being recounted, the images we see should be traces of Nixon around the time of his resignation, or of closely Nixon-related events at that time (p.71).

So the idea is that what we are being told by the narrative should be supported by photographic images showing those very events and objects the narrative talks about. Fiction films, Currie claims, are not coherent in this way.

In *Bringing Up Baby* (...) the narrative concerns a society - girl, a palaeontologist, a sheriff, and various others; the trace content of the images we see is of actors (...) Shots of an actor/sheriff pretending to arrest the other two would not be enough to induce a significant degree of coherence; for that, the sheriff would have to actually arrest them (Currie 2004, 71).

In this view then, documentaries must be photographic in nature, they must have a narrative, and the content of the photographs (the *trace content*) and the narrative content must be highly coherent. However, these are conditions for an *ideal* or *pure* documentary and Currie claims that very few documentaries are ideal in his sense. Not all documentaries maintain a high level of coherence between trace content and narrative content. Some documentaries include stock footage from the archive that is not strictly a trace of any of the events recounted—as when a war documentary shows us photographic footage of a Sherman tank, but that tank was not present at the time and place that the documentary is focused on (Currie 2004, 74)—, and others

---

conditions of intentionality and the condition of being conceptual to be two separate conditions.

include some re-enactment— as when the traces are not of the people and things the documentary talks about but of actors and props. These films are not ideal documentaries but, according to Currie, they can still be documentaries. Why is this so? He claims that this can be so as long as they “maintain, and are clearly intended by their makers to maintain, a reasonably high degree of coherence through large stretches of their narratives” (Currie 2004, 74). Overall, “a documentary film has to be made up of a preponderance of documentary shots” (Currie 1999, 292) by which he means that there should be a preponderance of shots whose trace content coheres, within the context of the film, with the narrative content. Furthermore, Currie also suggests, the narrative should still be assertive—rather than inviting imagining.<sup>178</sup>

Currie’s theory nicely explains the intuition that photographs contribute to non-fiction. Indeed, according to Currie, they affect categorisation: one condition for being a documentary work is that it be photographic.<sup>179</sup> Moreover, photographs, according to this view, contribute to the value we attach to documentary works. This is because ‘[b]y virtue of containing traces of things, they offer us special epistemic and emotional access to the things they are documentaries of’ (Currie 2004, 71). In addition the theory captures the natural expectation that documentaries are photographic and that what we see in the images coheres with what we are told that we are seeing.

The question now is: Is the theory correct? I believe the answer is no. The *visible traces* theory leaves out many examples that are currently considered documentary works. As critics have pointed out,<sup>180</sup> his definition excludes some films that figure in the canonical history of documentary such as Lumière *actualités*,<sup>181</sup> *Man*

---

<sup>178</sup> Again, Currie is not very clear about this. In the first version of the theory he says explicitly—although not emphatically—that what is assertive is the narrative. However, in the second version he says almost in passing that in order for a work to be documentary despite not being an ideal documentary it should be the case that ‘the *whole thing* [meaning the whole film] has an assertive force’ (Currie 2004, 74).

<sup>179</sup> As I mentioned before, strictly speaking, photographs are not necessary as long as there is another kind of *trace* such as a fossil or a death mask. However, considering that he is talking about films, it does not make much sense to think they could be made with death masks or fossils.

<sup>180</sup> (See Carroll 2000; Choi 2001).

<sup>181</sup> This is the example brought forward by Noël Carroll.

with *the Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929) or more contemporary documentaries such as *Bodysongs* (Simon Pumell 2003). None of these films has a narrative that meets the restrictions posed by Currie: the Lumière *actualités* are frequently no more than a record of a temporal process, e.g., the process of some people leaving a factory during 49 seconds, or a 45-second view of the busy transit of people and vehicles in Lyon's Cordeliers' Square; *Man with the Movie Camera* and *Bodysongs*, in turn, are documentaries without words so it is not entirely clear how they can meet the conceptual requirement. The theory also sidelines almost the entire category of what have been called "performative documentaries"—a set of documentary works that proliferated during the 1980s and 1990s that consisted mostly of re-enactments and performances (Choi 2001). In addition, Currie's definition of documentary rules out from the category any factual film about things and events of the future and of the past prior to the invention of photography such as the following: *2057: The City of the Future* (Discovery Channel 2012), *Future Intelligence* (Cohen and Goldstein, 2009), NOVA: *Car of the Future* (PBS, 2008), *Before we Ruled the Earth* (Discovery Channel, 2009), *Prehistoric Planet* (BBC, 2001-2003) or *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (Starkey, 2001). Since we lack traces of objects or events of the future and the past, all these documentaries are preponderantly composed by stock footage, re-enactments, animation or CGI images. Finally, Currie's theory excludes from the category entirely animated documentaries such as *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008).<sup>182</sup>

It could be claimed that while these factual films would not count as ideal documentaries for Currie, his view could still accommodate them as *non-ideal documentaries*. But that does not seem to be the case. In most, if not in all cases, there is no evidence that there is an intention to maintain a high degree of coherence between the trace content and the narrative, for either there is no narrative (e.g., *Man with the Movie Camera*), no trace content (e.g., *Waltz with Bashir*) or because the author deliberately decided to use re-enactment, stock footage, animation or CGI images as the best way to illustrate the narrative. Also many of them—notably *Waltz*

---

<sup>182</sup> There is no doubt that this film is a documentary: not only it has been classified as such, but it was nominated or won various awards on the category of documentary films, e.g., International Documentary Association Awards, Writers Guild of America Awards or Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards.

with *Bashir* and the ‘performative documentaries,’ but also others such as the *Six Wives of Henry VIII* and some of the documentaries about the future—are not comprised by a preponderance of traces of the objects or events mentioned in the film’s narratives. In fact, some of these documentaries contain very few traces, or photographs of their subject matter.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, it is not clear that the narratives of these documentaries are assertive. As I said before, some films such as *The Man with the Movie Camera*, do not have a clear narrative<sup>184</sup> but even if they could be attributed one, it is not clear that it would be assertive: in any case it would be better understood as a series of interjections or exclamations glorifying the advances of modern industrial cities and cinematic technical possibilities. Also, the narratives of some of the documentaries about the future are better understood as hypotheses or suppositions rather than as straightforward assertions. Moreover, these documentaries as well as the documentaries about the past and the performative documentaries certainly asks us to imagine what the situations depicted were like or will be like.

Currie has addressed some of these objections in his replies to critics.<sup>185</sup> In particular, he has claimed that some of the Lumière *actualités* would indeed count as having a narrative on his view. For example, he claims that ‘*Workers Emerging from a Factory* does possess a narrative, although admittedly not a very interesting one’ (Currie 2000, 306). One could think that this is because the title of the film itself provides a minimal narrative or describes a minimal action in the light of which we should understand the image. However, this is not the reason Currie offers. The reason he provides is the following:

Since authorial control was here exerted to the extent of choosing to focus for a certain length of time on these workers leaving this factory, we are right (though perhaps just barely so) to see narrative at work here (Currie 2000, 306).

This claim is puzzling. The reason that Currie gives for why it would be reasonable to attribute a narrative to *Workers Emerging from the Factory* does not seem to be entirely

---

<sup>183</sup> In particular, *Waltz with Bashir* has only one photographic sequence.

<sup>184</sup> As acknowledged by its own author; see Vertov’s own reflections on *The Man with the Moving Camera* in (Vertov 1984, 283).

<sup>185</sup> (Currie 2000 and 2001).

consistent with the two requirements he posed in his theory for something to count as a narrative, namely, not being merely a record of a temporal process and having conceptual content. The fact that an author chooses to focus the camera for a certain length of time does not seem to deliver anything more than a record of a temporal process, and it does not by itself turn the content of the images into conceptual content in the sense explained by Currie either. It is still the case that the content of the images could have been the one it is, even if the person who chose to focus the camera were not able to conceptualise it. Be this as it may, even if we concede to Currie that his theory does include *actualités* such as *Workers Emerging from the Factory*, it still leaves out many other films ordinarily classified as documentaries. In fact, Currie himself accepts this charge in another response to his critics. With respect to ‘performative documentaries’ and films that are not preponderantly constituted by traces he claims the following:

I do not deny that such productions constitute (or may—much depends on the details of particular cases) a distinctive kind of non-fiction film. I have chosen to distinguish, within the broad domain of the non-fictional film, a narrow category that I have called the pure documentary, wherein there is a certain kind of harmony between the photographic content of the images and the narrative that those images sustain (Currie 2001, 319).

Currie is of course within his right to use the term ‘documentary’ as he pleases. But the idiosyncratic use of the label should be justified. For Currie, his restricted category of documentary is worth philosophical consideration partly because it allows us to tackle interesting conceptual problems that arise when we think about documentary films such as the epistemic and affective value we confer on them (Currie 2001, 319). However, it is not clear that the necessity of trace or photographic content explains this in many cases. It is certainly true, as I have argued in chapters 2 and 3, that photographic images have important epistemic advantages over other pictorial types. But this does not mean that photographs are epistemically more advantageous in all respects. In some instances, other pictorial types—animations or CGI for instance—could make a better epistemic contribution than any trace content. This is frequently the case in scientific documentaries where diagrams and animations deliver clearer

and finer grained information than photographic images. For example, a documentary about lung cancer can show us photographs of tumours taken during actual surgeries. But seeing how tumours look—provided that we are able to distinguish the damaged tissue—may actually be a more morbid than illustrative experience. It might be more enriching and epistemically valuable to have an animated sequence showing us how the process of metastasis works and how the cancer develops. This information is likely to be better illustrated by non-photographic images rather than with traces of an actual tumour. Also, we should realise that epistemic notions central to documentary works such as that of *objectivity* are subject to change.<sup>186</sup> We now understand the concept of objectivity as something like the mechanical reproduction of particular objects, but this is a very recent conception. Naturalists of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, for instance, thought that particular individuals never instantiated the *true nature* of things. The role of the scientist was then to observe as many specimens of a genus as possible and try to identify the true specific characters imprinted in the different particular plants or animals and to separate the accidental, changing and contingent features from the essential and invariant ones. If their images were going to be really objective or *true-to-nature* they should ‘portray the underlying type of the species rather than the individual specimen. [Their drawings were] images of the essential, the typical and the universal’ and not of the particular, imperfect and contingent (Daston and Galison 2007, 20). Given this particular conception of being *true-to-nature*, we can see why images such as drawings or hand-made pictures that are not essentially connected to particular objects—and cannot thereby leave traces—were especially apt for their purposes. In this context, photographs would not have been as epistemically valuable. Cases like these, I think, show that the epistemic value we attach to documentaries does not by itself fully justify the necessity of photographic images in a definition of documentaries.

Nonetheless, Currie’s intuition that the nature of photography contributes to or plays an important role in non-fictional or documentary works seems to be on the right track, as is also his intuition that, at least nowadays, we expect documentary works to be photographic. This intuition partly accounts for why we perceive certain

---

<sup>186</sup> For an interesting study of the conceptions of objectivity in the sciences see (Daston and Galison 2007).



documentary works such as *Waltz with Bashir* or documentaries that contain many re-enacted scenes as non-paradigmatic. However, there is no reason to exclude non-paradigmatic cases from the category. The fact that these *deviant* documentaries are classified within the same category as other *canonical* ones might not be irrelevant for how we appreciate them. As these and other counterexamples to Currie's theory show, photographs—or more specifically, trace content, as Currie conceives of it—are not necessary for a work to become documentary. Also, in as much as we are looking for a comprehensive theory that tracks the extension of (visual or cinematic) works that are ordinarily called documentary or non-fiction, Currie's account seems to be too restrictive and narrow.

But is it also restricted and narrow if we apply it to still photography? It is possible that, even if Currie's is not a satisfactory theory for documentary films, it could nevertheless work for documentary photography; after all, one could think that in this medium we would not have the problem of leaving out from the category works that are not photographic. It seems that in photography, the first criterion of Currie's theory comes for free. So, would the theory be satisfactory in the case of photography? In order to answer this question we should first see how the theory would apply to photographs.

As I said before, on one interpretation, the first criterion of Currie's theory would be obviously (and trivially) met: documentary photography is always photographic and photographs always involve traces of objects. But on a different reading, although photographs could meet the criterion, it would not be trivially met: even if all photographs are traces of objects – and we experience those particular objects they are traces of – they are not always traces of (all) the objects they represent. *Io Gatto* (Figure 20) for example, is a trace of a woman and of a cat but it is not a trace of a catwoman, which is what the photograph primarily represents. On this interpretation –which I think is more plausible and therefore I am going to assume – only photographs that are traces of what they represent would meet Currie's first criterion (*Io Gatto*, for example, would be ruled out). With respect to the second criterion, narrative could be understood minimally: for example, in some cases, the

title of the photograph or the series of photographs could count as a narrative.<sup>187</sup> Alternatively, the context in which the photograph appears can also function as a narrative context, for example, a newspaper story, a scientific illustration book, an illustrated biography, an exhibition with a given theme such as ‘the tragedy of war,’ etc. In all these cases the narrative would meet the requirement of assertiveness, intentionality and of conceptual content.<sup>188</sup> Finally, if photographs meet criteria (i) and (ii) they can meet (iii) as well. So a documentary photograph would be one in which the *trace content* of the photograph—what it represents *by source* (in Currie’s own terminology)—coheres or is consistent with its narrative. For example, Figure 53 is a documentary photograph because it was produced for the book *Let us Praise Famous Men*—a book that was the result of an assignment that the poet James Agee and the photographer Walker Evans accepted to explore the conditions among sharecropper families in the American South during the ‘Dirty Thirties’. In this book, the text written by Agee describes the context and the conditions in which the families shown in the photographs lived. There is thereby a high level of coherence between the trace content of the photographs and the narrative.

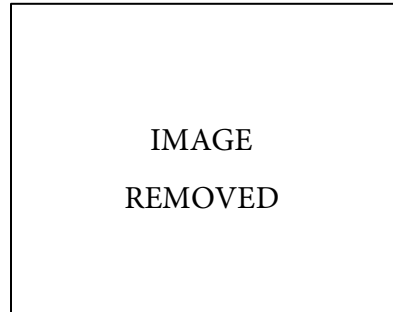


Figure 53 Walker Evans "Let us Praise Famous Men" (1941)

---

<sup>187</sup> Maybe a proper name or a noun alone would not suffice, since a name might just indicate or corroborate what is represented in the photograph. However, a short description of an event or an action could do the job. For instance, the caption of one of Robert Capa’s photographs of the D-day reads ‘1944 France. Normandy. WWII. Operation Overlord. Omaha Beach. June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944. The first wave of American troops lands at dawn.’ This caption could probably count as a narrative.

<sup>188</sup> Also, this seems to be consistent with Currie’s claim that ‘trace content is intrinsic to the image, whereas narrative content is (...) heavily dependent on the context that surrounds the image’ (Currie 2004, 77).

Similarly, Figure 54 would be a documentary photograph according to Currie's definition because the trace content of the photographs coincides with the description (or narrative) mentioned in the caption which reads: 'Buzz Aldrin eased down *Eagle's* ladder, paused on the last rung, and jumped the final three feet'.



Figure 54 LIFE Magazine. "Buzz Aldrin eased down *Eagle's* ladder, paused on the last rung, and jumped the final three feet" Special Edition. August 11, 1969

Judging from these examples, it seems that Currie's theory of documentary works fairly well for photography. However, there are also problematic cases. First, Currie's theory would presumably not classify as documentary or non-fiction some photographs that would seem to fit well into that category. For example, Sir Francis Galton, an anthropologist, eugenicist, geographer and statistician, produced in 1880 a series of photographs that aimed at showing the typical look of the Jewish racial type (Figure 55).



Figure 55 Francis Galton "The Jewish Type" (1880)

Galton used the technique of combination printing<sup>189</sup> for what he understood to be—and was taken to be—a scientific project.<sup>190</sup> In a paper he delivered at the

<sup>189</sup> Combination printing, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, is a technique that consists in producing a single image out of two or more negatives.

<sup>190</sup> As a matter of fact these photographs still figure in London's Science Photo Library <http://www.sciencephoto.com/>

Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland he said that his intention with these photographs was to ‘obtain with mechanical precision a generalised picture: one that represents no man in particular, but portrays an imaginary figure possessing the average features of any given group of men’ (quoted in Novak 2008, 90). Arguably, these photographs do not meet Currie’s first condition because, while they are traces of various people—a number of boys from the Jewish Working Men’s Club and Jew’s Free School—, none of them are what the photograph represents. Galton’s idea was clearly to represent a ‘Jewish Type,’ an idealised portrait of the ‘typical Jewish look.’ But not only are the photographs not traces of what they represent, the narrative that accompanied them is not coherent with what the photographs are traces of but with the *type* they aimed to represent: these photographs appeared in Joseph Jacobs’ *Studies in Jewish Statistics* (Jacobs 1891). In this book Jacobs states the following in reference to Galton’s photographs

Thanks, however, to Mr Galton, science has been enabled to call in the aid of photography *to obtain those averages* which no measurements can supply.

[They] say in a glance more than the most skilful physiognomist could express in many pages. ‘The best definition’ said the old logicians, “is pointing with the finger” (*demonstratio optima definitio*); [the photographs] will doubtless form for a long time to come *the best available definition of the Jewish expression and the Jewish type* (Jacobs 1891, xvi and xxxiv, *my italics*).

Given the scientific aim of these photographs and the context in which they were distributed and presented, it seems more accurate to classify them as documentary works—at least in the broad sense explained in section 2—, even if the object represented is indeed a fictive entity. However, if we apply Currie’s theory, these photographs would not be classified as such.

This is not the only problem with Currie’s theory when applied to photographs. The theory not only leaves out cases such as Galton’s *Jewish Type*, it also counts as documentary photographs that do not clearly fall into that category. Take for example Jeff Wall’s *The Passerby* (Figure 47). This photograph is a trace of what it represents: it is a trace of a man passing by, and its title is coherent with what it is a trace of. Yet, the

photograph is not a documentary work.<sup>191</sup> As I said in section 2, if one is familiar with Jeff Wall's *oeuvre*, one will realise that this, like other photographs by Wall, is aimed at being reminiscent of the atmosphere of fictional suspense films. While some of Wall's photographs are indeed documentary, this is certainly not one of them and it would be misleading to appreciate it as such.

Again, Currie may be right in that we tend to expect not only that documentary works are photographic, but also that what we see in the images is what we are told that we are seeing. In as much as his theory captures this intuition, the theory is appealing. However, as a comprehensive theory of documentary, it is not entirely successful: the features that Currie's theory highlights may play an important role, but they are not themselves definitive of the category of documentary, at least not in the broad sense as that we are trying to capture.

### 5 Documentary without photography: Carroll's *Films of Presumptive Assertion*

Partly as a response to the problems with Currie's view, and partly as a reaction to the structuralist tradition that tries to blur the difference between documentary and fictional works, Noël Carroll puts forward his account of *films of presumptive assertion*.<sup>192</sup> Despite its cumbersome name, Carroll's theory aims at tracking 'the extension of films that film scholars want to talk about and refer to [when they use the label 'documentary'] better than the alternative candidates do' (Carroll 2003). That is, his aim is to give a theory that captures the extension of films that are normally referred to as 'non-fictional' or 'documentary' in the broad sense. Carroll's theory also aims at being more comprehensive than Currie's, so that it can account for 'performative documentaries,' films entirely made of non-photographic images such as *Waltz with Bashir*, and films without a verbal narrative or clear story such as the Lumière *actualités* and other purely visual documentaries such as *Man with the Movie*

---

<sup>191</sup> As I mentioned in fn. 27 if the title of the photograph is a proper name or, in this case, a definite description, we might not want to call it a narrative. However, this photograph could have been called *A Man passes by a street in the middle of the night*. This could indeed be a narrative, however minimal, and the point I am making would still hold.

<sup>192</sup> (Carroll 1997; Carroll 2003). Carroll uses the term 'film of presumptive assertion' instead of 'documentary' to avoid confusion with the more technical notion of 'documentary' mentioned above.

*Camera, Bodysongs* or Godfrey Reggio's *Qatsi Trilogy* (*Koyaanisqatsi*, *Powaqqatsi* and *Naqoyqatsi*). For Carroll, the category of documentary, or films of presumptive assertion, is not constitutively linked to the medium of photography—as Currie has it—nor to any particular structure or style—as the structuralists contend. According to Carroll, there is nothing manifest in the works themselves, nothing that we can perceive in the work, that enters into the definition of documentary works. Rather, following a Gricean intention-response model of communication, Carroll maintains that documentary works should be defined only by reference to authorial intentions. Following this view, a documentary film—or a Film of Presumptive Assertion (FPA)—is defined thus:

*x* is a film of presumptive assertion if and only if the filmmaker *S* presents *x* to an audience *A* with the intention (1) that *A* recognize that *x* is intended by *S* to mean that *p* (some propositional content), (2) that *A* recognize that *S* intends them to entertain *p* as an asserted thought (or as a set of asserted thoughts), (3) that *A* entertain *p* as asserted thought, and (4) that 2 is a reason for 3 (Carroll 2003, 209).

Carroll's definition is inspired by traditional theories that distinguish fiction from non-fiction in terms of illocutionary acts and speaker intentions.<sup>193</sup> In a similar way in which theorists define fiction by appeal to a speech act characterised by the intention of the author to get the audience to imagine the content,<sup>194</sup> Carroll defines documentary, in the broad sense, appealing to the illocutionary act of assertion: a speech act characterised by the intention of the speaker—or author, in this case—to make the hearer believe that she aims at saying something true (Pagin 2012), or that she puts forward a given content as true. One important advantage of these theories is that they recognise that a good account of the categories of fiction and non-fiction is not going to be found at the syntactic (structural) or semantic (referential) level. Rather, they claim that the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is a pragmatic distinction, i.e., a distinction that has to do with the use of utterances or works in a given communicational context. Hence, a further advantage of this theoretical

---

<sup>193</sup> (Currie 1990; Lamarque and Olsen 1994a; D. Davies 2001; Stock 2011).

<sup>194</sup> See Chapter 1.

approach is that it emphasises the communicative aspect of artworks (films, photographs, novels, paintings, etc.) as well as the role that the context and the author's intentions play in conveying meaning to the works.

Carroll's theory, unlike Currie's, does not give any significant role to photography so, strictly speaking, for him photography does not in any way affect the categorisation of a work as fiction or non-fiction. Again, what ultimately matters are the assertive intentions of the author, regardless of which medium she uses. In this way, Carroll's definition can, in principle, account for non-photographic documentary works such as *Walz with Bashir* and documentaries about the past and the future. These works are documentaries because, regardless of whether the people and scenes we see are animations or CGI, the author intends the audience to believe that the events recounted in the film are true. Similarly, the theory does not explicitly require narrative content, so again, in principle, it allows for non-narrative documentaries and documentaries without words in as much as their contents are put forward as being the case.<sup>195</sup> *Lyon Cordeliers' Square* is a documentary because the Lumière brothers presented this short film with the intention that the audience believe that those images show something that was the case. And finally, the theory does not require a given degree of coherence between the images and the narrative. Hence, it can account *prima facie* for 'performative documentaries' and documentaries made mostly of stock footage or re-enactment.

Although this is a more comprehensive theory, it is not devoid of problems. A preliminary one is that it is not entirely clear that it is possible to assert with images. Remember that Carroll's theory does not require that films have a (verbal) narrative in order to be documentary. By omitting this requirement, Carroll aims to account for non-narrative documentary works and films that do not have voice or any linguistic device, but in doing this he makes his theory vulnerable to this objection: How is it possible that the audience take the content of the images of the films as asserted if the films do not use language and it is not clear that the images can be vehicles of assertions? It is true that speech acts are not necessarily acts of speech (Green 2009)

---

<sup>195</sup> As I will mention in due course, this may depend on whether assertions can be made without linguistic utterances.

and therefore at least some of them can be made by non-linguistic means; e.g., a gesture or a body movement can be an effective way to issue a warning. However, assertions in particular, in as much as they presuppose propositional content that can be true or false, do seem to require a vehicle that has propositional structure. But pictorial content is not typically thought of as being propositional; pictures lack the logical structure characteristic of proposition. In fact, various authors have taken this (among other considerations) to be a good reason to doubt that pictures can be vehicles of assertions (Gombrich 1960, chap. II; Goodman 1978, Chap. VII; Crane 2009, 457–462).<sup>196</sup> Even if this seems to be a central issue in Carroll theory, he is silent about it. Although a correct and thorough evaluation of his theory would require a careful consideration of this problem, it would take much more space than I can give to it in this chapter. I will therefore assume that Carroll's claim is weaker than what the literal statement of his theory seems to imply. Following Tim Crane, I will assume that we can say something like 'for any picture *P*, there is a sentence which gives the content of *P*' such that 'there can always be a sentence which describes what a picture represents and how it represents it' (Crane 2009, 460).<sup>197</sup> And that what Carroll means is that documentary films (or FPAs) are those that assert the contents of those sentences that fully describe what the picture or series of pictures represents. Or what is the same, that FPAs are films that are intended to get the audience to take the representational content of those sentences (as well as the content of the verbal narrative) as asserted.

Now, even if we grant this to Carroll, there are further problems with his theory.<sup>198</sup> On the one hand, not all documentary films are asserted, involve assertions or are intended to be believed. I already mentioned in section 4 that some documentary works such as *The Man with the Movie Camera* are better understood as

---

<sup>196</sup> For some accounts that defend pictorial assertion see (Sircello 1978; Wolterstorff 1980; Korsmeyer 1985). Notice that these authors do not defend the claim that pictures are themselves statements that are asserted. Rather, they claim that pictures can be used to make assertions given certain conditions.

<sup>197</sup> As Crane points out, we can assume that the sentence can be as long and detailed as necessary. Furthermore, it can incorporate terms of any language.

<sup>198</sup> Not surprisingly, these problems partly coincide with those of traditional theories of (literary) fiction (and non-fiction) that appeal to speech acts to define the categories. See (Friend 2008 and 2012).



(containing) exclamations or interjections praising the modern industrial cities and cinematic technical possibilities. In addition, other documentaries such as *The Question of God* (Catherine Tatge, 2004) are better seen as asking questions such as ‘Is there a God?’ ‘What is happiness?’ ‘How do we find meaning and purpose in our lives?’<sup>199</sup> The audience is also presented with the views of Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis on these matters, but not necessarily in order for them to believe all that they claim—this, in fact, would lead the audience to endorse various conflicting and incompatible beliefs, since Freud and Lewis held very different views. Rather, these ideas seem to be put forward for the audience to consider the questions themselves and what people have thought about them. On the other hand, presenting content as asserted is not exclusive to documentary works: authors also make assertions in fiction films and intend their audiences to believe the contents. *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Mulligan, 1962), for example, presumably is made with the intention that people believe the moral of the story, namely, that we should fight and overcome prejudice against all odds. *Missing* (Costa Gavras, 1982) is also intended for people to believe that a young and educated American journalist was hijacked, tortured and killed by the Pinochet regime in Chile. Similarly, *Lincoln* (Spielberg, 2012) is presented for the audience to believe that the series of events and occurrences narrated in the film actually happened during the last four months of Abraham Lincoln’s life. Finally, an intention to assert the content in and of itself is not enough to make a film documentary: imagine that a filmmaker called Matthew makes a film that only consists of three consecutive shots: the first one is a dark background in front of which we can see the pronoun “I”, the second shot presents the same background but this time with the inscription “AM” and the last shot shows again the same background this time with the name “MATTHEW.” The short film is called “I am Matthew” and the filmmaker intends to make an assertion with it. Would this film be a documentary work? Arguably not.

If this is correct, Carroll’s theory fails to capture the right extension of documentary films: while it counts as documentary films that are clearly fictional, it leaves out others that are uncontroversially classified as documentary. Assertive

---

<sup>199</sup> In fact these seems to be the premises guiding the documentary.

intentions do not seem to be either necessary or sufficient to make a film a documentary.

Would the theory work better if applied to still images in general or photographs in particular? Again, assuming a weak view of how assertions can be made with pictures, Carroll's theory has the advantage that it would count as non-fictional or documentary (in the broad sense) non-photographic images that intuitively fit into that category. For example, as I said before, botanical and scientific drawings of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century aimed at capturing the ideal type of specimen, and thus, they arguably were intended to make viewers believe that these (depicted) features are the essential features of this kind of leaf.



Figure 56 Francois Michaux "Morus rubra (Red mulberry)" (1813)

In addition, Carroll's theory can account for cases of such as Walker Evans' photographs of the 'Dirty Thirties' (Figure 53), the photographs of Buzz Aldrin's landing on the moon (Figure 54) and also Galton's *The Jewish Type* (Figure 55), that seem to fit well into the category of documentary works. In all these cases we can say that the photographs were intended for the audience to believe their content. In the case of Evans' photograph, it seems reasonable to think that the author is asserting that the members of the family we see depicted in the photograph suffered the conditions narrated by Agee's text. Similarly, the Aldrin photograph can be taken as inviting us to believe that things happened in the way depicted in the image. And finally, it is reasonable to take Galton's *The Jewish Type* as intending the audience to believe that the typical Jewish expression and physical type is the one we can see in the image.

Judging from these cases, Carroll's theory is indeed more comprehensive than Currie's also with respect to still pictures and photographs. However, there are similar problems as those encountered when applying this theory to films. First, it seems that there are some photographs that fit well into the category of documentary and do not assert everything they show. An example is Elliot Erwin's *New York Streets* (see Chapter 1, Figure 15). This photograph clearly invite viewers to see—or imagine—what looks like a man with the face of a dog; but Erwin does not assert that there is in fact a man with the face of a dog; it is just an ironic and playful documentary photograph. Another example is Figure 57, which won the American Public Health Association Photography Contest in 2004. This photograph seems to fit well into the category of non-fiction or documentary, but the use it is given is more a warning or a prediction than an assertion.

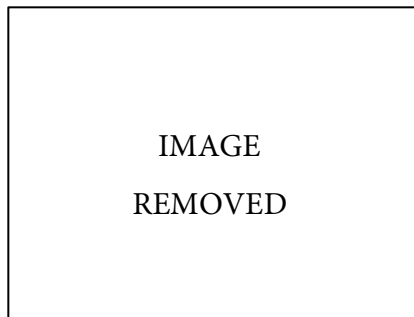


Figure 57 Phillis Kim "What our world will look like in 50 years. Think about your carbon footprint today!" APHA contest winner (2004)

The caption reads: 'What our world will look like in 50 years. Think about your carbon footprint today!' Here, the author does not seem to be committed to the claim that what can be seen in the photograph is in fact the way things will look like in the future. Rather, the photograph is used as a way to make people think how the future *could* look if we do not take the appropriate measures.

Of course, this may not correctly capture the relevant assertions. One may claim, on behalf of Carroll's view, that the author is asserting a statement of possibility, something like: 'It is possible that in 50 years the world looks like this photograph'. However, it is not entirely clear how we should determine that this statement, rather than the explicit caption, is the relevant assertion that expresses the content of the work. In principle, there are various possible ways to express in a sentence the content

of almost any photograph or, for that matter, any film, so that we can obtain a proper assertion. Certainly, we can use the assertion of possibility as the relevant illocutionary act performed by Phillis Kim with Figure 57, and we can also say that the appropriate assertion in the case of Erwin Elliot's photograph is something like 'It is the case that in New York streets we see funny things such as a man with what seems to be the face of a dog'. But then there is no reason why we cannot do the same with fictional films or photographs. We can say, for instance, that in the case of *Dr. Duanus' Famous Magic Hat* (Figure 51), the author is asserting something like: 'I [Duane Michals] am showing you how to make it look as if I were pulling a man out of a top hat' or in case of the film *The Silence of the Lambs* we could say that the author is asserting something like: 'This could be what a sophisticated cannibalistic serial killer would look like'. The problem is that there seem to be many ways in which one can paraphrase the content of a photograph or a film; some of which would be assertions and some would not; but Carroll does not tell us how to determine what the correct paraphrase or illocutionary act is that represents the relevant content of the work.

At any rate, it might be true that many documentary photographs in one way or another assert their content or, more specifically, are aimed for their viewers to take the content as being accurate or true to the facts. However, making people believe that things are thus and so is often not the main goal. Documentary photography is frequently aimed at getting viewers to be emotionally moved by what they see, denouncing a situation or commenting on a certain state of affairs. The purpose of the famous photograph *The Kiss by the Hotel de Ville* by Robert Doisneau is not so much to assert that such event occurred (which the author arguably also does) but mainly to express a feeling, to share a moment of romance with the spectator and probably make her feel good about what she sees. Similarly, Figure 58 is not so much meant to assert that such an event took place but to make people laugh. Finally, Figure 59, more than asserting that what we see is the case, it seems to be an ironic commentary on the change of presidency of the USA. Bush's face is in shadow, as if ironically suggesting (but not necessarily asserting), that his days are over; also, there is a shadow that seems to be saying 'bye, bye'. But the author is not asserting that 'there is in fact a person saying goodbye'. Rather, it seems to be an ironic way to say farewell, which is itself a speech act different from assertion.

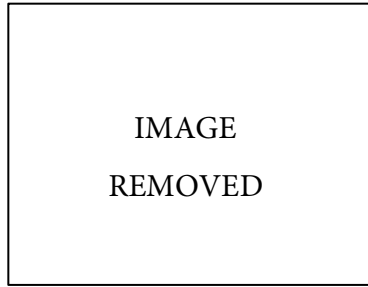


Figure 58 Jim Bourg "George W. Bush hands back a crying baby that was handed to him from the crowd as he arrived for an outdoor dinner with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Trinwillershagen, Germany, July 13, 2006."

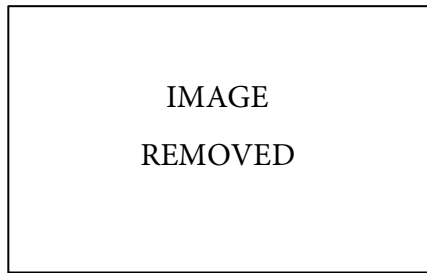


Figure 59 Tim Sloan "UNITED STATES, Washington: US president-elect Barack Obama waves while walking with President George W. Bush after arriving at the White House NOVEMBER 10, 2008 in Washington. January 20, 2009 inauguration as the next president."

The second problem is that some photographs that seem to be better classified as fictional—or at any rate, non-factual—can also be used to assert their contents or parts thereof. An example is Annie Leibovitz's *Disney Dream* photographs (see chapter 1 Figure 9 and Figure 10). These photographs assert, and are intended to get the viewer to believe, that the person seen in the photograph is Roger Federer or Rachel Weitz. Indeed, part of the success of these photographs is that we recognise that the people depicted are in fact the famous actress and the world tennis champion. Similarly, Jeff Wall's *The Passerby* could be said to be asserting something like 'there is a man passing by a street at night'. But is that enough to make the photograph documentary? It seems not.

If this is right, then neither for the case of films nor for photographs is Carroll's theory of documentary or works of presumptive assertion<sup>200</sup> entirely satisfactory. The theory does not seem to capture the correct extension of works that we intuitively consider documentary. Carroll is correct in recognising an important place for authorial communicative intentions when it comes to determining the category of a

---

<sup>200</sup> In as much as the theory seems applicable beyond the domain of films, I call these *Works of Presumptive Assertion*, rather than *Films of Presumptive Assertion*.

work, and it also seems to be true that presenting the content of the works' content as being the case seems to be a typical mark of non-fiction. However, an intention to assert the content on the part of the author does not seem to be the defining feature of the category of documentary.

The same applies to any intention that may be relevant to classification, such as the intention to make a documentary. Carroll's focuses on intention out of a desire to surmount the difficulties of Currie's theory and to avoid the structuralist pitfall of collapsing the difference between fiction and non-fiction on the grounds that there are no stylistic and structural differences between works in these categories. This leads him to treat the manifest properties (structural and stylistic) and the medium as dispensable elements when it comes to defining documentary works. However, intentions by themselves—assertive or otherwise—do not seem to be enough. This was clear in the case of the imaginary film 'I am Matthew', but also, it is difficult to imagine, for instance, that a film such as *X-Men* (Singer, 2000) could have been categorized as a documentary work without any change in the work as we know it, only by virtue of the author's intentions.

A communicative intention is intelligible only with respect to a given practice with certain uses and conventions. If the intention is indeed communicative, it should be aimed at being recognized and understood by others. But in order to be understood, that intention has to be actualized in some way that makes it intelligible for the audience. There has to be some publicly available features that are susceptible of being apprehended, understood and associated with a certain communicative practice (the practice of asserting, or the practice of documentary, for instance). No doubt, there might be multifarious configurations of these features under which a certain intention can be rendered intelligible, but not *any configuration* is apt for doing the job.<sup>201</sup> In fact, in most cases, the formal structure and the expressive means are crucial not only for

---

<sup>201</sup> As a matter of fact, this is a problem that critics frequently raised against Grice. If one asset of Grice's theory was to link the notion of meaning to the intentionality of the speaker, probably one of the main flaws, according to his critics, is having failed to connect what is actually said and what it actually means in the language (Searle 1971, 45). That is, we cannot try to mean something if we do not presume that the person we are addressing is able to make sense of the vehicle of communication that we are using, and how we are using it.

the audience to recognise the relevant intentions but also for legitimately ascribing such intentions to the author. For example, it would be very difficult for *H* to understand that *S* is asking to marry her if *S* is pointing at *H* with a gun; in fact, it would not make sense to legitimately ascribe *S* the intention to ask *H* to marry him if that is all he is doing. Similarly, it would be very difficult for the audience to recognise a film as documentary if the author presents it with all the characteristics of *The X-Men* film (characters, style, narrative, etc.); moreover, it would be also difficult to ascribe to the author legitimate intentions to make a documentary.

The author's intentions seem to be constrained by the social uses that shape the practices. If an author really intends to communicate something to an audience and intends them to respond accordingly, she has to use some communicative means in a certain way that allows her audience to understand the message. The manifest properties of a work—the structure, style, medium, etc.—therefore, do not seem to be dispensable, for they are the means by which a certain—sincere—intention is rendered intelligible.

If all of this is sound, Carroll's theory does not provide a satisfactory account of documentary works. The problem is that, given his antagonistic position with respect to Currie and structuralist theories, he puts too much explanatory weight on authorial intentions and dismisses the role of the medium, stylistic and structural features. As a result, Carroll's view does not explain why we intuitively think that photographs generally contribute to non-fiction or why there seems to be the expectation that documentary works (especially films) be photographic: why, for example, is *Waltz with Bashir* taken to be a rare specimen of its kind? Why are 'performative documentaries' controversial? It seems that while Currie's view overstated the role of photography in the classification of a work as documentary, Carroll's account understates it in a way that renders his theory silent with respect to interesting questions about documentary works.

In what follows, I will put forward an alternative account of documentary drawing from the work of Stacie Friend and her Genre Theory. I will argue that this theory, which has not yet been applied to visual media, nicely captures the advantages of both Currie's and Carroll's view while avoiding their problems.

## 6 The Genre Theory: photography as a standard feature

Recently, Stacie Friend has suggested that we should understand fiction and non-fiction as genres. The focus of her theory is written texts but, as we shall see, it can be applied to films and pictorial media more generally. According to this view, genres are categories in which we classify representational works that guide our appreciation of them “so that knowledge of the classification plays a role in a work’s correct interpretation and evaluation” (Friend 2012, 181).<sup>202</sup> As opposed to traditional theories of fiction and non-fiction or documentary, Friend contends that membership in these categories is not determined by necessary and sufficient conditions;<sup>203</sup> rather, it is determined by non-essential criteria that include not only internal properties of the work,<sup>204</sup> but also contextual factors such as the work’s origins, the artist’s categorial intentions, or the category in which the audience contemporary to the artist would have classified the work.

The idea, adapted from Walton’s *Categories of Art*, is that the categories of fiction and non-fiction (or documentary, we may add) work as contrast classes such that, when we perceive<sup>205</sup> or evaluate a work in either of these categories, in comparison to other members of that group, some of the internal features of the work will stand out as standard, contra-standard or variable.

*Standard* features are those that members of the category typically have or are expected to have; furthermore, the presence of these features normally places the work in the relevant category. For example, Walton mentions flatness as a standard feature of paintings, and Friend notes that an obvious-but-innocent suspect is standard for whodunits. *Contra-standard* features, in turn, are those that are not typically found and not expected in members of that category; having such features usually disqualifies the work from the category. Again, following Walton’s and Friend’s examples, “a

---

<sup>202</sup> This idea of genre is inspired by Kendall Walton’s *Categories of Art* (Walton 1970).

<sup>203</sup> Using the terminology of Rosch and Mervis in their cognitive work on categorisation, fiction and non-fiction or documentary would be categories described with reference to more or less prototypical examples, rather than a category that can be described with respect to “logical bounded entities” (Rosch and Mervis 1975).

<sup>204</sup> I will explain what counts as internal features in due course.

<sup>205</sup> Walton emphasises the idea of ‘*perceiving*’ a work in a category; Friend, however, applies the idea to the evaluation of texts.



protruding three-dimensional object or an electrically driven twitching of the canvas” (Walton 1970, 340) are contra-standard for paintings and “stream-of-consciousness narration is contra-standard for science textbooks” (Friend 2012, 188). Finally, *variable* features are those that may or may not be present in members of the category and, hence, are neither expected nor unexpected; in any case, they do not affect classification in a category. Use of colours and different types of geometrical shapes are variable in painting, while the degree of insight into the psychology of the characters is variable for literary texts.

The claim is then that standard features internal to the work, together with contextual features contribute to place a work in a category. Moreover, classifying a work under a category, the theory predicts, affects appreciation: when we appreciate a work in a category, there are certain features that we are going to expect to find, others that will not generate any expectations at all, and finally others that will surprise us if we find them.

It is important to note that Friend departs from Walton’s account in various points. Firstly, whereas Walton emphasis is on artworks, Friend’s talks about representational works more generally regardless of whether these are artistic or not. Secondly, whereas Walton’s examples come mainly from the visual arts and music, Friend focuses on written texts.<sup>206</sup> Finally and perhaps more importantly, Friend departs from Walton in determining what counts as internal features of the work. Given the purpose of Walton’s theory,<sup>207</sup> his focus is on what he calls *perceptually distinguishable categories*, i.e., categories whose membership is determined *solely* by perceptible features. Hence, he restricts *internal features* to perceptually available or manifest features of the works such as colour, shapes, composition, melodies, etc. He then considers other features such as the history of the work, the authorial categorial intentions, and the category in which contemporaries of the author classify the work,

---

<sup>206</sup> As I will mention in due course this is partly due to the different purposes of their theories.

<sup>207</sup> Walton’s theory is aimed at being in opposition to other theorists who claim that aesthetic properties of an artwork depend only on non-aesthetic observable properties internal to the work. In order to argue against them, he restricts the internal features to those that his opponents would count as relevant for aesthetic appreciation, namely, those that are manifest and perceptible in the artwork.

as *contextual features*. Friend, on the other hand, does not have the same theoretical constraints as Walton does. Her concern is not perceptually distinguishable categories – the categories of fiction and non-fiction do not rest *only*—or even mainly—on perceptually manifest features of the work.<sup>208</sup> Also, as I have already mentioned, the focus of her theory is written texts. Hence, although she coincides with Walton in what should be considered *contextual features*, her conception of *internal features* is more comprehensive: she counts as internal features of the work not only features that are manifest in the work, i.e. features that can be identified only by being exposed to the text itself ‘such as the use of linguistic or formal devices, stylistic choices and structural properties (e.g. the inclusion of ‘once upon a time’, footnotes, first- or third-person narration, etc.)’, but also other features that are integral to the work but whose identification needs complementary background knowledge, for example: the meaning of words or the implied meaning of certain expressions, ‘whether certain names refer, whether an author asserts a particular claim or has made up a particular detail, and so on’ (Friend 2012, 189).

Extending the range of internal features allows Friend to contend that some of the properties that traditional theories have considered as necessary and sufficient for fictionality, such as an invitation to imagine rather than believe parts of the work, made-up content and certain structural and stylistic devices, are in fact standard features of fiction, i.e. they are internal features of a work that are normally expected to be found in works of fiction. Hence, in contrast to other theorists, Friend claims that these features contribute to categorisation but do not by themselves determine the classification of a work (Friend, p. 189).

I think we should follow a similar strategy for the case of cinematic documentary (and fictional) works. First, following Friend, let us conceive of internal features of films as including all the features that are manifest and that can be identified only by perceiving the work: e.g., formal devices such as type of shots, type of editing, lighting, sound design, etc.; stylistic choices, such as realism, classic Hollywood style (‘invisible’ editing, absence of direct look at the camera, etc.),

---

<sup>208</sup> As many theorists of fiction and documentary have made it clear.

composition, film colour tonalities; and other things such as medium.<sup>209</sup> But in addition, internal features will also include elements that are not—or not entirely—retrievable by perceptual means, such as the force of the utterances made in the film, absence or presence of correspondence with things of the world, degree of coherence in the narrative, absence or presence of narrative closure, absence or presence of fictional or real characters and actors,<sup>210</sup> correspondence between images and sound or narrative, presence or absence of characterisation, staging or manipulation,<sup>211</sup> etc. Then, we can say that features that other authors have suggested as necessary and sufficient for documentary works such as assertive force of the content, the presence of photographs that represent only what they are ‘traces’ of and coherence between photographic content and the narrative, should be conceived of as standard features. Like other standard features, these elements do not by themselves determine the category of a work, but they do play an important role.

Following this line of thought, standard features of documentary that we expect to find in non-fictional literary and cinematic works are things such as contents that are about or refer to current events, real objects and events, a certain degree of correspondence with the facts, the presence of assertions putting forward the author’s or someone else’s view and an effort to get the facts right. If we are reading a non-fictional book, we expect there to be references to the sources of the information, and if we are watching a documentary film we expect formal features such as slow pace in editing, location sound and gradual, rather than abrupt, camera movements. We also expect that it contains documental images: images that not only represent real people and scenes but that these people and scenes are perceived as particular real existent individuals or events. Also we expect photographic images that cohere to a certain degree with what we are being told, so that if the documentary is about Churchill, we

---

<sup>209</sup> As I claimed in chapter 3, photography is a perceptually recognisable medium.

<sup>210</sup> Notice that we can perceive particular real people on screen, and we may even recognise the person. However, we need to have some background knowledge to realise that some people that we see in the film are actors.

<sup>211</sup> In some cases, characterisation, use of fake scenery or different types of image manipulation will be evident and perceptually identifiable. In other cases, however, these things may be present and we may be able to *see* the results, but we need some background knowledge to know there has been manipulation, characterisation or some sort of staging.

are not shown a Churchill look alike but photographs of Churchill himself. These features are standard for non-fictional or documentary works. Contra-standard features, or things that we do not usually find in non-fictional or documentary texts and films are, for example, indirect verbal address, sophisticated special effects produced in studio, dramatic music, re-enactment, staging, entirely animated content (in films) and invented or imaginary dialogues. On the other hand, when we read or watch a fictional text or film, we expect to find a story that represents non-existent individuals, invented or made-up content, scenarios and characters, ‘false claims’, and various elements that we are invited not to take at face value but to imagine.<sup>212</sup> Also, standard formal features of fiction films are subjective editing (e.g. point-of-view shots, flash-backs, dream sequences, etc.), frequent and varied camera movements and dramatic music. By contrast, there are other features that will somehow surprise us if we find them in a work of fiction (contra-standard features), e.g., footnotes and bibliographies in texts; interviews; people looking and talking directly to the camera and people or professional actors playing the part of their real selves in films.

Standard (and contra-standard) features then, according to this theory, affect categorisation without determining it. If a given work does not have any standard feature of the category, the chances that it belongs to that category are almost null. However, standard features do not determine by themselves the category in which a work is ultimately classified. Contextual features also play a significant role: one has to take into account, for example, the authorial categorial intentions.<sup>213</sup> A film such as *The Arbor* (Barnard, 2010), for instance, would not have been categorised as documentary only in virtue of its internal features: *The Arbor* has probably as many standard features of non-fiction as it has of fiction; part of the interest of the film relies precisely on the fact that it combines and plays with the expectations of the audience with regards to standard and contra-standard features of the genres. If the *The Arbor* is a documentary work, it is not because it is based on a true story, or because it is a creative re-enactment of real events with actors lip-synching recordings of testimonies

---

<sup>212</sup> Notice that these elements work equally well for literary texts as for films.

<sup>213</sup> Notice that the categorial intentions, on this account, should be distinguished from the intentions involved in different speech acts, such as the intention to make the audience imagine or believe certain content.

of real people. It is (partly) because the author intended the film to be appreciated in that category. But not only because of that; historical factors including the evolution of the genre also play an important role. If limited re-enactment had not been introduced as a trend in documentary during the 80s and 90s, it would have been difficult that an entirely re-enacted film such as *The Arbor* would have been classified as a documentary. And of course, the audience, critics and the relevant film institutions play a central role here: producers normally take into account the predicted responses of the potential audience and critics when they categorise works. If the audience and critics, for example, had not been familiar or had not been exposed to the different documentary trends—including verbatim theatre, a documentary version of theatre—<sup>214</sup> it would have been difficult for them to categorise the work as documentary.

If we follow the genre theory, then, we can claim that membership in the category of documentary works is determined by a set of non-essential criteria that include not only a robust set of standard features internal to the work, but also contextual features such as the author’s categorial intentions, historical and social conventions, and the category under which contemporaries would have placed the work. Moreover, these criteria should provide insight in the way we appreciate documentary works.<sup>215</sup>

So far, compared to Currie’s and Carroll’s views, the genre theory provides us with a better framework to classify works as documentary (and fiction). The theory captures the intuitions of Currie’s and Carroll’s accounts but avoids their problems. On the one hand, it captures Currie’s intuition that photography and specifically photographs that represent what they are traces of—or what I called in chapter 2 *honest* photographs—do affect categorisation. Although being photographic is a variable feature of fictional films, it is a standard feature of documentary works. We not only expect that documentary films are photographic, but we expect that the photographs represent objects and events related to the topic of the documentary. This explains why documentaries that contain a substantial amount of re-enactment or animated images are non-paradigmatic or surprising. But, unlike Currie’s view, the

---

<sup>214</sup> *The Arbor* uses similar techniques to verbatim theatre.

<sup>215</sup> This last statement will be clarified and dealt with in more detail in due course.

genre theory does not exclude these non-paradigmatic works from the category. The reason why (honest) photography is a standard feature of documentary films is, in all likelihood, also partly related to Currie's intuition: the epistemic and the phenomenological qualities of photographs. Documentary works are typically about real objects and events and objectivity (as we now conceive of this concept) is also a feature that documentaries aim to achieve. Photographs serve these purposes very well: they allow viewers to have an experience as of particular, real objects and events; in this way, photographs make viewers feel close to them. Also, photographs carry certain guarantee of reliability and, although this may change in the future, viewers still take photographic images as reliable.<sup>216</sup> However, the genre theory accommodates the fact that, while photographs are in general favourable for documentary works, on certain occasions, other pictorial types are preferable either for expressive or epistemic reasons.

On the other hand, the genre theory captures Carroll's motivations for his FPA theory: even if honest photographs are a standard feature of documentaries, their presence is neither necessary nor sufficient for a film to qualify as documentary. And the same is true of other structural and stylistic devices characteristic of documentaries. Moreover, the genre theory nicely fits the intuition that assertions play a role in documentary films. According to the genre theory, asserting the content<sup>217</sup> or parts of the content could be a variable feature of fictional films, but is indeed a standard feature of documentary works. However, the theory does not consider an assertive intention a necessary or sufficient condition for documentary. In this way, it can accommodate, on the one hand, that some documentary works are mostly glorifications, exclamations or contain more questions than assertions and, on the other, that the content of fictional films is sometimes also put forward as true.

Another advantage of the genre theory is that, like most traditional theories, it embraces the idea that what determines the categories under which works are classified include pragmatic and contextual features related to the use, historical and

---

<sup>216</sup> I will say more about the influence of photographs in the category of documentary in Chapter 5.

<sup>217</sup> Since, as I pointed out in section 5, it is not clear that we can assert with images, we can say the following: With respect to the content of images it is standard that it is put forward as being the case, but with respect to the verbal narrative content we can talk about assertions proper.

social conventions, and not only structural and semantic features. However, in contrast to other views, the genre theory does not consider works as a large continuous single speech act (e.g., a large assertion) or a compilation of speech acts with the same force. Rather, it conceives of works as complex communicative units that include a variety of authorial intentions with respect to the force of individual utterances or propositions<sup>218</sup> and also broader categorial intentions (and in doing this, it does not reduce the latter to the former).<sup>219</sup> Furthermore, the theory also captures and highlights the communicative dimension of representational works. Genres can be seen as indicators of relevance that have effects in the process of comprehension and understanding. In intending a work to belong to a certain genre, an author draws from mutual social knowledge of the uses and conventions associated with that genre and, if the author wants to be understood, she will try to follow the principles operative in that genre thereby creating certain expectations of relevance.<sup>220</sup> For the audience, in turn, knowledge of genre provides them with a cognitive-effective way to interpret the works: by guiding them to the relevant aspects to which they should be paying attention to to correctly understand the work, genres help the audience to focus on the relevant elements thus saving them unnecessary cognitive effort.<sup>221</sup>

Now, despite having shown that the genre theory provides us with a better framework to classify works as documentary or fiction, this does not yet show that the

---

<sup>218</sup> Intentions to imagine of the sort of ‘the fictive utterance’ theory of fiction (Currie 1990; Davies 2001; Stock 2011) normally apply to individual utterances or propositions and the claim is then that works of fiction contain a preponderance of fictive utterances. In Carroll’s theory, the assertive intentions are meant to apply to the whole content of the films but, as I have mentioned before, this is a partly a problem for Carroll’s theory: authors make various utterances in documentary works and not just one. Moreover, not all of them are assertions.

<sup>219</sup> It may be that as a consequence of these categorial intentions, the author makes more assertive utterances or utterances with a fictive force within the work depending on whether her intention is to produce a work of non-fiction or fiction respectively. As I said before, the genre theory contemplates assertive utterances as a standard feature of non-fictional works and fictive utterances as a standard feature of fictions.

<sup>220</sup> I use the term ‘relevance’ following the *Relevance Theory* of communication put forward by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (Sperber and Wilson 1995).

<sup>221</sup> How exactly genres contribute to ‘fine-tuning’ the expectations of relevance and thereby enter in the comprehension process is an issue that requires a more developed explanation than I can give to it here. For more on this see (Unger 2006; Sperber and Wilson 1995).

categories of documentary and fiction are genres in the sense of Friend's theory. Remember that genres are not only ways of classifying works in virtue of internal and contextual features. The theory predicts that the expectations we have with regard to standard and contra-standard features also have effects on how we evaluate works in each category. A category that we use to classify works cannot qualify as a *genre* in the relevant sense if the criteria of classification do not affect appreciation. So we now have to see how the theory explains the effects of categorising works as documentary, and whether it is in fact the case that categorising a work as a documentary, instead of fiction, affects our appreciation.

The genre theory predicts that mere presence of standard features is not normally something that captures particular critical attention: their presence is expected; if they capture our attention it is probably because we appreciate how well exploited or how originally realised these features are. For example, we do not find surprising, let alone remarkable, that the stories in documentary films or in non-fictional books are about real things and events, that the photographic images show us the people or events mentioned in the story, or that the text corresponds to what actually happened; but we praise the film or the text if it is insightful, well researched, interestingly presented and illuminating. Similarly in fiction: we take for granted that fictional works contain made up stories, or if it is a film, that it has staged scenarios, special effects, or actors not playing themselves. What we praise is that the stories are engaging and well narrated, the effects convincing, the quality of acting good, etc. By contrast, the absence of standard features or the presence of contra-standard features is normally the object of significant (positive or negative) critical attention: finding out that the content of a non-fictional film is made up, that what we see in the photographs are actors rather than the people we are told they are is, at least, a source of puzzlement and, at most, the object of severe negative criticism. The documentary film *Frat House* (Todd Phillips, 1998), for example, was widely criticised and eventually withdrawn from broadcasting by HBO after it was discovered that the final sequence of the film was staged. The sequence purportedly shows aspiring members of a fraternity being subject to humiliating 'rites of passage' but, as it turns out, the young men we see in the film footage were not in fact aspiring members; rather, they were already members of the fraternity who were paid to pretend to be aspiring members

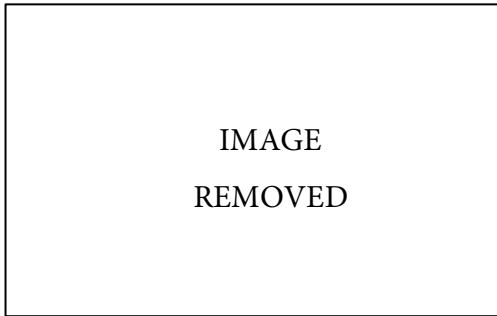


and recreate some events that, according to rumours, had actually happened. Likewise, Errol Morris' documentary film *A Thin Blue Line* (1988) received much critical attention when it was first released for including re-enactments of crime scenes. For some critics, this diminished the value of the work; for others, given that the re-enactments were clearly acknowledged as being such, and it was recognised that the author's intention was to make a documentary film, the film provided insightful and revealing information on events of which we lacked original footage. At any rate, these mixed critical responses seem to show that when contra-standard features are present—or standard features are lacking—, they significantly affect our evaluation of the works. If *Waltz with Bashir* is considered particularly interesting and original *as a documentary work*, it is partly because it uses a contra-standard feature of the genre, namely, the use of animated images. Something similar can be said in the case of fiction: the absence of linear and logical narration in a fiction film or text is usually unexpected and, for that reason, noteworthy. When *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, 1997) was released, for instance, the reviews were by no means unanimous. Many critics found the film frustrating, empty and unengaging due to the lack of a coherent and logical linear narrative. Others, however, found it original, brilliant, thoughtful and suggestive. As Friend points out, the responses we have to films such as the ones I have mentioned 'would not make sense if the lack of a standard feature or the possession of a contra-standard feature simply excluded a work from the relevant category' (Friend 2012, 191).

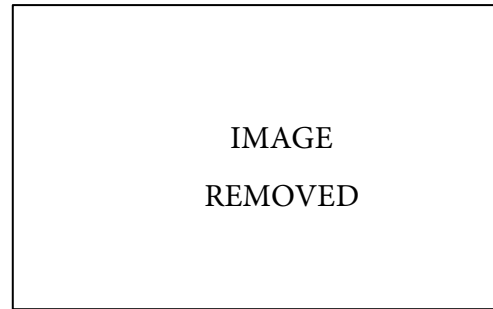
These however are theoretical predictions based on critical practices of works whose categorisation we already know. Now it is interesting to see how categorisation as fiction and non-fiction or documentary actually affects our interpretation and evaluation of works whose categorisation we do not know or are not sure of. In order to further show that fiction and non-fiction are indeed genres in the sense explained, Friend proposes a test. She invites us to consider a section of a given work in the absence of knowledge of its category; then we should first take it as fiction and then as non-fiction. The idea is that by changing the contrast-class against which we evaluate the work, some features become more salient while other stay in the background

(Friend 2012, 198).<sup>222</sup> Friend shows us how this tests work for texts, but we can try here the same with films.

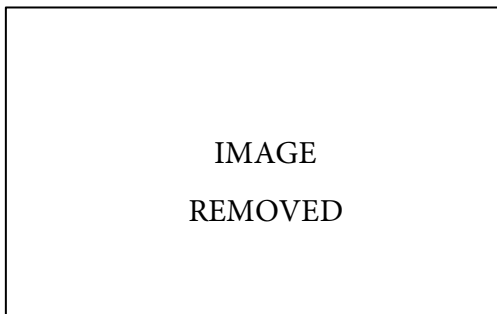
Take the following sequence describing the reappearance of a purported missing boy from the film *The Imposter* (Bart Layton, 2012). The sequence takes place very early in the film, just after the title—which, when it appears, is accompanied by a dark music that we associate with suspense.



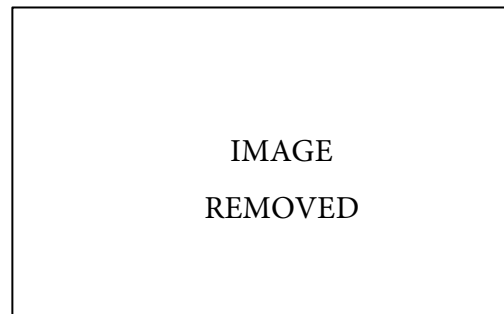
**Duration:** approx. 5 sec  
**Text on screen:** “Linares, Spain, October 7, 1997”  
**Audio:** Sound effect of rain and thunderstorm



**Duration:** approx. 28 sec.  
**Text on screen:** “Police go ahead” **Audio:** sfx of rain and thunderstorm **Off screen sound:** (very noisy telephone sound)  
 MAN 1 (Speaking in Spanish): “Policía dígame” (Police speaking)  
 MAN 2: “My wife and I are here as tourists, we found a kid.”

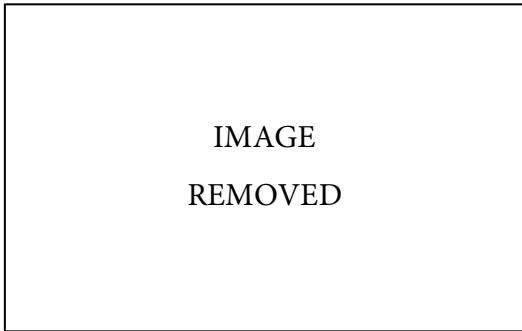


**Duration:** approx. 5 sec.  
**Text on screen:** (text on screen follows the very noisy dialogue over the telephone)  
**Audio:** sfx of rain and thunderstorm, suspense music that seems to move with the travelling we see in the image.  
**Off screen sound:** (very noisy telephone sound)  
 MAN 2: “...about 14, 15 years old”



**Duration:** approx. 5 sec.  
**Text on screen:** (text on screen follows the very noisy dialogue over the telephone)  
**Audio:** sfx of rain and thunderstorm, suspense music  
**Off screen sound:** (very noisy telephone sound)  
 MAN 2: “...No I.D. No documents on him”

<sup>222</sup> In doing this, Friend follows the thought experiment put forward by Walton (1970) in which he asks us to imagine a society where there are no paintings but there are a kind of works called *guernicas*. The *guernicas* are like Picasso’s *Guernica* but in bass-relief. The idea is that, in this society, Picasso’s *Guernica* would not be assessed in comparison to other paintings but against other *guernicas*; as a result, people in that society would not find salient some of the features that are indeed salient to us, when we evaluate the work with other paintings in the background.



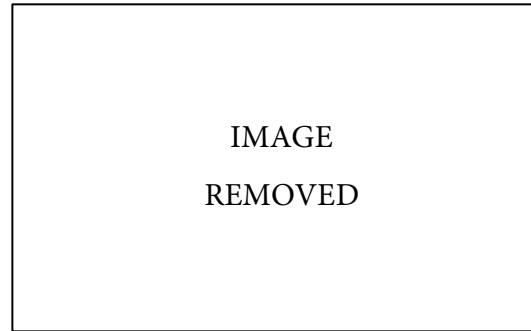
**Duration:** approx. 15 sec.

**Text on screen:** (text on screen follows the very noisy dialogue over the telephone)

**Audio:** sfx of rain and thunderstorm, suspense music accompanying the camera movement.

**Off screen sound:** (very noisy telephone sound)

MAN 2: "...He seems very young, he looks very scared. We tried to get him some food but he doesn't want it. I think you should come and help him."



**Duration:** approx. 7 sec.

**Text on screen:** (text on screen follows the very noisy dialogue over the telephone)

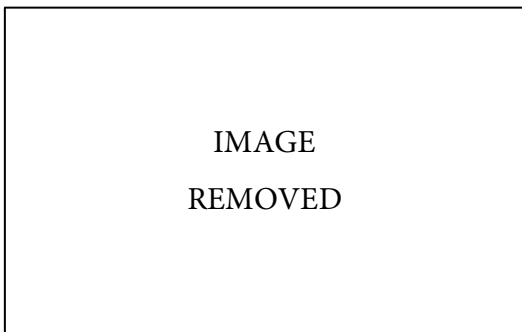
**Audio:** sfx of rain and thunderstorm, suspense music.

**Off screen sound:** (very noisy telephone sound)

MAN 1: "OK. We're going to send a patrol car"

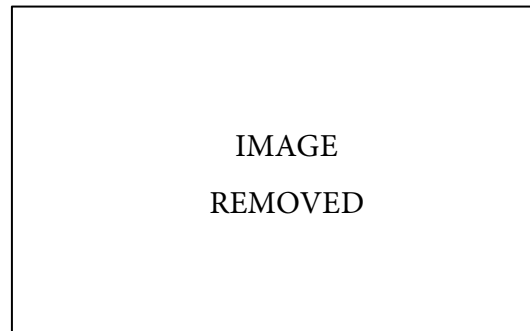
MAN 2: "You know how long it's going to take you?"

MAN 1: About 10min.



**Duration:** approx. 5 sec.

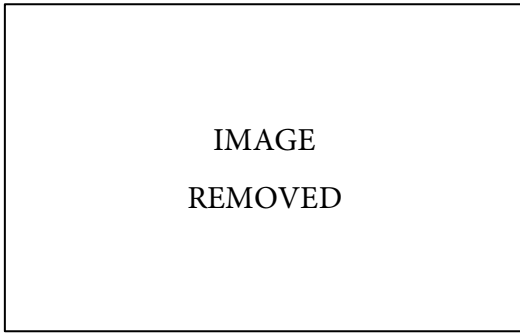
**Audio:** sfx of rain, thunders and a police siren.



**Duration:** approx. 5 sec.

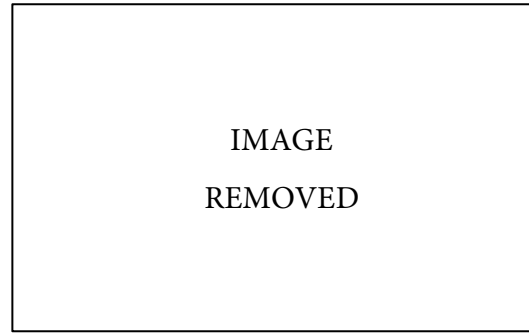
**Audio:** sfx of rain, thunders and a police siren.

Off screen sound: MAN 3 (voice over): "The most important thing for me, and what I learnt very fast was to be convincing. When the police arrived I had immediately to put into their mind that they have a kid in front of them and not an adult, so it was very important for me to behave like one."



**Duration:** approx. 7 sec.

MAN 1 P.O.: “Ven aquí. En la comisaría al menos estarás calentito. Cuéntame qué te ha pasado.” (Come on, at the police headquarters at least you’ll be warm. Tell me what has happened to you)

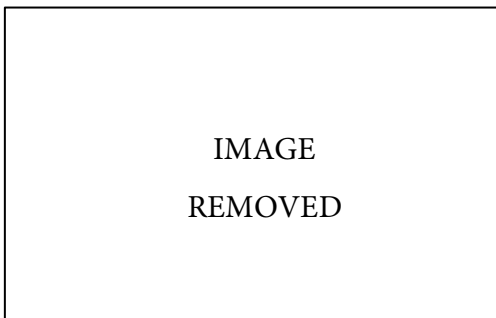


**Duration:** approx. 15 sec.

MAN 1 P.O.: “Déjame verte; ¿Qué haces aquí solo? ¿Quién ha llamado?” (Let me see you; What are you doing here, alone? Who called us?)

MAN 3 (Briefly on screen, talking directly to the camera in a different shot, and then voice over off screen): “I wanted to provoke in them a sense of guilt... of being an adult in front of a kid who is dead scared. When you see a kid, you get nervous reflex; you can’t touch him; then you understand that something is wrong.”

MAN 3 P.O.: “tranquilo” (calm down)



**Duration:** approx. 15 sec.

We see the boy on screen moving his lips but the voice we hear is that of MAN 3, whom we have seen on screen before.

MAN 3: “I wasn’t the one telling him that I’ve been sexually abused. I had them ask me that. By my attitude they were the ones thinking about it. And that gave me power.”

If we see this sequence as fiction, or as part of a fiction film, we will not be surprised by encountering a dramatic suspenseful atmosphere created by the tense music, the perfectly produced sound effects of thunders and storm, the careful composition of the night scene image and the slow *travelling shot*.<sup>223</sup> We will not ask how it is possible to get so many camera perspectives of the same event; how, for example, there is a camera inside the phone booth – this is something standard on fiction films: filmmakers design every aspect of the *mise-en-scène*. We will probably

<sup>223</sup> A *travelling shot* is a shot in which the camera moves towards or from a person or object.

assume that, although the name ‘Linares’ refers to a real city in Spain, the people we see in the film are actors, and we will certainly not take for granted that the characters they are playing really exist or existed: fictional characters and actors are standard in fictional films, and it is frequent to see fictional events in a film taking place in real locations—this is a variable feature in fictional films. We may indeed remark, however, on the direct address to the camera of one of the characters (MAN 3), but we may assume that, since he is talking in first person, the night scene might be a flash back, and maybe it is some sort of dramatic effect: maybe he is confessing to the police or telling the story to a psychologist in the fictional future.

Contrast our perceptions and expectations when we see this sequence as non-fiction. We may be puzzled by the multiple camera angles and perspectives of the night scene: they do not seem to be recordings of a surveillance camera. Also the mysterious atmosphere, the tense music and sound effects—standard for fiction—strikes us as salient in a non-fiction context. However, in light of the subsequent shots where a man is facing the camera directly, we will assume that the night scene is maybe a dramatic illustration of the events he is telling. Now we may assume that these events really took place at the particular place, date and time indicated at the beginning. We will then assume that the man speaking to the camera is not an actor, but a real person who is being interviewed for the film and that the characters played by what seem like actors in the night scene really existed. We will probably think that the events happened in the way they are being told; and if we learnt that they were not so, we would be disappointed. The mix of dramatisation and what seem like a real interview may produce some confusion at first, as we may not be sure, until the story develops further, what we can believe to be true and what we should not.

*The Imposter* is in fact a documentary film and its classification as such is uncontroversial. Viewers who might enter the film theatre without knowledge of the category in which the work falls will probably be confused and constantly questioning—especially at the beginning—whether the story is real or not. As we have seen the film exploits many expressive devices associated with fiction—from the style and the *mise-en-scène* to the re-enactment and the apparent invitation to imagine how the events occurred. But none of this makes the work fiction; more importantly, it does

not make the film a bad documentary. On the contrary, the film was praised for its originality, its depth and for creating an appropriate suspense atmosphere that matches the convoluted real story that it tells.

As the example of *The Imposter* shows, the effects on appreciation—what we expect and find salient in each case—clearly differ when we perceive or evaluate works in different genres: fiction or documentary. But the effects of classification are further supported by psychological research. Friend cites various studies that indicate that different subjects who read the same story in some cases labelled fiction and in others non-fiction, exhibit different responses (pp.199-200). For example, subjects who read the narratives labelled as fiction tend to retell the stories with more detail than those who read the same narratives as non-fiction; also, the results show that texts labelled as fiction tend to lower the level of scrutiny of readers, so they may be *more* likely to believe certain claims if they are part of a work of fiction than if they are part of a non-fictional work (p.199). These studies are specific for literary works or texts, so further evidence is needed for the case of films.<sup>224</sup> However, it would not be surprising to find similar results.

Now we are in a position to affirm that the genre theory provides us with a robust and satisfactory account of the category of fiction and non-fiction or documentary, not only for written texts but also for films and maybe also visual media in general.<sup>225</sup> On the one hand, the theory gives us a robust framework for classification that works better than alternative accounts: as we mentioned before, it captures the intuitions of other theories while avoiding their problems. Moreover, it nicely explains why we think that photographs somehow affect categorisation and

---

<sup>224</sup> In the next chapter, I will bring forward some empirical studies on the effect of the fiction and factual labels in the case of photographs. There are similar studies for the case of films that suggest that subjects who are exposed to violent films whose actions they perceive as real are more predisposed to aggressive behaviour than when viewers are exposed to violent films whose actions they take to be fictional (Thomas and Tell 1974). However, the methodology is different from the experiments cited by Friend. Thomas and Tell did not specifically test the effect of the labels but the perception of the content.

<sup>225</sup> I will address the application of this theory to the case of photography later on in this chapter and in Chapter 5.

contribute to non-fiction. On the other, it offers a convincing account of how these categories affect appreciation.

Our next question is: Can we apply the genre theory to account for non-fictional or documentary photography? I will give an answer in the following chapter. But let me summarise what I have said so far in the following conclusion.

## 7 Conclusion

There are two things to bring home from this chapter. Firstly, there is indeed a close relation between the photographic medium and the documentary genre; the former does play an important role in categorisation and contributes to the purpose of the latter. The relation, however, does not rely on the fact that photographically representing real existing particular objects is sufficient for a work to become documentary; being an honest, natural image is not equivalent to being a documentary work. In fact, honest or veridical photographs are not even necessary for a visual non-fictional work to be documentary: there are clearly documentary films and, arguably also documentary pictures that are not photographic, and even when they are indeed photographic, photographs do not have to be veridical or honest. But the fact that honest photographs are neither necessary nor sufficient for documentary works does not mean that they do not play a role in categorisation at all. Honest or veridical documental photographs are a standard feature of documentary works; we expect documentary works to contain these kinds of photographs and not finding them normally affects our evaluation of the works. Throughout the discussion of this issue, it also became clear that the theories of documentary that either take honest documental photographs as necessary for documentary or not relevant at all, are flawed. Conceiving of the category of documentary or non-fiction, as well as that of fiction, as genres is a more convincing view. This is the second point to bring home. In chapter 5 I will discuss how the genre theory applies to photographic works. I will analyse whether we can identify the correct criteria for classification and, whether knowledge of genre does in fact guide our appreciation of photographs, as the genre theory predicts. Only if these conditions are fulfilled we will be in a position to say that fiction and non-fiction or documentary are photographic genres. In chapter 5, I will also add some claims about the close relation between the category of documentary

and the photographic medium. Moreover, I will address the question of why the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is not frequently used in still photography.



## CHAPTER 5

---

### FICTION AND NON-FICTION IN PHOTOGRAPHY

**T**HE BEST way to conceive of the categories of fiction and non-fiction or documentary, we have seen in the previous chapter, is as genres: categories in which we classify representational works that guide our appreciation of them. Notice, however, that it is possible in the framework of the genre theory that fiction and non-fiction are genres in some media but not in others: as other genres, they may play a role in the evaluation of works in a certain medium but not in others (the villanelle, for instance, is a genre of poetry, but it does not occur in other media). Also, the theory allows that standard features of the same category differ slightly from one medium to another – for example, being composed by veridical photographs may be a standard feature for non-fiction in films but, for obvious reasons, not for non-fiction in literature. This is actually another advantage of the genre theory. Other views seem to predict that in as much as a representational work fulfils the necessary and sufficient conditions for fictionality or non-fictionality (e.g., prescribing imaginings of the relevant kind or being presented with assertive intentions) it automatically becomes fiction or non-fiction respectively. The genre theory is more flexible in this regard. Since it does not claim that there are necessary and sufficient conditions for either category, and since genres are ultimately categories linked to appreciative practices, it is possible that some genres do not apply to certain media. So does the distinction between the genres of fiction and non-fiction/documentary apply in photography? Answering this question will be one of the purposes of this chapter; the other is to explore how the nature of photography shapes the genres or appreciative practices of works in this medium.

#### **1 Overview**

As we saw in chapter 4, Friend's theory tells us that in order to say that a given category is a genre in her sense, we should be able to identify the correct criteria of classification including internal and contextual features and also this classification

should have an effect on appreciation. Following these requirements, I will start by exploring the case of documentary in photography. In section 2 I will try to identify standard, contra-standard and variable features of documentary photography and see whether they, together with other contextual features, give us a good framework to classify works in this category. Subsequently, in section 3, I will examine whether the category of documentary is a genuine, active genre in photography by analysing whether this category has effects on appreciations. Then, in section 4, I will focus on the category of fiction. I will put forward some sceptical arguments that can give us reason to doubt the application of the genre of fiction to photography. In section 5, I provide answers to these arguments and claim that there is indeed a recognisable genre of fiction in this medium. However, in section 6, I will claim that even though fiction and non-fiction/documentary seem to be active genres in photography, there are good reasons to think that these categories behave slightly differently in this medium. In particular, I will suggest that in photography it is better to speak of documentary and non-documentary genres, or perhaps more conventionally put, factual and non-factual photography. Unlike in other media, it seems that in photography the documentary or factual genre, in Austin's words, is the category that 'wears the trousers' (Austin 1964, 70).<sup>226</sup> This, I will argue in section 7, is a consequence of the nature of the medium itself. Moreover, I will claim that in photography we can say that the factual genre 'comes for free' or is the default outcome.

## 2 Documentary. Criteria for classification

The first thing we need to do in order to see whether the genre theory provides a satisfactory framework to understand the category of documentary in photography is to examine whether we can find a set of internal and contextual features that do justice to the works we ordinarily classify as non-fictional or documentary photography. What then could be these internal (standard, variable and contra-standard) and contextual features? I suggest they are those that are listed in Table 1 below:

---

<sup>226</sup> According to Austin, a *trouser-word* is a term that for some reason is more basic or more definite: "to understand 'x', we need to know that is to be 'x', or to be an *x*, and knowing this apprises us of what is *not* to be an *x*."

NON-FICTIONAL/DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY*			
	STANDARD FEATURES	VARIABLE FEATURES	CONTRA-STANDARD FEATURES
Internal Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Factual content (Things that happened in the world, e.g. every day scenes, social and political events, scientific content: ethnography, anthropology, medicine, etc. Nature, sports.)</li> <li>• Representation of real people, objects or scenarios.</li> <li>• Veridical representations ('honest' photography)</li> <li>• Documental (images not only represent real people and scenarios but we <i>perceive</i> people and scenarios as being concrete, real and existent)</li> <li>• Realist or natural style</li> <li>• Content put forward as being the case</li> <li>• Coherence between the content of the image and the title or narrative (if there is one)</li> <li>• Natural or little artificial lighting</li> <li>• Snapshot aesthetics</li> <li>• Little or no manipulation (colour and light retouching is frequent but not composition printing)</li> <li>• Research, educational or informative purposes</li> <li>• Small or medium format (except for landscapes and portraiture)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black and white or colour photography</li> <li>• High or low image quality</li> <li>• Outdoors or indoors scenarios</li> <li>• Long, medium or short exposures</li> <li>• Close-ups, wide-angle shots.</li> <li>• Digital or analogue photography</li> <li>• Long-format photography</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characterisation of actors or people</li> <li>• Staging (except portraits)</li> <li>• Re-enactment</li> <li>• Made-up or imaginary scenarios</li> <li>• Sophisticated pre- and post-production</li> <li>• Use of studio (except for portraits)</li> <li>• Unrealistic or surreal style</li> <li>• Very controlled and sophisticated composition and lighting conditions</li> <li>• Manipulation</li> <li>• Non-realistic or imaginative intent.</li> <li>• Incoherence between the content of the image and the title or narrative (if there is one)</li> <li>• Symbolic or metaphorical content.</li> </ul>
Contextual features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Category under which contemporaries place the work and institutional context: Journalism, specialised magazines (travel, nature, science, current affairs, medicine, etc.); scientific contexts, non-fictional books, family albums, yearbooks, etc.</li> <li>• Author's categorial intentions: intention that the work is judged against the works considered documentary or non-fiction.</li> <li>• Historical and social conventions (e.g. canons of objectivity, things that are considered scientific, etc.)</li> </ul>		
<p>* This table does not mean to be exhaustive, it captures general features that may or may not change in documentary subgenres and it is made considering contemporary standards of documentary or non-fiction photography.</p>			

Table 1

According to this description, Walker Evans' series *Let us Praise Famous Men* (Figure 53 Walker Evans "Let us Praise Famous Men" (1941) will be classified as documentary because (1) it possesses various of the standard features of the category: it depicts what

looks like a factual, ordinary life scene; the style is realist; the people depicted do not look like actors (they are not posing, seem to be wearing ordinary clothes and their gestures seem natural and spontaneous); and there are no signs of artificial lighting. Also, the content is put forward as true and, as far as we know, it is a veridical or honest photograph. In addition, (2) the photograph is part of a book with clear factual content that could be found in the non-fictional sections of bookstores and libraries; furthermore, the photograph (and the book) was produced under an assignment of *Time* magazine in the historical context of the Great Depression. And (3) Walker Evans had the intention to produce a documentary picture.

Similarly in the case of the photo of Buzz Aldrin's landing on the Moon (Figure 54). The photograph presents various of the standard features of documentary photography: it is the photograph of an event that actually happened; the composition does not look specially sophisticated, it is a rather spontaneous snapshot, the content is of what can be considered a scientific expedition; although there is artificial light, the illumination does not seem particularly carefully planned and the accompanying caption seems to be an statement of facts. Also, it was published in *LIFE* magazine (a factual publication), when the society was aware of the Apollo 11 mission to the moon.<sup>227</sup> And finally, the intent was to document a historical moment.

Also, we can see how the genre theory can fit Galton's *The Jewish Type* (mentioned in the previous chapter), photographs such as the one showing Hitler-without-Goebbels (Figure 24) and other deceptive pictures into the category of documentary. Although they do present contra-standard features—notably, manipulation—they still possess some standard features of the category: *The Jewish Type*, for example, presents a snapshot aesthetics, the content is put forward as being the case; but perhaps more importantly, in this case, was that it was meant as a scientific undertaking, it was part of a research project and it was presented in institutional settings associated with non-fictional works. Figure 24, in turn, was put forward as being the case, it presents what looks like an everyday natural shot of the life of Nazi politicians and friends, it was part of the private albums of the Nazis and then was distributed in pamphlets and newspapers. However, the genre theory can also

---

<sup>227</sup> Maybe in a context where people were completely unfamiliar with the possibility of space travel, this photograph would not look credible at all.

explain why these photographs are contentious cases of documentary photography: they possess significant contra-standard features such as manipulation and made-up content. This justifies why we may think of them as defective or not ‘ideal,’ but does not disqualify the photographs as documentary works. In fact, if these photographs were classified as fictional, the charge of manipulation and made-up content would not have been legitimate criticisms, as these would presumably be standard features of such category.

So far, it seems that the genre theory gives a convincing account of documentary photography. However, the success of the theory for the case of photography will ultimately depend on whether categorising a work as non-fiction or documentary –as opposed to, say, fiction—actually has an effect or plays a role in our appreciation of still photographs. Up to this point I have just made the case for the genre theory as a better alternative to other theories of documentary in terms of classification of photographic works. Also, it has become clear that the category of documentary or non-fiction as well as that of fiction works much in the same way as genres or categories of art (in Walton’s sense). However, as I mention at the beginning of this section, the genre theory predicts that we can only speak of a genre if categorisation plays a role in appreciation of the works—categorising photographs for how well they work as bookmarkers, for instance, does not play any role in the appreciation of those photographs as photographs; and this, even if we can identify standard and contra-standard features (e.g., it may be standard for photo-bookmarkers to be rectangular and medium-sized, while it may be contra-standard that photo-bookmarkers are daguerreotypes). Hence, if we want to know whether the genre theory is a good alternative to account for the category of documentary in photography, we need to analyse whether knowledge of genre does in fact have an effect on our interpretation and evaluation of photographic works.

### **3 Documentary. Effects on appreciation**

In order to know whether non-fiction/documentary is actually a photographic genre in the relevant sense explained by the genre theory, this category should play a role in our appreciation and evaluation of photographic works. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, Stacie Friend has shown us how the fiction and non-fiction categories do indeed have

effects in understanding and interpretation of literary works, and I argued the same for the case of film. Now, in order to see whether this also applies to photography, we can start by running the ‘change of category test’ that I introduced in the previous chapter.

Take, for example, the following photograph entitled *Dead Troops Talk (A Vision After an Ambush of a Red Army Patrol near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986)*

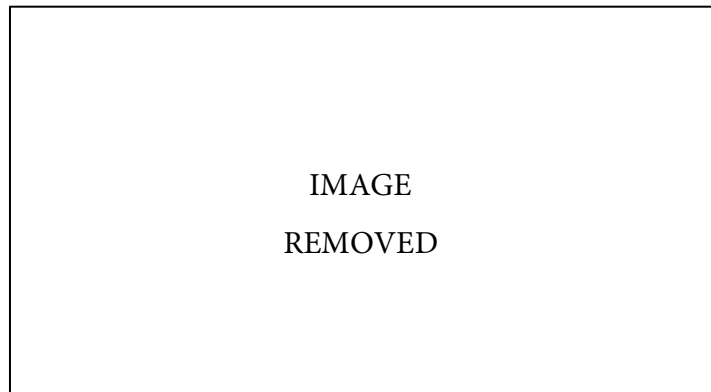


Figure 60 [Author undisclosed for the purposes of the test] "Dead Troops Talk (A vision after an ambush of a Red Army patrol near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986)

If we judge this photograph as a documentary work, we will recognise the subject matter of the photograph as standard for the category; it seems to be a factual war scene, and war scenes are very frequently associated with documentary photography. Considering the title, we will probably think that the people we see in the picture are real soldiers of the Red Army patrol, and we may also assume that the events actually took place in Afghanistan on the winter of 1986. Again, all these are standard features of documentary works. Now, overall, and paying attention to the details, we will probably be led to assess this photograph negatively because it looks somehow artificial, inauthentic and stilted. If the viewer looks closely she will notice unobtrusive details such as the following (Figure 61) (centre of the image): one of the soldiers seems to be explicitly showing us his wound while the other has a very strange exaggerated expression of disgust.



Figure 61 Image detail "Dead Troops Talk"

This is not the only detail of the picture that looks strange; there is something unnatural about the poses of the soldiers in general. Furthermore, the composition of the picture itself looks artificial. It looks maybe too dynamic and maybe too closely shot for a picture of (nearly) dead bodies in a war scene, and too dull and focused for a documentary image of a battlefield. All this, as well as the exaggerated, almost theatrical expressions of the soldiers depicted are not only contra-standard in documentary photography but are normally judged negatively in these kinds of works: either because the viewer may suspect that the photograph is staged or, if the charge of inauthenticity is ruled out, then because the photographer seems to be inviting a morbid view on the part of the audience. An alternative possibility that we might consider in view of the apparently contra-standard features perceived in the details is that the photograph may be a snapshot of a theatre play but, in this case, we may still judge the photograph negatively: the content of the image does not really show what the caption tells us the photograph is about; hence, the work appears deceptive.

If we now perceive the photograph as fiction, by contrast, we will assume from the outset that this is a staged scene. The soldiers we see in the shot—we will be led to think—are in all likelihood actors and, although the photograph may be intended to represent an actual event, it need not. All these are standard features in fiction and, as such, they do not strike us as unusual or puzzling; in fact, we expect them to be so. With respect to the details of the photograph, we may take the theatricalisation or artificiality as a bad performance, in which case we may still assess the photograph negatively. However, we might take a different approach. Given how blatant the exaggeration is, we might take it as being purposeful and, therefore, perhaps also blameless. The photograph may be, for example, a sort of parody—certainly black humor—, or the author might be trying to make a caricature of the nonsense of war.

None of this is unusual in at least some fictional works. In this case, the photograph might be judged as provocative, critical or thought stimulating.

These different reactions to the same image depending on how we label it support the claim that the category of documentary—and also the category of fiction—do indeed affect appreciation in photography. Further support comes from some empirical studies. Mendelson and Papacharissi (2007) tested a hypothesis previously considered in more informal empirical studies by Worth and Gross (1974), according to which people process information differently if they label the representations as fiction or factual. They showed four different photographs to two different groups of subjects. Two of the photographs depicted a marching band and the other two depicted a war scene in Bosnia. Subjects of one group were told that all the images were taken from the newspapers; the first two images, they were told, ‘are news photographs of a local high school band in Washington, D.C. that succeeds with few resources’; the other two images, they were further told ‘are news photographs from the war in Bosnia’. People of the other group, by contrast, were told that the images were actually taken from two different fictional films; they were told that the first two photographs were ‘shots from an upcoming movie on an urban high school band that succeeds with few resources’, while the other two were taken from a ‘movie on the war in Bosnia’ (Mendelson and Papacharissi 2007, 237–38). Mendelson and Papacharissi obtained the following results: (1) When images are labelled as ‘fiction’, participants listed substantially more thoughts in response to photographs than in response to photographs labelled as ‘factual news’. The fictional label, Mendelson and Papacharissi suggest, leads to increased cognitive processing because viewers assume that there is some intended meaning above and beyond the representational content that is being perceived, and/or because the images are viewed to be more ambiguous. When photographs are labelled as fiction, they claim, people tend “to wander to more disparate areas” (p. 240). When the images are labelled as ‘news’ or factual, by contrast, people seem to take the content at face value and the ‘specificity [of the content ...] limits the connections they make’ (p. 240).

These results may need to be further tested – for example, with clearly artistically intended non-fictional works whose content may be more ambiguous, and whose context may invite more thoughts. However, if Mendelson and Papacharissi are

Paloma Atencia-Linares



right, in the case of *Dead Troops Talk*, if we label the photograph as fiction, we would perhaps be led to make various hypotheses about why the author has produced this photograph in the way he did: the exaggerated expressions may be so for a reason, is it a parody? Is it a reflection on the atrocities of war? Why does the title include the word 'talk'? Is this an imaginary scene of dead soldiers sharing their thoughts with each other on what happened to them, on the incidents that had them killed? On the contrary, and again assuming that the results are accurate, when we label the same work as documentary, we may just take the content at face value: we may just think that this is a real war scene and if we are puzzled by the exaggerated expressions we may just react against that morbid way of representing atrocities.

A different result they obtained was this: (2) different labels also affect perceptual and emotional responses. 'While it does seem that "real" messages were less cognitively engaging, they were more emotionally engaging' (Mendelson and Papacharissi 2007, 241). According to Mendelson and Papacharissi, subjects perceive the photographs labelled as factual more 'real and novel', and they feel more excited and emotionally moved by events they perceived as 'real'. This is in consonance with previous studies on violent and action content in films that suggest that people who perceive video images as 'real' are more aroused and prone to aggressive behaviour than people who perceive the content of video images as 'fantasy' (the arousal was measured by skin conductance and self-report) (Geen 1975). Again, more studies would need to be made in the particular case of photography to strengthen these results. But, it is plausible to think that if we take *Dead Troops Talk* as a documentary photograph, and we assume, as is standard for this category, that the representational content is real and that we are seeing actual people wounded in a battlefield, we may feel more emotionally moved than if we take the photograph as being fictional. In the latter case, as is standard of fiction, we may assume that what we see is made up content and therefore would perhaps be disposed to take more emotional distance.<sup>228</sup>

---

<sup>228</sup> Notice that this need not apply to narrative films. It is possible that the narrative and the point of view that it adopts on the characters give us a perspective on the action that turns out to be more moving than what it would be in a non-fiction film. However, in photography, the lack of narrative in most cases may lead to the results that Mendelson and Papacharissi obtained.

As it turns out, despite the allusion to real places and dates in the title and the seemingly factual thematic of the photograph, *Dead Troops Talk*, by Jeff Wall, is not a documentary work. Or, as Susan Sontag puts it, this photograph is ‘the antithesis of a document’ (Sontag 2003, 123). But precisely because of these seemingly contra-standard features Wall’s picture has been praised for being a reflection on the impossibility of understanding what we see in real war images (Sontag 2003) and for the originality of treating a topic typical of documentary photograph in probably the most standard fictional style: by a careful and produced staging, using actors, make-up and sophisticated lighting design.

There seems to be evidence then, that not only the category of non-fiction/documentary, but also of fiction, do play a role in guiding our appreciation of photographic works. Indeed, knowledge of the category directs our attention to different features of the work, which we take to be more or less salient according to our expectations. Moreover, as Friend notes (Friend 2012, 201), these effects affect our appreciation at various levels: we not only care about the coherence between the depicted content and the title, or whether the content is asserted or meant to be imagined; rather the categories also have an effect on whether we perceive stylistic and structural features as salient or not.

This evidence, in addition to the identification of criteria for classification in the documentary genre that I advanced in Chapter 4, allows us to say that documentary is indeed an active genre in photography. This is not surprising. The category of non-fiction or documentary is frequently associated with photography; there is a clear institutionalised practice with awards, specialised agencies, clear channels of distribution, photographers specifically working in documentary photography, etc.<sup>229</sup>

Can we say the same about fiction?

---

<sup>229</sup> I mean ‘documentary’ in the broad sense indicated in Chapter 4. Clearly, we can distinguish more finely various different types of documentary or non-fictional photography understood in the broad sense, e.g., photojournalism, documentary photography in the narrow sense, ethnographic photography, war photography, sports photography, wildlife photography, etc. I will have something to say about this later on in this chapter, but the main point I am making, is that these are all established *subgenres* and practices of what we can call broadly ‘documentary’ photography.

#### 4 Scepticism about fictional photography

The example of Jeff Wall's *Dead Troops Talk* showed that the category of fiction does indeed play a role in our appreciation and interpretation of photographic works. There are certain expectations that viewers seem to have in mind when they perceive or evaluate a work labelled in the category of 'fiction' as opposed to non-fiction or documentary. But does this mean that we can then say that fiction is indeed a genre active in photography? Not yet. Remember that the genre theory predicts that a given category is a proper genre if (1) perceiving (or reading) the work in the given category affects appreciation, but also, and this is important, (2) if we can identify the correct criteria of classification. This second condition involves that we can detect a practice of classifying and appreciating works together, relevant categorial intentions (contextual features) and also a robust and consistent set of standard features shared by various works (internal features). This set of features, in turn, should justify the classification into a single category such that this category, partly in virtue of these standard and contra-standard features, contributes to the correct interpretation, understanding and appreciation of the work. I have shown how these two conditions are met in the case of the documentary genre. However, in the case of fiction, I have only shown that the first condition seems to apply. What we need to do now to show that fiction is indeed a genre in photography is to see whether the category meets the second condition: we need to identify a practice of classification and, among other things, the standard and contra-standard features of the category.

This may not seem, in principle, to be a difficult task, but there might be some reasons to be sceptical about the possibility of success. Here are some of them.

To begin with, the sceptic can claim, we do not normally use the labels of 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' in photography. The documentary genre is indeed recognised in photography and maybe we can say that that is the name we use for non-fictional photography. However, it is a bit odd to hear the category of 'fiction' as applied to photographs; this is a label that is typically associated with narrative works both literary and cinematic. The sceptic can claim that the fact that we do not frequently use the label 'fiction' in photography is an indication that there is no practice of fiction within the medium. To support this idea, the sceptic can suggest that

there do not seem to be exhibitions on fictional photography, there do not seem to be any awards for fictional photography (or, if we want to make comparisons with the case of films, there are no awards to photography in any of the well-known fiction subgenres such as comedy, drama, etc.), the idea of fictional photography is not very common in critical practices, libraries and archives do not normally classify photographs as fictional, and it is not clear that photographers intend their works to be fictional. Now, the sceptic can further claim, if there is no clear institutionalised practice of classifying photographic works as fiction, how do we know which are standard or contra-standard features of the works in such a category? Actually, the fact that we seem to have confused intuitions with respect to what counts as fictional photography supports the claim that we actually have difficulties identifying standard and contra-standard features in this category. We do not normally have problems when it comes to fictional works of literature or film. We may hesitate in unclear cases but we have a very clear idea of what the paradigmatic fictional literary work amounts to. We do not seem to have that clarity of intuitions in the case of fictional photography.

One possible answer to this latter problem could be to say that we can know what the standard and contra-standard features of fictional photography are just by opposition to the documentary genre. That is, the standard features of the documentary genre are the contra-standard features of fiction and the contra-standard features of documentary genre are the standard features of fiction. However, this may bring forward yet another sceptical doubt: the solution of assuming that contra-standard features of documentary photography are the standard features of fictional photography may not be as straightforward as it seems. On the one hand, just in virtue of being photographs, fictional photographs would inherit many of the standard features of the documentary genre such as being documental and representing real people and scenarios—even if the photograph is meant to represent also something else. On the other hand, it is not clear that we can actually say that other standard features of documentary such as being produced with natural or little artificial light, having a realist or natural style or being in small or medium format are not also standard features of fiction. Notice, for instance, that a few instances of non-documentary photographic works included in this thesis arguably have one, two or all

of these features.<sup>230</sup> So the sceptic can claim that if in such a limited selection of possibly ‘fictional’ photographic works we can spot a non-negligible set of works that share those features, then we cannot be certain whether these are in fact contra-standard features of fiction.

How serious are these sceptical doubts? Should they discourage us from thinking that the genre of fiction applies to photography?

## 5 In defense of photographic fiction

I do think that the genre of fiction is applicable to photography, and I will argue for this by providing arguments and evidence against the sceptic. Now, even if there is indeed a category of fiction, the sceptical doubts force us to explain things such as why the label of ‘fiction’ is not normally applied to photographs, why it is ‘odd’ to talk about fictional photography or how it is possible to obtain the standard and contra-standard features of the category if the sceptic is right and there does not seem to be any practice of classifying photographic works as fiction. I will start by saying why I do not think that the sceptical arguments are persuasive. Some of the questions posed above will then be immediately answered, but others will be dealt with in sections 6 and 7.

Firstly, the fact that we do not use the label of ‘fiction’, would not mean that the label or the category is not intelligible as applied to photography. And this would be so, even if the sceptic were right and there was not a robustly institutionalised practice of ‘fiction’ in photography. Because photographers and viewers are experienced consumers and interpreters of fiction in other media, they could import the conventions and uses that are present in other media to photography. As a matter of fact, this seems to be what people actually do when they are told that a photograph is ‘fiction’. If the label is—as it seems to be—a meaningful guide for their appreciation of the work, it may well be because they know what kind of features are associated with ‘fiction’ and, at least some of them seem to be intelligible for photographs as well.

---

<sup>230</sup> The following list of works have the three features: Figure 2, Figure 27, Figure 30, Figure 51, Figure 66, Figure 67; these works have two features: Figure 20, Figure 23, Figure 26, Figure 51, Figure 46, Figure 47; and these have one of these features: Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 27, Figure 48, Figure 50, Figure 63.

Compare, for example, how puzzling and meaningless would be to be told that *Dead Troops Talk* is a villanelle or a minuet. As the example of the photograph above shows, the implied standard features that seem to be tacitly operating when we apply the label fiction are similar to the ones that we use in other media: presence of actors, staging, special effects, make-up, sophisticated studio production, etc.

Moreover, it is not clear that there is no institutionalised practice that we can associate with the category of fiction in photography. We may not call it ‘fiction’ but it might be that what appear to be disparate practices represented by different critical traditions are really part of one kind or category. In fact, this seems to be the case: there are practices in photography that are continuous with the practice of fiction in other media and it makes sense to understand them as belonging to the same genre. For example, there is a tradition in photography that clearly draws from fictional literature and is directly inspired by different types of fictional films. A great deal of the work by Cindy Sherman represents a paradigmatic example, and specifically, her sixty-nine black-and-white photographs made between 1977 and 1980 called *Untitled Film Stills* (Figure 62).

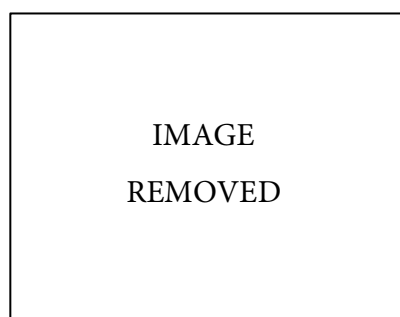


Figure 62 Cindy Sherman "Untitled Film Still #21" (1978)

The title of these photographs not only directly alludes to the influence of and reference to film, but also Sherman adopts in her photographs standard features of fictional films such as staging or made-up situations, impersonation, performance, an underlying (perhaps suggested) imaginative story, and also, types of shots characteristic of fictional films such as ‘low-horizon’, ‘deep-focus’ or ‘Dutch tilt’ (Denson 2012). Also in this tradition are some photographs by Jeff Wall. *Dead Troops Talk* is certainly one but there are others such as *The Passerby* or *Mimic* (Figure 63).

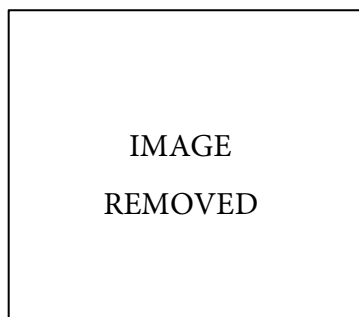


Figure 63 Jeff Wall "Mimic" (1982)

Like Sherman, Wall draws on the style and thematic frequently found in fictional films: his photographs are of staged scenes and use performance, impersonation, make-up, and have an underlying implicit story. Interestingly, Wall frequently finds inspiration in social realism or neorealist films (which are a sub-genre of fictional film),<sup>231</sup> so even when his ‘cinematic photographs’—as they have been called—involve sophisticated and careful pre- and post-production, re-enactment and characterisation, his ‘actors’ are frequently amateurs, the scenes are inspired by real scenes—in fact they frequently represent similar real scenes that Wall himself has experienced in his life<sup>232</sup>—and he aims at creating a natural style without intending to produce documentary works. Other well-known photographers, parts of whose work fit well in this tradition, are Duane Michals, Anna Gaskell, Gregory Crewdson and Hanna Starkey. All of them are inspired in one way or another by the atmosphere, style, and thematic of fictional films or literary works; moreover, their work imports the conventions not only of fiction films and literature in general but of the different fictional sub-genres by which they are inspired.

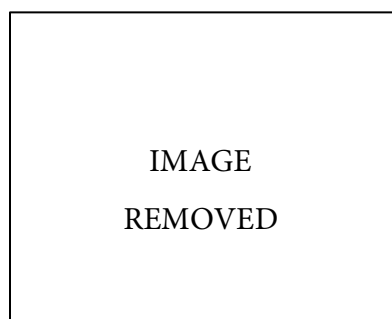


Figure 64 Gregory Crewdson "Unpenitent Daughter" (2011)

<sup>231</sup> This has been recognised by Wall himself in an interview see (Jones 1990)

<sup>232</sup> This is the case of *Mimic* (see the online catalogue of the Tate Gallery “Jeff Wall: Room Guide, Room 3” 2013)

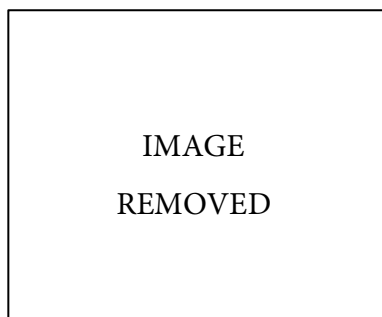


Figure 65 Anna Gaskell "Untitled 21" (1997)

This shows, I think, that there is indeed a tradition in photography that is continuous with the genre of fiction in other media. Furthermore, it makes sense to understand the works in this tradition as belonging to the same genre, not only because there is an explicit intention on the part of the authors to produce works that are continuous with the practice of fiction in other media, but also, because the standard features of works in this practice are partly inherited from works of fiction in films and literature<sup>233</sup> and, as the example of *Dead Troops Talk* shows, these features play a role in appreciation.

Further support for the claim that this photographic tradition is indeed integral to the genre of fiction is that there is evidence in critical practices of making this connection explicit. Take the following examples:

(1) On the occasion of a retrospective on the work of Cindy Sherman organised at the MoMA in New York, Eva Respini, the photography curator of the museum said the following:

[Cindy Sherman] emerged just before the boom of staged photography in the '90s, with people like Gregory Crewdson and Jeff Wall. And I think it's no coincidence that her extremely *fictional photographs* came before *what is now the de facto mode of photography—staged and fictional cinematic tableaux*. A lot of younger artists are interested in using a photographic space that is a fictional space, whether it's created in the studio or appropriating pictures from the Internet (Hoban 2012; *my italics*).

---

<sup>233</sup> This does not mean that *all* the standard features are inherited from fictional films or literature. Some standard features, such as an explicit intention to allude to cinematic references, might be specific of this genre in photography.



(2) The following commentary appears in relation to Jeff Wall's *Dead Troops Talk* on the Tate Gallery online catalogue of the exhibition:

Wall *merges conventions from war and horror movies* with those of the history painting of previous eras to create an elaborate, *grotesque fiction*. The picture presents a hallucinatory scene in which soldiers who have just been killed on the battlefield are re-animated, engaging with each other in what the artist describes as a 'dialogue of the dead'.

(3) Katerina Gregos, curator, art historian and director of Art Brussels, on the work of Anna Gaskell:

A different kind of *fictional world* can be observed in Anna Gaskell's work. *Her series of photographic episodes (Wonder and Override) are based on a loose re-interpretation of Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland. (...) Apart from the fictional references (...) [t]he artist adopts a cinematic approach towards photography employing 'actors' (young girls), artificial lighting and 'framing' the action taking place within the picture space.* Unusual viewing angles and close ups, violent cropping and stark contrasts of shadow and light result in a set of menacing claustrophobic spaces that intimate not only anxiety about one's coming of age but a general psychological unease. Gaskell's work does not possess specific narrative but rests rather on a series of suggestive 'actions' (Gregos 2013; *my italics*).

(4) An academic paper comparing the work of Susan Meiselas and Gregory Crewdson claims the following:

Susan Meiselas's historical photographs in Nicaragua contrast sharply with Gregory Crewdson's postmodern, *overtly fictional photographs* in *Twilight* (...) His series of forty plates presents surreal scenes set both in—and out-of-doors in an *overtly fictional New England suburb*. The photographs are arranged in no readily discernible order, and while their temporal setting is, roughly speaking, the late twentieth century, the photographs have no firm mooring in historical time or space. Instead, Crewdson's photographs appear to be *postmodern fictions*--apocalyptic moments that are also strangely flat; visionary crises that

freeze onlookers in their tracks. At the end of the collection of plates, *a ten-page section of "Production Notes and Credits" hints at the process of making the photobook, confirming its fundamental fiction" (My italics).*

As all these examples show, the term 'fiction' might not be so common in photography as it is in other art forms, but there is indeed substantive evidence that the critical practices use it with respect to certain photographic works. Moreover, they explicitly make the connection between these photographic works and fictional works in other media.

Finally, contrary to the sceptic's claims, there is also evidence that fictional photography is indeed an institutionalised practice. The first quotation above clearly indicates that it is not unusual to appreciate the work of photographers such as Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, Gregory Crewdson and others in the same contrast class. But also, there are exhibitions on fictional photography in prominent institutions: at the moment when this chapter is being written, the Victoria and Albert museum in London has an exhibition called: 'Making It Up: Photographic Fictions' where precisely the works of photographers like Gregory Crewdson, Duane Michals, Cindy Sherman and Hannah Starkey among others are being shown.

It is clear then, that there is no reason to be sceptical about the application of the genre of fiction to photography. Although the label 'fiction' might not be so prominent or frequently used as applied to photographs, it is not unheard of either. In fact there is a clear coherent tradition in photography whose works usually prompt the term 'fiction' in the critical practices that refer to them. Works in this tradition inherit the standard, contra-standard and variable features of works in other media such as literature and film. Standard features of fictional photography then can be things such as the following: presence of a narrative, made-up content and scenarios, presence of actors, impersonation or re-enactment, staging, controlled and sophisticated pre- and post-production, point-of-view shots, explicit reference to cinematic style, etc. Contra-standard features, in turn, would include the following elements: lack of narrative, lack of reference to cinematic style, representation of real subjects or scenes where the subjects and scenes that we see are the subjects and scenes represented, unsophisticated production, etc. Finally, there are clear contextual features that

determine that works fall into this category: there is an implicit intention on the part of the photographers to produce works that are continuous with the tradition of fiction in other media and there are institutional practices of exhibiting works in this category together.

Now that we know that the category of fiction has effects on appreciation of photographic works and once we have identified a practice of classification with the relevant standard and contra-standard features, we can say not only that the category of documentary or non-fiction applies to photography, but also the category of fiction.

## 6 'Factual' and 'non-factual'. Categories reconsidered

Now although fiction and non-fiction/documentary are legitimate categories that affect appreciation in photography, there seems to be a remaining worry. The labels 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' suggest that these two categories are complementary and exhaustive of the logical space: either a work falls in the category of fiction or it falls in the category of non-fiction.<sup>234</sup> This, however, does not seem to be the case in photography. While, in principle, the documentary or non-fictional genre seems to be comprehensive and relatively homogeneous,<sup>235</sup> the fiction genre in photography seems highly restrictive and substantively different from other non-documentary photographic genres. In other words, while there seems to be a clear encompassing non-fiction or documentary genre with various sub-genres, there are non-documentary practices that do not seem to be well classified as sub-genres of fiction. Non-documentary practices are very heterogeneous and, rather than being a complementary category of non-fiction, fiction seems to be one among the many non-documentary traditions. Let me clarify this further.

Photographic traditions such as pictorialism, dada, surrealism, photographic distortion, abstractions etc. clearly do not belong to the documentary genre. However, they do not seem to fit well in the category of fiction as I have described it in section 4 of this chapter either. Pictorialism, for example, is a photographic genre that began as a

---

<sup>234</sup> This is so even if we call the category of non-fiction 'documentary', because remember that I have been using these labels interchangeably (see section 3 in Chapter 4, p.155).

<sup>235</sup> I will qualify and expand on this point in due course.

reaction to traditional documentary photography. Although photographers working in the pictorialist tradition did not entirely reject the purpose of depicting reality, they were not worried about expectations of accuracy or veracity as understood in what they thought of as traditional ‘commercial’ every-day photography. Also, they fully rejected most of the subject matter of documentary photography and its style. Pictorialism then, almost by definition is not documentary photography; not only because some of the standard features of documentary photography are not present, but also because works are intended *not* to belong to that category. Furthermore, the channels of distribution and the critical practices are different from those of documentary photography.<sup>236</sup> At the same time, it is not clear that pictorialist works are fiction in the sense in which I characterised this genre in section 5. To begin with, pictorialist photography does not seem to share the standard features of fictional photography. Pictorialism does not count as standard features things such as an explicit reference to cinematic style and sophisticated pre- and post-production. And, although subjects are depicted adopting deliberately expressive poses, there is not normally the presence of actors or impersonation. Similarly, although the content or the subject matter of the photographs is frequently expressive or evocative of emotions and thereby invites viewers to engage in imagination, it would not be appropriate to speak of full-fledged made up content. In fact, the majority of the scenes and individuals depicted are real and, although the emphasis is not on the individuality or reality of the people and scenes, they do not try to represent or re-enact different existent or non-existent people or scenes.



Figure 66 Clarence H. White "Morning" (1908)

---

<sup>236</sup> Pictorialist photographers created specific associations and exhibited their work sponsored by institutions such as the Munich and the Vienna Secession and published their work in specialised magazines (Marien 2010, 174–177).



Figure 67 Imogen Cunningham "On Mt Rainier 5" (1915)

Something similar can be said with respect to Dada and surreal photography. These practices are clearly not documentary, but do not seem to fit in the category of fiction either. Although photographs in these traditions sometimes suggest some kind of narrative, this is by no means a standard feature. Re-enactment is certainly not a standard feature either, and although the depicted subjects (if there are any) do sometimes represent other things different from themselves, they either represent objects (Figure 68) or dream-like figures. In any event, representing other things or people (impersonation) is, at most, a variable feature in these traditions.

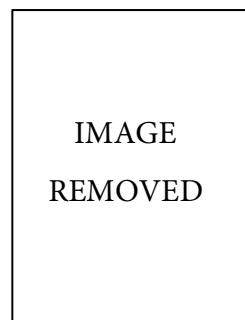


Figure 68 May Ray "Ingres's Violin" (1924)

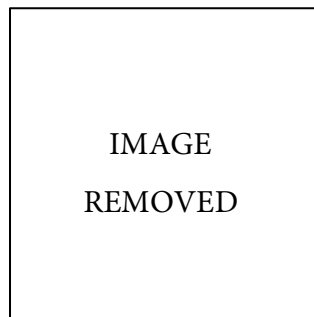


Figure 69 Jaroslav Rössler "Untitled" (1931)

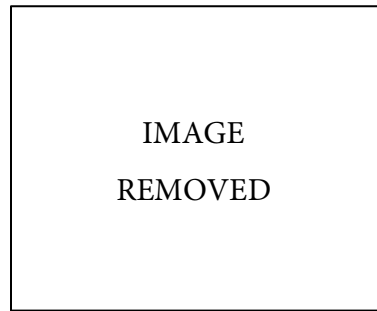


Figure 70 Jerry Uelsmann "Symbolic Mutation" (1964)

Elements that are central for these practices are unconventional subjects, juxtaposition of elements (objects, people, etc.), radical perspectives and manipulation. However, there is no explicit reference to cinematographic styles or thematic. As in the case of pictorialism, the intention of the photographers does not seem to be to produce works that in a way remind or refer to a cinematic or literary fictional tradition.

It seems, then, that there are a variety of practices that are clearly not documentary but that do not seem to fit into the category of fiction either. The practices of non-documentary works seem to be too heterogeneous. Not only do their standard and contra-standard features differ substantially from each other, but also, the intentions with which they are produced also vary.

Now, one may suspect that the case of non-fiction or documentary photography broadly construed is not very different. There are many types of non-fictional photography: photojournalism, ethnographic photography, medical photography, sports photography, aerial photography, family photography, street photography, 'paparazzi' photography, etc. Why would we think that all these traditions are less heterogeneous than the practices that I mentioned before? Why do we have to think that the former are sub-genres of non-fiction while the latter are different practices altogether? Isn't this rather *ad-hoc*?

I do not think so. Certainly, the genre of non-fiction in photography is quite diverse and each sub-genre has some specific standard features that differ from the rest. A standard feature of sports photography is the representation of athletes and games; this is different from medical photography, where standard features are things such as depiction of body tissues, injuries and medical procedures. Both sports photography and medical photography, in turn, differ from ethnographic photography whose

Paloma Atencia-Linares

specific standard features are anthropological subject matter, depiction of people with an emphasis on their traditions and customs, and so on and so forth. However, there is a set of what we may call *core* standard and contra-standard features that all these practices share, and these coincide with those I listed as the standard and contra-standard features of non-fiction. To make this clearer, the following table shows a non-exhaustive set of practices that I consider sub-genres of non-fiction in photography and a list of what seem to be standard features of the non-fiction genre.

		Sub-genres of Non-fiction/Documentary Photography					
		Photo-journalism	Ethnographic Photography	Medical Photography	Sports Photography	Family album Photography	Paparazzi
Standard features of the non-fiction/documentary genre	Factual Content	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Rep. of Real people/objects or scenarios	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Veridical representation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Documental	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Realist/natural style	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Content put forward as being the case	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Image and narrative/title coherence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓*	✓
	Natural or little artificial lighting	✓	✓	✓**	✓	✓***	✓
	Snapshot aesthetics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓***	✓
	Little or no manipulation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓***	✓
This table is not meant to be exhaustive							
*Family-album photographs do not always have titles, but when they do, we expect them to cohere with the content of the image.							
**Medical Photography requires specific types of flashes, but that does not mean that it does not meet this condition. A specific type of flash does not amount to a sophisticated and careful lighting design.							
***Some family portraits can be done (and maybe are usually done) in studio, so they may include posing, some artificial lighting and maybe even some degree of manipulation. However, the degree of staging (or posing), manipulation and artificial lighting is not normally excessive. Moreover, it is important to note that in order to be part of a genre it is not necessary to meet all the standard conditions.							

Table 2 Sub-genres of non-fiction/documentary photography and standard features of the documentary genre

As this table shows, what may seem to be different practices share a consistent core of set of standard features. Moreover, these features—in addition to the specific standard features of each practice, which are not included in the table—play an important role in appreciation.<sup>237</sup> If a work of photojournalism turns out to be

<sup>237</sup> Notice that it is not necessary that a category meet all the core standard conditions of a given genre in order to be considered part of it (or a sub-genre). However, it still

manipulated or a non-veridical representation, in all likelihood we will find it defective. The same applies to sports photography: a newspaper editor would certainly not choose to publish a photograph taken from an odd perspective that makes it look as if a shot was a goal where, in reality, the ball did not actually cross the goal line. If the newspaper published this photo or a manipulated version of it, it would certainly be a scandal. In medical photography it is no different: a photograph that does not accurately depict the relevant organ is of no use for medical purposes and, although manipulation may be sometimes useful, it is not something usual. Even in family photographs we value veracity: we tend to discard those photographs that are completely out of focus or that did not capture the moment correctly. It is certainly the case that some family portraits involve some degree of manipulation, but we find it awkward when the manipulation fully distorts the expression or the real appearance of our dear family member. Also, we would find it odd, although perhaps original, to see a family album full of photographs made using composition printing of, say, someone's body and some other person's face. In all these practices, we will be surprised to find a very carefully composed and produced photograph—imagine, for instance, a photograph of a surgery where the doctors seemed to be performing a careful choreography, the shadows and lights were so well-placed and expressive that they would look like Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson*. All this would certainly be outstanding, but if we take it to be so, it is precisely because it is something that we *do not* expect in this type of works. Medical photographs, like most of our family pictures and the pictures we see everyday in the news, are normally taken in a relatively short time and with limited resources. That is why they tend to have a natural or realist *snapshot* look.

This contrasts with the different non-documentary practices. As we saw, there does not seem to be a robust and consistent set of features that all of them share. This point is summarised and put graphically in the following table (Table 3).

---

has to share a substantial number of them. In addition—or in its defect—there has to be some contextual feature(s) that justifies its inclusion in the genre. For example, that works in the category are produced with similar categorial intentions, that the works in the category are exhibited together with works that are part of the genre, criticised making reference to it or appreciated in the light of certain background knowledge of the genre.



		Some non-documentary practices					
		Fiction	Pictorialism	Dada	Surreal Photo	Caricaturesque distortion	Abstraction
Some standard features of fiction in photography	Non-factual content	✓	(variable)	✓	✓	(variable)	✗
	Reference to cinematic style	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
	(Imaginative) Narrative	✓	(variable)	(variable)	(variable)	✗	✗
	Made-up content/scenarios	✓	✗	(variable)	✓	✗	-
	Presence of actors	✓	✗	(variable)	(variable)	✗	✗
	Impersonation or re-enactment	✓	✗	(variable)	(variable)	✗	✗
	Staging	✓	(variable)	(variable)	✓	✗	✗
	Sophisticated pre- and post-production	✓	✗	(variable)	✓	(variable)	(variable)
	Point of view shots	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
	Non-veridical representation	✓	(variable)	✓	✓	✓	✗
**This table is not intended to be exhaustive**							

Table 3 Non-documentary practices and standard features of fiction

Moreover, the different practices seem to be appreciated differently. Finding a *superhero*—or a fictional character—, for example, in the middle of a pictorialist photograph would probably immediately disqualify the picture from the category,<sup>238</sup> but it would not be odd in what I called the ‘fictional’ genre—in this genre, this could be a variable feature. Notice that this same feature will also be appreciated differently in surreal photography—a seemingly closer category to fiction—: judged as a surreal photography the ‘superhero photograph’ would probably look too commercial, or too close to pop culture and a bit unsophisticated. Similarly, Cunningham’s *On Mount Rainier* or Duane Michals’ *Dr. Duanus’ Famous Magic Hat* would look uninteresting and dull if judged against the standard features of Dada; and caricaturesque photographic distortions such as those made by ‘Weegee’ would look too simple and unsophisticated judged against the standards of fictional photography. Although appreciating, say, a pictorialist, dadaist or abstract photograph as fiction may not be completely unintelligible, it would not be too informative either.

If this is correct, we can say that in photography the non-fiction/documentary genre seems to be a well-defined, encompassing genre with various specific sub-genres.

<sup>238</sup> And would certainly make old pictorialists, so opposed to mass-media and commercial images, revolve in their graves.

Fiction, by contrast, rather than being a complementary ‘umbrella’ category or –let us call it—*supergenre*<sup>239</sup> with various sub-genres, seems to be one among the many practices or independent genres that, in the absence of a better term, can be put together simply in a category called non-documentary. Notice, however that ‘non-documentary’ does not refer to a more comprehensive supergenre. As we saw, there does not seem to be any robust set of standard and contra-standard features that the putative sub-genres of this category share, such that it would be justified to say that these *core* set of features characterise the standard-features of the purported supergenre of ‘non-documentary’. Moreover, even if ‘non-documentary’ is a useful term to refer to all the independent genres that are *not* documentary, it is not itself a genre (or supergenre): in and of itself the category is probably not very informative with regards to appreciation. If it guides our appreciation at all, it is only to the extent that it indicates that we may *not* have to expect the same features that we expect in documentary works.

In photography, it seems to me, the documentary or non-fiction genre is the category that *wears the trousers*—in Austin’s words. Although there is indeed a genre of fiction in photography, in comparison to other media, this category is, in a way, a derivative and restricted genre, and this may explain why we do not use very frequently the labels ‘fiction’ and ‘non-fiction’ in photography. I suggest that, in this medium, instead of talking about the complementary distinction between fiction and non-fiction, it is more accurate to talk about ‘documentary’ and ‘non-documentary’ photography. Or perhaps in more conventional terms ‘factual’ and ‘non-factual photography’.<sup>240</sup>

## 7 The nature of photography and the shaping of a genre

The fact that the relevant complementary genres in photography are ‘factual and non-factual photography’, and that it is the factual genre the one that ‘wears the

---

<sup>239</sup> Friend traces back this term to (Rabkin 1976).

<sup>240</sup> What I am calling non-factual photography is frequently called art-photography. I do not think this is a good name. Not all non-factual photography is necessarily artistic and there are also documentary or non-factual artistic works.

trousers’—or that is in a way a more basic or more definite genre—might not be unrelated to the nature of the medium. In fact, I will suggest that this is no coincidence.

Given the characteristics of the medium that I discussed in chapters 2 and 3, there is a sense in which we can say that a factual photography ‘comes for free’. All—or most—of the standard features of factual photography come almost effortlessly or *by default* when we take a simple, ordinary photograph. As I said in chapter 2, the photographic mechanism is designed to capture veridical images and it is much easier to obtain a photograph that is honest or veridical than to obtain one that depicts a fictional object or a non-veridical scene. Also, the design of the photographic mechanism allows for the deliverance of documental images: images that support an experience with particular content. Things shown in photographs not only look to us as correctly resembling how things are in the world, but also, they are experienced as being of concrete, existent, particular objects and scenes. Moreover, given that this characteristic experience of photographic images normally puts viewers in a position to believe that the things they see exist in the world, it is not surprising that they are typically used to show that what is seen in the image is in fact the case. Actually, as I argued in Chapter 1, this seems to be the default attitude that people take, unless they have any reason to think that they should not trust the image or unless there is a clear indication that the photograph should be taken in some other way. This natural reaction to photographs also explains why they are frequently used with the purpose of informing people about certain states of affairs. Furthermore, since the mechanism is easy to use, we can take photographs almost everywhere without needing elements such as a studio or sophisticated artificial lighting. In this way, the ‘natural or realistic’ look, yet another standard feature of documentary or factual photography, comes also for free.

By contrast, in order to produce a non-factual photograph (in whatever genre), typically something extra has to be done. At the very least, the photographer needs to give viewers a minimal indication that the content of the photograph should not be taken at face value—which seems to be the default option—or that the purpose of the photograph is other than pointing out that things are thus and so. At most, and if the photographer wants to add the standard features of any of the non-factual genres, then she will need to get involved in more complicated tasks such as manipulating the

image with different techniques, planning and creating a scenario, imagining a narrative, designing the appropriate lighting set, etc.

This being so, it comes at no surprise that the factual or documentary genre is more homogeneous and more basic in photography—in a way, its standard features come by default with the medium. Any modification from this ‘default setting’ can go in various directions and be exploited in various unexpected ways. This, however, does not mean that just in virtue of being photographic, images are therefore factual—in the genre sense—*by nature*. This is not the case. As I have argued in Chapter 4, genres depend on practices of classification and appreciation, and these practices require that the works are used and appreciated in certain ways. The nature of the medium, by contrast, is in principle independent from the practices.<sup>241</sup>

Now, a relevant question at this point is this: are the standard features of factual photography (and perhaps also of documentary films) shaped by the nature of photography or did photography become an ideal medium for the genre because it suited the purpose of non-fiction? The answer probably is: both.

On the one hand, before the invention of photography the genre of non-fiction and its sub-genres already existed in other media such as literature or written texts. Traditions such as history, biography, journalism, scientific writing, etc., were already in place and they all were concerned with factual information and the representation of the real; they were also associated with the expectations of veracity, accuracy and truth. In this context, and coinciding with a new way of conceiving objectivity as the mechanical non-mediated reproduction of the facts (Daston and Galison 2007), it is likely that photography became a perfect medium to suit the purposes of the genre. If it was standard of non-fiction to represent things of the world in a way that captured correctly the way things were, photography, as a mechanism designed to accurately capture the appearance of real things in the world, was clearly perfect to meet this purpose.

---

<sup>241</sup> According to Dominic Lopes artforms and media are indeed determined by practices of appreciation (Lopes MS). This however, is not a common view. And, at any rate, even if the nature of the medium was determined by a practice, this may be a different practice from that which determines the nature of a genre.

But on the other hand, it is also plausible to think that photography, given its peculiar characteristics, transformed and shaped the practice of non-fiction, at least in the visual arts. The fact that photographs not only provided accuracy and correspondence to the facts—which in a way both texts and paintings could furnish—but also a means to somehow *experience* the reality of the objects and events seen in the photographs, probably set a central standard of the non-fiction or documentary genre in the visual arts: visual non-fiction became primarily or standardly documental. Non-fiction in photography and films not only meant getting the facts right, but also letting people experience these facts for themselves. Also, the fact that photographs became at a certain point in history relatively easy to produce and the cameras sufficiently portable, probably contributed to the association of the genre of documentary with the characteristic realist, natural or spontaneous style of snapshots.

The factual or documentary genre in photography, then —and perhaps also in film—adopted some of the standard features already in place in literary practices. However, the advent of photography not only provided an ideal means to instantiate some of those already existing standard features, but also opened new possibilities to the genre. Photographic images, given their phenomenology, their immediacy and their spontaneous look and style, shaped new standard features of the genre in visual pictorial media.

## 8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have settled some questions that have been lingering throughout this thesis. On the one hand, I have confirmed an intuition that I introduced from the beginning, which is that the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is applicable to photography. This required to clarify first the nature of this distinction, which I did in Chapter 4 following Friend's genre theory: fiction and non-fiction or documentary are genres, categories that guide our appreciation of representational works. With this framework as the background, I argued in this chapter that both fiction and non-fiction/documentary are established genres in photography: there are clear classificatory practices of grouping together works that share a consistent set of standard and contra-standard features, and classifying works in these categories affects our appreciation of them. However, I suggested that these genres are not

complementary in photography. Fiction is just one among the many different genres that are *not* documentary but that do not fit into an overarching, all-encompassing category that has a consistent set of shared features and that clearly affects appreciation. In photography, I suggested, it is more accurate to speak of the difference between factual and non-factual photography, where factual photography is itself a genre, but ‘non-factual’ is just a term that is useful to name all the different categories that are themselves genres but that do not belong to or are not nested within a more general unified category or supergenre.

On the other hand, I also confirmed the intuition that I introduced early in this thesis concerning the close relation between photography and non-fiction or documentary works. In the previous chapter I gave a preliminary explanation of why it seems intuitive to think that the intimate relation between photographs and reality somehow affects the categorisation of a work as fiction or non-fiction. I claimed that photography—and in particular, *veridical documental photography*—affects categorisation because it is a standard feature of the non-fiction or documentary genre. However, in this chapter I substantiated my previous claim: I proposed that photographs are factual (in the genre sense) by default. This, I conjectured, is partly because they suited perfectly well the already existing standard features of non-fiction, but also because, in a way, they shaped the practice of the documentary or factual genre in the visual media.

## REFERENCES

- Abell, Catharine. 2010. "The Epistemic Value of Photographs." In *Philosophical Perspectives on Depiction*, edited by Catharine Abell and Katerina Bantinaki. Oxford University Press.
- Allen, Melissa. 2009. "Brief Report: Decoding Representations: How Children with Autism Understand Drawings." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 39 (3): 539–543. doi:10.1007/s10803-008-0650-y.
- Atencia-Linares, Paloma. 2011. "Pictures, Bytes and Values: An Interview with Dominic McIver Lopes." *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 8 (2) (September 1). <http://www.pjaesthetics.org/index.php/pjaesthetics/article/view/10>.
- . 2012. "Fiction, Nonfiction, and Deceptive Photographic Representation." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70 (1) (January 1): 19–30. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6245.2011.01495.x.
- Austin, John Langshaw. 1964. *Sense and Sensibilia*. London [etc.]: Oxford University Press.
- Bach, Kent. 2010. "Getting a Thing into a Thought." In *New Essays on Singular Thought*, edited by Robin Jeshion, 39–63. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bercovitch, Sacvan, and Sacvan Bercovitch, ed. 2013. "Documentary Literature and The Disarming of Dissent." In *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, 241–249. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Accessed July 22.
- Budd, Malcolm. 1992. "Review of Mimesis as Make- Believe." *Mind* (401): 195–198.
- Burge, Tyler. 1993. "Content Preservation." *Philosophical Review* 102 (4): 457–488.
- . 1997. "Interlocution, Perception, and Memory." *Philosophical Studies* 86 (1): 21–47.
- Carroll, Noël. 1996a. "From Reel to Real: Entangled in Nonfiction Films." In *Theorizing the Moving Image*, 224–252. Cambridge University Press.
- . 1996b. "Concerning Uniqueness Claims for Photographic and Cinematographic Representation." In *Theorizing the Moving Image*, 37–49. Cambridge University Press.
- . 1996c. *Theorizing the Moving Image*. Cambridge University Press.
- . 1997. "Fiction, Non-fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis." In *Film Theory and Philosophy*, edited by Richard Allen and Murray Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2000. "Photographic Traces and Documentary Films: Comments for Gregory Currie." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58 (3) (July 1): 303–306.

- doi:10.2307/432116.
- . 2003. "Fiction, Nonfiction and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: Conceptual Analyses." In *Engaging the Moving Image*, 193–224. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Cavedon-Taylor, Dan. 2010. "In Defence of Fictional Incompetence." *Ratio* 23 (2): 141–150. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9329.2010.00457.x.
- Choi, Jinhee. 2001. "A Reply to Gregory Currie on Documentaries." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59 (3): 317–318. doi:10.1111/1540-6245.00030.
- Coady, C. A. J. 1992. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. 1ST ed. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Cohen, Jonathan, and Aaron Meskin. 2004. "On the Epistemic Value of Photographs." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62 (2): 197–210.
- Crane, Tim. 2005. "What Is the Problem of Perception?" *Synthesis Philosophica* 2 (40): 237–264.
- . 2009. "Is Perception a Propositional Attitude?" *Philosophical Quarterly* 59 (236): 452–469.
- . 2011. "The Problem of Perception." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2011. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/perception-problem/>.
- Cummins, Robert. 1991. *Meaning and Mental Representation (Bradford Book)*. New edition. MIT Press.
- Currie, Gregory. 1990. *The Nature of Fiction*. Cambridge University Press.
- . 1995. *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy and Cognitive Science*. First Edition. Cambridge University Press.
- . 1999. "Visible Traces: Documentary and the Contents of Photographs." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (3): 285–297.
- . 2000. "Preserving the Traces: An Answer to Noël Carroll." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58 (3) (July 1): 306–308. doi:10.2307/432117.
- . 2001. "Response to Jinhee Choi." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59 (3): 319–319. doi:10.1111/1540-6245.00031.
- . 2002. "Imagination and Make-believe." In *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, edited by Berys Nigel Gaut and Dominic Lopes. Routledge.
- . 2004. "Documentary." In *Arts and Minds*, 63–83. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- . 2008. "Pictures of King Arthur: Photography and the Power of Narrative." In *Photography and Philosophy*, edited by Scott Walden, 265–283. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.



- Currie, Gregory, and Anna Ichino. 2013. "Imagination and Make-Believe." In *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics.*, Third Edition.
- Daston, Lorraine, and Peter Galison. 2007. *Objectivity*. New York; Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books ; Distributed by the MIT Press.
- Davenport, Alma. 1999. *The History of Photography: An Overview*. University of New Mexico Press.
- Davidson, Donald. 1986. "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge." In *Truth and Interpretation. Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, edited by Ernest LePore, 307–319. Basil Blackwell.
- Davies, David. 2001. "Fiction." In *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, edited by Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes, 263–74. London: Routledge.
- . 2008. "How Photographs 'Signify': Cartier-Bresson's 'Reply' to Scruton." In *Photography and Philosophy*, edited by Scott Walden, 167–186. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- . "Fictionality, Fictive Utterance, and the Assertive Author (Forthcoming in a Volume on 'Mimesis' Edited by Petr Kotatko et Al.)."
- Davies, Martin. 1992. "Perceptual Content and Local Supervenience." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 66: 21–45.
- Denkel, Arda. 1999. *The Natural Background of Meaning*. Springer.
- Denson, G. Roger. 2012. "Cindy Sherman as Orson Welles... as John Ford... as Vittorio De Sica... as Alfred Hitchcock... As..." *Huffington Post*.  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/g-roger-denson/before-there-was-cindy-sh\\_b\\_1312622.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/g-roger-denson/before-there-was-cindy-sh_b_1312622.html).
- Donnellan, Keith S. 1970. "Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions." *Synthese* 21 (3-4): 335 – 358.
- Dretske, Fred. 1988. *Explaining Behavior: Reasons in a World of Causes*. MIT Press.
- Edwards, Jim. 2000. "Burge on Testimony and Memory." *Analysis* 60 (1): 124–131.
- Ekman, Paul. 1997. "Expression or Communication About Emotion." In *Uniting Psychology and Biology: Integrative Perspectives on Human Development*, edited by Nancy L. Segal, Glenn E. Weisfeld Ph D, and Carol C. Weisfeld Ph D, 1st ed., 315–38. American Psychological Association (APA).
- . 2005. "Facial Expressions." In *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, edited by Tim Dalgleish Research Scientist and Mick J. Poweressor of Clinical Psychology, 301–320. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Evans, Gareth. 1982. *Varieties of Reference*. Oxford University Press.
- Fineman, Mia. 2012. *Faking It: Manipulated Photography before Photoshop*. New York;

- New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Distributed by Yale University Press.
- Fodor, J. A. 1984. "Semantics, Wisconsin Style." *Synthese* 59 (3) (June 1): 231–250. doi:10.1007/BF00869335.
- Friday, Jonathan. 1997. "Digital Imaging, Photographic Representation and Aesthetics." *Ends and Means* 2 (2): 7–11.
- Friend, Stacie. 2008. "Imagining Fact and Fiction." In *New Waves in Aesthetics*, edited by Kathleen Stock and Katherine Thomsen-Jones, 150–169. Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2011. "II—Fictive Utterance and Imagining II." *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 85 (1): 163–180. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8349.2011.00201.x.
- . 2012. "VIII—Fiction as a Genre." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (Hardback)* 112 (2pt2): 179–209. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9264.2012.00331.x.
- Geen, Russell G. 1975. "The Meaning of Observed Violence: Real Vs. Fictional Violence and Consequent Effects on Aggression and Emotional Arousal." *Journal of Research in Personality* 9 (4) (December): 270–281. doi:10.1016/0092-6566(75)90002-1.
- Gombrich, E. H. 1960. *Art and Illusion. a Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. Phaidon.
- Goodman, Nelson. 1978. *Ways of Worldmaking*. Indianapolis,: Hackett Pub. Co.
- Green, Mitchell S. 2007. *Self-Expression*. First Edition. OUP Oxford.
- . 2009. "Speech Acts." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2009. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/speech-acts/>.
- Gregos, Katerina. 2013. "Anna Gaskell | Postmedia." Accessed August 23. <http://www.postmedia.net/999/gaskell.htm>.
- Grice, H. P. 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Harvard University Press.
- Grierson, John. 1933. "The Documentary Producer." *Cinema Quarterly* 2 (1): 7–9.
- Hauser, M D. 1992. "Costs of Deception: Cheaters Are Punished in Rhesus Monkeys (Macaca Mulatta)." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 89 (24) (December 15): 12137–12139.
- Hicks, Roger. 2003. *Darkroom Basics - and Beyond*. London: Collins & Brown.
- Hinton, J. M. 1973. *Experiences: An Inquiry Into Some Ambiguities*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hoban, Phoebe. 2012. "The Cindy Sherman Effect." *ARTnews*, February. <http://www.artnews.com/2012/02/14/the-cindy-sherman-effect/>.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell. 1859. "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph." *The Atlantic*, June. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1859/06/the-stereoscope-and-the-stereograph/303361/>.
- Hopkins, Robert. 1998. *Picture, Image and Experience: A Philosophical Inquiry*. Cambridge University Press.
- . 2010. "Factive Pictorial Experience: What's Special About Photographs?" *Noûs* (December 15).
- Hurd, Peter L. 1995. "Communication in Discrete Action-response Games." *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 174 (2) (May 21): 217–222. doi:10.1006/jtbi.1995.0093.
- Jacobs, Joseph. 1891. *Studies in Jewish Statistics: Social, Vital and Anthropometric*. D. Nutt.
- "Jeff Wall: Room Guide, Room 3." 2013. Accessed August 23. <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/jeff-wall/room-guide/jeff-wall-room-3>.
- Jeshion, Robin. 2010. *New Essays on Singular Thought*. Oxford University Press..
- Johnson, Ken. 2011. "Elliott Erwitt's Photographs - Review." *The New York Times*, June 9, sec. Arts / Art & Design. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/10/arts/design/elliott-erwitts-photographs-review.html>.
- Jones, Bill. 1990. "False Documents: An Interview with Jeff Wall." *Arts Magazine*.
- Kingslake, Rudolf. 1989. *A History of the Photographic Lens*. Academic Press.
- KODAK. 2013. "KODAK: Teaching Basic Darkroom Techniques." Accessed July 5. <http://www.kodak.com/global/en/consumer/education/lessonPlans/darkroom/combination.shtml>.
- Korsmeyer, Carolyn. 1985. "Pictorial Assertion." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (3) (April 1): 257–265. doi:10.2307/430639.
- Kripke, Saul A. 1991. *Naming and Necessity*. New Ed. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lamarque, Peter, and Stein Haugom Olsen. 1994. *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: a Philosophical Perspective*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press.
- Langford, Michael John. 1981. *The Darkroom Handbook*. London: Ebury Press.
- Levinson, Jerrold. 1993. "Seeing, Imaginarily, at the Movies." *Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (170): 70–78.
- Lopes, Dominic. MS. "Beyond Art."
- . 1996. *Understanding Pictures*. Oxford University Press, USA.

- . 2003. “The Aesthetics of Photographic Transparency.” *Mind* 112 (447): 434–48.
- . 2010. “Picture This: Image-based Demonstratives.” In *Philosophical Perspectives on Depiction*, edited by Catharine Abell and Katerina Bantinaki, 54–80. Oxford University Press.
- Marien, Mary Warner. 2010. *Photography: a Cultural History*. London: Laurence King.
- Martin, Michael G. F. 1997. “The Reality of Appearances.” In *Thought and Ontology*, edited by M. Sainsbury. Franco Angeli.
- . 2001. “Episodic Memory as Retained Acquaintance.” In *Time and Memory*, edited by C. Hoerl and T. McCormack. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2002a. “Particular Thoughts and Singular Thought.” In *Logic, Thought, and Language*, edited by Anthony O’Hear, 173–214. Cambridge University Press.
- . 2002b. “Particular Thoughts and Singular Thought.” In *Logic, Thought and Language*, O’Hear, A., 173–214. Cambridge, UK.: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2012. “Sounds and Images.” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 52 (4) (October 1): 331–351. doi:10.1093/aesthj/ays036.
- . 2010. “What’s in a Look?” In *Perceiving the World*. Oxford University Press.
- Matravers, Derek. 2010. “Why We Should Give Up on the Imagination.” *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 34 (1): 190–199. doi:10.1111/j.1475-4975.2010.00205.x.
- Maynard, Patrick. 2005. *The Engine of Visualization: Thinking Through Photography*. Cornell Univ Pr.
- Maynard-Smith, John, and David Harper. 2004. *Animal Signals*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- McDowell, John. 1986. “Singular Thought and the Extent of ‘inner Space’.” In *Subject, Thought, and Context*, edited by John McDowell and Philip Pettit. Clarendon Press.
- . 1994. “Knowledge by Hearsay.” In *Knowing from Words*, edited by B.K. Matilal and A. Chakrabarti. Dordr: Kluwer.
- McGinn, Colin. 1982. *The Character of Mind*. Oxford University Press.
- Mendelson, Andrew L., and Zizi Papacharissi. 2007. “Reality Vs. Fiction How Defined Realness Affects Cognitive & Emotional Responses to Photographs.” *Visual Communication Quarterly* 14 (4): 231–243. doi:10.1080/15551390701730224.
- Nanay, Bence. 2004. “Taking Twofoldness Seriously: Walton on Imagination and Depiction.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62 (3): 285–289. doi:10.1111/j.0021-8529.2004.0160.x.
- Newhall, Beaumont. 1976. *The Daguerreotype in America*. New York: Dover Paloma Atencia-Linares

## Publications.

- Novak, Daniel A. 2008. *Realism, Photography and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press.
- Ortwein, Andrew. 2013. "Guide to Film Photography - Basic Film Photography Guide for Beginner Film Photography Tips, Techniques, and Information." Accessed July 5. <http://www.guidetofilmphotography.com/>.
- Pagin, Peter. 2012. "Assertion." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2012. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/assertion/>.
- Peacocke, Christopher. 1983. *Sense and Content: Experience, Thought, and Their Relations*. Oxford University Press.
- Perry, John. 2001. *Reference and Reflexivity*. CSLI Publications.
- Pettersson, Mikael. 2011. "Depictive Traces: On the Phenomenology of Photography." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69 (2): 185–196.
- Phillips, Dawn M. 2009. "Photography and Causation: Responding to Scruton's Scepticism." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49 (4): 327–340.
- Rabkin, Eric S. 1976. *The Fantastic in Literature*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Recanati, Francois. 1993. *Direct Reference: From Language to Thought*. 1st Edition. Blackwell Pub.
- Reid, Thomas. 1863. *The Works of Thomas Reid*. Maclachlan & Stewart Edinburgh.
- Riechert, Susan E. 1978. "Games Spiders Play: Behavioral Variability in Territorial Disputes." *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology* 3 (2) (January 1): 135–162. doi:10.2307/4599163.
- Rinn, William E. 1984. "The Neuropsychology of Facial Expression: a Review of the Neurological and Psychological Mechanisms for Producing Facial Expressions." *Psychological Bulletin* 95 (1) (January): 52–77.
- Rohter, Larry. 2009. "New Doubts Raised Over Famous War Photo." *The New York Times*, August 18, sec. Arts / Art & Design. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/18/arts/design/18capa.html>.
- Rosch, Eleanor, and Carolyn B Mervis. 1975. "Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories." *Cognitive Psychology* 7 (4) (October): 573–605. doi:10.1016/0010-0285(75)90024-9.
- Sainsbury, R. M. 2005. *Reference Without Referents*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press.
- Sartre, Jean-Pau. 2004. *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the*

- Imagination*. Routledge.
- Savedoff, Barbara. 2008. "Documentary Authority and the Art of Photography." In *Photography and Philosophy*, edited by Scott Walden, 111–137. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Schellenberg, Susanna. 2010. "The Particularity and Phenomenology of Perceptual Experience." *Philosophical Studies* 149 (1).
- Schier, Flint. 1986. *Deeper Into Pictures: An Essay on Pictorial Representation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Scruton, Roger. 1981. "Photography and Representation." *Critical Inquiry* 7: 577–603.
- Searle, John R. 1971. "What Is a Speech Act?" In *The Philosophy of Language*, edited by John R. Searle, 39–53. Oxford University Press.
- Siegel, Susanna. 2006. "Which Properties Are Represented in Perception?" In *Perceptual Experience*, edited by Tamar S. Gendler and John Hawthorne. Oxford University Press.
- Sircello, Guy. 1978. *Mind and Art: An Essay on the Varieties of Expression*. Princeton University Press.
- Smith, Murray. 1997. "Imagining from the Inside." In *Film Theory and Philosophy*, edited by Richard Allen and Murray Smith, 412–430. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.
- Snowdon, Paul F. 1980. "Perception, Vision, and Causation." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 81: 175–92.
- Sobieszek, Robert, and Odette Appel-Heyne. 1976. *The Spirit of Fact: The Daguerreotypes of Southworth & Hawes, 1843-1862*.
- Sontag, Susan. 1977. *On Photography*. 4th Edition. Farrar Straus & Giroux (T).
- . 2003. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Soteriou, Matthew. 2000. "The Particularity of Visual Perception." *European Journal of Philosophy* 8 (2): 173–189.
- Sperber, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson. 1992. *Sperber: Relevance: Communication & Cognition*. Harvard University Press.
- . 1995. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. 2nd Edition. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Stock, Kathleen. 2008. "The Role of Imagining in Seeing-in." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66 (4) (October 1): 365–380.
- . 2011. "I—Fictive Utterance and Imagining." *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 85 (1): 145–161. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8349.2011.00200.x.
- . "The Imperative to Imagine."

- Számadó, Szabolcs. 2011. "The Cost of Honesty and the Fallacy of the Handicap Principle." *Animal Behaviour* 81 (1) (January): 3–10. doi:10.1016/j.anbehav.2010.08.022.
- Thomas, Margaret Hanratty, and Phillip M. Tell. 1974. "Effects of Viewing Real Versus Fantasy Violence Upon Interpersonal Aggression." *Journal of Research in Personality* 8 (2) (August): 153–160. doi:10.1016/0092-6566(74)90016-6.
- Unger, Christoph. 2006. *Genre, Relevance and Global Coherence: The Pragmatics of Discourse Type*. Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Vertov, Dziga. 1984. *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Edited by Annette Michelson. Translated by Kevin O'Brien. University of California Press.
- Walden, Scott. 2005. "Objectivity in Photography." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 45 (3): 258–272.
- Walton, Kendall L. 1970. "Categories of Art." *The Philosophical Review* 79 (3) (July 1): 334–367. doi:10.2307/2183933.
- . 1984. "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism." *Critical Inquiry* 11 (2) (December 1): 246–277.
- . 1990. *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. 1st Edition. Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2008a. "On Pictures and Photographs: Objections Answered." In *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts*, 117–132. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2008b. "Postscripts to 'Transparent Pictures': Clarifications and To Do's." In *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts*, 110–116. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2008c. "Transparent Pictures and On Pictures and Photographs: Objections Answered." In *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts*, 117–132. Oxford University Press.
- Wharton, Tim. 2003. "Natural Pragmatics and Natural Codes." *Mind & Language* 18 (5): 447–477. doi:10.1111/1468-0017.00237.
- Wollheim, Richard. 1980. "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation." In *Arts and Its Objects*, Second Edition, 205–226. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 1987. *Painting As an Art*. First Edition. Princeton Univ Press.
- . 1998. "On Pictorial Representation." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (3): 217–226. doi:10.2307/432361.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. 1980. *Works and Worlds of Art*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.
- Worth, Sol, and Larry Gross. 1974. "Symbolic Strategies." *Journal of Communication*

24 (4): 27–39. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00405.x.

Zahavi, Amotz, and Avishag Zahavi. 1997. *The Handicap Principle: A Missing Piece of Darwin's Puzzle*. First. Oxford University Press, USA.