An Intentional Understanding

of Photographs

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a characterisation of photographic understanding which accounts for the role of a photographer's intention in producing a photograph. While four key elements are acknowledged as necessary for a full characterisation of photographic understanding – the causal, intentional, cognitive and contextual – only the causal and intentional are treated. It is emphasised that photographs are the result of a photographic *process*, and paintings are used as a foil to photographs throughout.

The essay adopts Richard Wollheim's seeing-in thesis as its underlying theory of depiction, but critically examines, and ultimately rejects, Wollheim's claims for a 'species of seeing' peculiar to photographs. Specifically, it analyses Wollheim's view concerning photographs by raising and investigating the following questions: (1a) Is the standard of correctness for appropriately seeing pictures such as paintings *uniquely* set by an artist's intentions? (1b) Is the standard of correctness for appropriately seeing photographs always *not uniquely* set by an artist's or photographer's intentions? (2) Is the difference between our understanding of photographs and paintings as sharp as the subject-model distinction suggests? (3) Do artists or photographers *use* photographs as representations?

The essay then seeks to determine whether we can dispense *altogether* with the intentional element in understanding photographs through an investigation of Roger Scuton's 'ideal photograph' thesis and general notions of photographic transparency. It concludes that 'ideal photographs' stand at too great a distance from 'real photographs' to have explanatory power over our understanding of a diverse range of photographs commonly encountered, that photographs cannot usefully be likened to mirror images, frames held up to the world, or television, and that photographs, correctly, convey intention.

The thesis concludes with a critical examination of photographic realism by evaluating a number of ‘likeness’ theses.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Christopher Janaway for discussing with me many of the topics and conundrums investigated here and for continuously firing my imagination and enthusiasm for some of the deeper and more remote aspects of pictorial and photographic representation.

A very early interest in depiction was first pressed into philosophical form during a series of introductory lectures on aesthetics given by Sebastian Gardner and nurtured by some of his kind attention and probing questions.

I am also grateful to Karen Chester for her love, friendship, and historical and culinary support.

Statement of Intellectual Authenticity

The author confirms that this thesis is his own work and that he alone is responsible for the arguments advanced in it.

Table of Contents

List of Plates

Prelude

There is a long-standing debate concerning photography which is perhaps best encapsulated in the words of Marius De Zayas in a 1913 issue of *Camera Work*: '[P]hotography is not Art, but photographs can be made to be Art'.[1] The thought that photographs can be turned into Art (with a capital 'A') usually presupposes a sharp distinction between photographs and pictures such as paintings. The motivation for the distinction is usually to claim a special status for photographs, based on the causal element inherent in the medium. Having achieved this 'special status', the theorist often then moves in one of either two directions. He can highlight the 'higher', 'purer' or 'ideal' form photography is capable of achieving by virtue of its special status. Or, he can move in the opposite direction and put photography (again, by virtue of its special status) firmly in its place, through uncomplimentary comparisons to Art. Neither move is particularly useful to any theory which seeks to explain our understanding of photographs. The challenge for explanatory theory is to have something substantive to say about understanding photographs *as* Art, as well as literal visual records.

[1] De Zayas (1980), p. 130. Graham Clarke draws our attention to this quote in: Clarke (1997), p. 167.

1. Introduction

My aim is to contribute to a characterisation of photographic understanding which accounts for the role of a photographer's intention in producing a photograph.

The term 'intention' is famously woolly. Richard Wollheim, in his *Painting as an Art,* usefully steers between an excessively narrow and excessively broad definition: "'Intention' best picks out just those desires, thoughts, beliefs, experiences, emotions, commitments, which cause the artist to paint as he does".[2] The definition is useful because 'intention' is not taken to be expanded to cover everything that goes on in an artist's or photographer's head, nor is it reduced to indicate one simple volition, but involves a range of mental aspects which centrally motivate a picture maker's work. I adopt and reapply that definition to the medium of photography by modifying the final clause: '… which cause the photographer to photograph as he does'. Just as Wollheim essentially concerns himself with serious painters producing paintings, I will, for the most part, concern myself with serious photographers producing photographs, although I do not wish to discount the practice and products of amateur and 'snapshot' photographers.

The view that intention may be substantially involved in contributing to our correct understanding of a photograph is not uncontroversial, for explanatory weight is often given to the causal element inherent in photography. A central thread of this essay will seek to demonstrate that a photographer's intention may, and commonly does, play a greater role in our understanding of a photograph than is often acknowledged in aesthetic theory.

[2] Wollheim (1990), p. 19

1.1 Four Elements Involved in Fully Understanding a Photograph – Two Treated Here

I take there to be four basic elements involved in fully understanding a photograph: (i) the causal; (ii) intentional; (iii) cognitive; and (iv) contextual. I believe the causal and intentional elements to be the prime contributing factors to any substantial explanation of photographic understanding, and the cognitive and contextual elements to be secondary, but necessary, factors to that explanation.[3] So, for the sake of brevity, my concern in this thesis is with the first two elements: the causal and intentional. (The latter two, which broadly concern interpretation of a photograph, could easily be the subject of *another* thesis). I said in my opening line that this essay's aim is to *contribute* to a characterisation of photographic understanding, because a complete account of photographic understanding would require a further investigation into the elements of viewer cognition and viewing context and their integration with and implications for the causal and intentional elements.

Here, briefly, are the four elements characterised:

The Causal Clearly there is an irreducible causal element inherent in the optical-mechanical nature of photography, due to the nature of its central tool, the camera, which makes the photographic endeavour different from other types of pictorial endeavour.[4] No matter how the camera is manipulated, the subject manipulated, the developing and printing methods manipulated within the photographic process, whatever stands before the camera when the shutter is released will be caused to appear in some way in the resulting photograph – however clearly or obscurely. The causal, at least in this optical-mechanical guise, rarely

[3] Note that if one takes a post-modernist or relativist view, for example, concerning our understanding of pictures, the cognitive and contextual elements will be prime, rather than simply supportive, elements alongside the causal and intentional. It will shortly become clear why I deem the cognitive and contextual as supportive.

[4] Even the pinhole camera works on principles of optics – the science of light – despite its lack of a lens.

plays any such role in the production of other types of pictures such as paintings and drawings. Obvious exceptions are pictures based on sketches made utilising a *camera obscura* or some type of projection or back-projection device. It is this seeming ability of a photograph to stand as an index of the physical presence of its subject matter at moment of exposure which lends authority to common notions of 'realism' and 'truth' represented in photographs. It is due to this uniqueness of the causal element that many aesthetic theorists seek to reduce the photographic process to its causal-mechanical properties and why some claim that photographs are 'transparent'. Thereby, some hold, photographs convey reality.

The Intentional Perhaps not as obviously, a photographer's intention also seems to play a role in determining how we understand a photograph and what is represented in it. Consider the following two (out of many) examples from professional photographers and photographic writers Tom Grill and Mark Scanlon concerning aspects of photographic composition:

> In general, there are two ways focus can be used compositionally: to direct attention, and to obscure distractions. … A viewer's eye is irresistibly drawn to the area of sharpest focus in a photograph. Therefore, because the photographer controls focus, he automatically controls attention. … A skilled photographer will never take a photograph without first actively deciding which portions of a scene he wishes to render in sharp focus, and which he does not.[5]

> [I]f a photograph of a dancer is extremely sharp and detailed, a viewer might notice the presence of perspiration on the dancer and think of the hard work that dancing entails. However, if noticeable grain is present, the same scene might cause the viewer to concentrate more on the dancer's shape and form. In short, grain is another tool the photographer can use to control emphasis.[6]

The photograph in **Plate 1** illustrates how selective focus may draw attention to certain aspects of a subject matter (the puppeteer, puppet and screen) and suppress other aspects of a subject matter (the buildings of Notre Dame); the photograph in **Plate 2** illustrates how grain may emphasise certain aspects of a subject matter (form) and suppress others (facial and costume detail)**.**

[5] Grill, T. and Scanlon, M. (1990), p. 64

[6] Ibid., p. 86

How a subject matter is intentionally lit will also affect how its photographic depiction will be understood. Compare how the mundane objects in **Plates 3** and **4** are treated through lighting. The diffused light of the first image produces soft shadows and conveys its subject matter as light and delicate. The harsh, directional lighting of the second image produces sharp and characteristic shadows and conveys its subject matter as weighty, dramatic and perhaps mysterious. Michael Birt, in his photograph of Joely and Natasha Richardson (**Plate 5**), has applied low directional lighting and used harsh shadow to create a distinctively 'dark' portrait.[7]

Producing a photograph is a process. I will later argue that to collapse this process to a single 'moment of exposure' – as do many theorists who wish to characterise photographs in strictly causal terms – is to misconceive the medium and to damage our chances of fully explaining photographic understanding.

Here are Grill and Scanlon again concerning the photographic process:

> At the highest level, a photographer has learned to visualize how the scene he sees in front of his camera will be altered by the photographic process. The image created on film is *always* different from the scene as viewed with the unaided eye. The glass in the camera lens, its focal length, the aperture and shutter speed used, the type and age of film, the processing chemicals employed to develop the image, the type of enlarger as well as the paper used, these and many other factors influence the final image.[8] [Original emphasis.]

A photograph – from initial setting up or posing (if required), through selection and use of appropriate photographic equipment and materials, through method of processing, to the optical/chemical (and more recently digital) production on the photographic support – is open to a very wide variety of manipulation by the photographer/artist. Even 'unmanipulated' photographs, though, can be understood to involve intention. Take 'straight photography',

[7] Joely Richardson herself comments on this particular photograph: 'Nearly all the photographs Natasha and I have had taken jointly are very much pretty, pretty, boring, boring headshots. Michael's picture to me looks rather dark, symbolic, or even slightly Brechtian. It is something that he picked up with his camera that had nothing to do with the crowded office we were in, or the atmosphere, that's the art.' Cited in Michael Birt (1988), p. 36.

[8] Grill, T. and Scanlon, M. (1990), p. 56

such as photojournalism and documentary photography, which standardly aspires, on moral grounds, to be unmanipulated. Martin Lister succinctly characterises the view thus:

> ['Straight photography'] does not, and cannot, mean an unmediated, uncrafted photograph or an image which is not the result of intention and shaping by the photographer. The very choice to work in this way, to avoid dramatic and rhetorical artificial lighting for example, to resist any setting up and orchestration of the subject, or the many manipulations and devices of the darkroom, is itself the outcome of working with ideas and making choices within a wider set of possibilities.[9]

Another way of putting this point would be to say that an artist or photographer, in committing herself to depicting certain aspects or properties of a subject matter in a particular manner, necessarily precludes depicting those aspects or properties in other ways. The photographer who commits herself to depicting a scene under natural lighting conditions in a particular photograph precludes the possibility of depicting the scene under unnatural lighting conditions in it, and *vice versa*. Or, the photographer who commits herself to depicting the vertical edges of buildings as curves in a particular image, by using a 'fish-eye' lens for example, precludes the possibility of depicting vertical edges as straight in the image, and *vice versa*.[10]

If intention is involved in 'straight photography', then the intentional contribution to 'non-straight photography' is likely to be even greater in determining our understanding of the image. Here I am thinking of abstract photographs, multiple exposure photographs, photographs taken with lengthy time exposures and heavily manipulated photographs. See, for example, Victor Burgin's *The Bridge – Venus Perdica* (**Plate 6**), where visual reference is made to Sir John Everett Millais's painting of the drowned Ophelia from Shakespeare's play

[9] Lister (2000), p. 283. Lister, here, is characterising the position held by Martha Rosler.

[10] For a full discussion of a picture's commitments and non-commitments to different 'aspects' of its subject matter, and the development of a theory of aspectual systems of depiction, see Dominic Lopes (1996). In defining his terms, he says '… I think of a pictorial aspect as a pattern of visual salience, a pattern as much of what a picture leaves out as of what it includes' (p. 119). Lopes eschews intentional theories of depiction in favour of an informational theory, but I believe aspectual systems of depiction can fit with intentional views by being the result of a picture maker's intention. See also Ned Block (1983).

Hamlet and the character of Madeleine in Hitchcock's film *Vertigo*.[11] Or, consider our understanding of Mario Castagneri's photomontage rendering (using multiple negatives) of a fellow photographer in his *Fortunato Depero Among the Skyscrapers* (**Plate 7**), Alberto Montacchini's photograph *Musical Alchemy: The Soloist* (**Plate 8**), in which clever use of multiple flash exposure (on a single negative) has depicted a cellist in a manner unavailable to the naked eye, or Man Ray's famous solarised image *The Primacy of Matter Over Thought* (**Plate 9**), which seems to reveal something in the realm of fantasy.

The Cognitive By the cognitive element I mean those thoughts, ideas and so on which a viewer has acquired through general experience, education, experience of other pictures, etc. which are brought to a photograph and thereby contribute to the viewer's understanding of it. This cognitive element may have cultural, social, historical, gender, educational and other environmental influences on that understanding. Of course, the cognitive will, to some extent, affect a viewer's understanding of *any* picture, whether photograph, painting, pencil sketch, or some other depictive medium.

The Contextual The immediate, physical or editorial environment within which a photograph is viewed (gallery, magazine, newspaper, advertisement hoarding, postage stamp, or web site, to name a few), the type of caption, the sequence of the images – in short, the context – may also affect or modify a viewer's understanding of a photograph. For example, she may understand the same image differently if it appears: as an illustration for a social documentary piece in a Sunday supplement magazine; as a platinum print at an exhibition of the photographer's work; as part of a shock-value advertisement image promoting designer t-shirts.

Who is presenting a photograph will affect how a viewer understands the image. The presenter of an image may vary from context to context; it may be a magazine or newspaper

[11] Mulligan and Wooters (1999), p. 707

editor, art director, curator, webmaster, or indeed the photographer herself. Because of the enormous diversity of types of photographs, this role of presenter – a modifier of the photographer's initial intentions, or an agent imposing a secondary intention – can play an especially strong role in dictating photographic understanding.

Again, these contextual factors will affect a viewer's understanding of pictures produced in any medium.

1.2 Classifying Photographs

My primary concern is to clarify our understanding of photographs, rather than investigate their ontology. I will focus on unambiguous photographs (and paintings and sketches, etc.) and assume that it is unambiguous whether a picture is a photograph or a painting, for example. I acknowledge that with some pictures their medium may be uncertain. For example, it is ambiguous whether painted photographs are paintings or photographs; it is ambiguous whether Heather Ackroyd and Daniel Harvey's *Mother and Child* (2000) – an organic picture produced in a darkroom over a two-week period by projecting a photographic negative onto a vertical support fixed with moistened 'stay-green' grass seed and whose subsequent green and brown growth marked the tonal range of the negative with remarkable precision – is a photograph or a garden! These are boundary cases. It is another thing altogether, though, whether a photograph's or painting's subject matter is ambiguous (i.e. it may be unclear what a picture depicts) and this will have implications for explaining our understanding of them. Before I proceed, though, it will be useful to become clearer about what we mean by 'photograph' and the type of object it might refer to.

Photographs can be classified in the following manner. Under a family tree-like structure headed 'representations' we can imagine such entities as objects, acts, states, facts, or symbols. Under 'objects' we can find a range of genus, including 'pictorial representations', 'three-dimensional representations', 'literary representations', 'symbolic representations' and so on – the list is not exhaustive. I take photographs to fall within the genus of pictorial representation.[12] Dropping down one final level on the representation family tree, we can distinguish two further sub-categories: 'static pictorial representations' and 'moving pictorial representations'. Photographs stand alongside other types of static pictorial representations

[12] For a view which attempts to draw symbolic and pictorial representations together, see Nelson Goodman (1976). I sketch Goodman's semiotic view in §1.3.

such as paintings, etchings, drawings, holographs and silhouettes. They stand apart from film (including both animated and 'realistic'), flipbooks and 'pop-up' illustrations. I will have more to say later as to why static and moving pictures should be held apart.

For the purposes of this essay and simplicity's sake, I will take 'photograph' to refer to a paper print reproduced through any standard intermediary support – including negative, transparency, chemically prepared glass plate or digital array – or reproduced directly via self-processing as with a Polaroid print. We can note in passing, though, that almost any object which has been suitably chemically treated may act as a photographic support (stones, chairs, etc.) and that transparencies may be projected onto various surfaces or viewed directly (without projection or printing) on a light box or via other light source.[13]

Types of photographs (strait and otherwise) are indeed great in number and diverse in nature. They will include varieties of: portrait; artistic; photojournalistic; travel; snapshot; wedding; advertising; glamour; architectural; medical; satellite; and various hybrids of these and other types. Indeed, it seems an important mark of the photographic medium that it *is* so diverse, and any good philosophical theory which concerns itself with photographs and which tries to characterise our understanding of them will seek to capture and explain as much of this diversity as possible.

[13] In a broader, looser sense, we can take 'photograph' to refer to photographic images reproduced in books, magazines and so on. Such reproductions derive directly from the above sorts of photographic intermediary supports, such as negatives and transparencies, but involve an extra reproductive step, usually a very complex one such as offset printing.

To say, for example, that one has seen Ansel Adam's photograph *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico* (1941) in a coffee table book is to say that one is familiar with the image, just as one might be familiar with the image of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* in a similar way as a reproduction. But note that to be familiar with the photographic image of *Moonrise* is not the same as having seen an original photographic print of *Moonrise* – one Adams laboured over and eventually released for public appreciation – just as being familiar with the *Mona Lisa* is not the same as having seen the original housed in the Louvre, for clearly there may be implications for aesthetic appreciation of either image.

1.3 Theories of Pictorial Representation

Behind any philosophical discussion of photographs and photographic understanding must lie a general theory of pictorial representation. I take as my initial point of trajectory, and lean heavily on, Richard Wollheim's seeing-in theory of depiction. Of course, seeing-in is only one of a number of theories of pictorial representation. Other views include: resemblance; illusion; semiotic; and make-believe. The scope of this essay does not allow for an in-depth discussion about the arguments for and failings of each of these theories, but I will very briefly sketch what I take to be the characteristic weak points of these views, if only to suggest the reasonably compelling intentionalist position from which I begin.

Seeing-In Seeing-in is a sophisticated, interesting, highly intuitive and widely discussed view which places visual experience at the centre of pictorial representation. It is a psychologically based theory which exploits and develops the mind's innate capacity to generate visual experiences out of itself. Seeing a man in the moon, a face in the clouds, or a battle scene in the stains on a wall are examples of seeing-in. The difference between seeing a man in the moon and a man in a picture is that the latter is set by an intentional standard of correctness. Our correct understanding of a picture's subject matter involves a standard of correctness which is set by the intentions of the picture maker, in conjunction with viewing the surface markings of the picture itself.

This is not to discount the perspective of individual viewers, who will often bring to a picture background knowledge about the subject matter, the pictorial medium, pictorial style and so on (things which make up the cognitive element, which I have briefly touched on). Neither is this focus on picture makers' intentions to discount the context within which the picture is viewed (the contextual element), which may also affect the viewer's understanding of a picture.

The thought may be put thus: in understanding a picture, it is best to begin from the intentions of the picture maker (i.e. his 'desires, thoughts, beliefs, experiences, emotions, commitments' which cause him to make pictures as he does) because it is the picture maker who is best placed to know what his picture depicts. This does not mean that the producer of a picture can intend a picture to depict *anything*. Intention may be necessary, but it is not sufficient for successful depiction, for there is scope for the picture maker to get things wrong. There may be more depicted than the picture maker intended. Critically, a reasonably sensitive and attentive viewer must be able to *see* a picture's subject matter.

We may not understand a picture's subject matter upon immediate viewing: we may have to work at it; its subject matter may have to be pointed out to us (by someone more familiar with the work); or we may require some further information or background knowledge.

Our natural capacity for seeing-in (seeing things in pictures which are usually absent, and sometimes non-existent) is based on our ability to experience what Wollheim calls 'twofoldness': to see simultaneously the surface marks of the picture and the figurative effects of those marks as two elements of one and the same perceptual experience.

The strengths of the seeing-in thesis are its bedrock grounding in visual experience and its applicability to an especially wide range of artistic and non-artistic, and realistic and ambiguous, pictures. Its weaknesses lie in whether one is willing to accept the possibility of the 'twofoldness' of visual experience (i.e., to experience *simultaneously* both a picture's surface marks and its subject matter), and/or whether one wishes for a 'deeper' explanation of the seeing-in theory's psychological/biological base (of which Wollheim is openly sceptical).[14]

[14] For criticisms of twofoldness, and seeing-in generally, see: Flint Schier (1986), pp. 199-205; Malcolm Budd (1992), pp. 264-73; Dominic Lopes (1996), pp. 43-51; and John Hyman (2000), pp. 33-35. For a recent defence of the seeing-in thesis see: Richard Wollheim (1998), pp. 217-226; and a supportive yet probing response to this in Jerrold Levinson (1998) pp. 227-232. For a more technical support of seeing-in, through a consideration of the visual persuasiveness of monocular and binocular viewing, see Martin Kelly (1991), pp. 158-162.

Wollheim's psychological account of depiction, as he acknowledges, sets him in opposition to those views which seek to explain pictures in terms of rules, conventions, symbol systems, or which 'in effect assimilate pictorial meaning to something very different, which is linguistic meaning'.[15] The key thought here is that we don't follow the formulation of a picture – we don't 'read' it – to perceive what is depicted; seeing-in is more basic and logically prior to this. For example, in a painting we may 'read' the lamb at the foot of a cross as a symbol for Christ – and this may add to our experience of representational seeing – but that 'reading' cannot build into the experience of representational seeing, for we must initially see the lamb in the picture before we can recognise it as a symbol.

The resemblance and illusion views, like the intentionalist view, are also based in visual experience, but critically, I believe, run into problems characterising that experience.

Resemblance – Objective Similarity Relatively simple versions of the resemblance view, based on objective similarity between a picture and its subject matter, require the viewer to compare, in some *unspecified* manner, what is before them (a picture) with something that is absent (the subject). There is also a difference in logic between resemblance and representation: while the former may be a matter of degree, the latter is either all or nothing; resemblance is a symmetric, two-way, relationship (if *A* resembles *B*, then *B* resembles *A*), while representation is a one-way relationship (if *A* represents *B*, it does not follow that *B* represents *A*); and resemblance is reflexive (all things resemble themselves), while nothing represents or depicts itself. Also, it is difficult to see how a picture may resemble an ideal or fictional object – resemblance seems to be a relationship between two particulars.

Resemblance – Subjective Similarity Sophisticated resemblance views speak in terms of 'experienced resemblance', and thereby subjective similarity between picture and subject matter. When looking at a picture we experience a resemblance between visual field shape of

[15] Wollheim (1980), p. 226

the picture (Peacocke, 1987), or 'experienced isomorphism of visual field structure' of the picture (Budd, 1991 and 1993) and the subject matter itself. I believe that ultimately these views have difficulties in explaining our understanding of a host of 'non-realistic' pictures (Cubist paintings, caricatures, Kwakiutl split-style pictures, pictorial illusions à la Escher, to name just a few), without either writing these (reasonably common) pictures off as rogue and placing them outside of the theory, or allowing the experienced visual field (or experienced isomorphism …) of the picture to become so unlike the experienced visual field (or experienced isomorphism …) of its subject matter that it ceases to be a *resemblance* theory.[16] It would seem to require some kind of *psychological* explanation to make the theory work with non-figurative and highly distorted pictures. And it seems natural that here the seeing-in thesis – and reference to the picture maker's intentions – can help out.

Illusion In an illusion view a picture represents by delivering to us an illusion of its subject matter. In EH Gombrich's theory, a viewer's attention rapidly flickers back and forth between seeing a picture and seeing a perceptual illusion of its subject matter. Illusions arise in a viewer essentially through a conventional process, rather than through resemblance, based on an evolving historical practice of picture makers. Ultimately, the illusion view makes it difficult to distinguish between experiencing a representation of something and experiencing the thing itself. Except for the very occasional *trompe l'oeuil*, we rarely find ourselves mistaking a picture for its real subject matter. In viewing a picture, we almost invariably become aware of its edges, its frame – that frontier where image lets off and the contrasting real world (the gallery wall, the surrounding magazine text, etc.) takes over – and aware of its flatness, which surely must quash illusion. If we do find ourselves increasingly in the grip of a pictorial illusion, surely we also increasingly cease to have a grip on the fact of it being a picture – and thereby of its plane surface. The illusion view, though, contradicts the common experience of appreciating simultaneously a painting's brushstrokes and its subject matter (or

[16] I discuss sophisticated resemblance theories in § 4.4.

the quality or grain of a fine photographic print and its subject matter).[17] Also, experiences of visual illusion in pictures only arise for the stationary eye – the smallest shifts in viewer perspective will reveal that different objects of a scene do not move in relation to each other.

Semiotic Strict semiotic views, such as that advanced by Nelson Goodman (1968), hold that all signs, including pictures, are conventional. As pictures represent their subject matter in virtue of belonging to a symbol system, similar to how natural languages represent their subject matter, they are not grounded in visual experience. For Goodman, the difference between how pictures represent their subject matter and sentences, maps, graphs, or wiring diagrams represent their subject matter is that pictures are symbolically 'dense' (they have no discrete parts analogous to words and sentences in language) and 'replete' (the number of visual features *relevant* to a picture's representational role is much greater than the number of features found in text or maps, for example). Despite some broad parallels between experiencing pictures and language, there appear to be profound disanalogies, for example between how we learn to 'read' a picture and learn to read a language. A landscape picture delivers a visual experience, whereas a sentence describing a landscape or the features of a map do not. (Literary imagery is not visual imagery). Ultimately, Goodman's semiotic view concerns representation and not depiction. His is an explanation of pictorial understanding through picture classification: pictures and descriptions are classified into kinds in a habitual, though admittedly unsharp, manner. Any object (including a picture) and any surface marking can represent anything we wish to denote. I find the counterintuitive nature of the semiotic view as applied to depiction most clearly displayed when we try to understand how *any* convention could get us to see the *Mona Lisa*, for example, as depicting something other than a portrait of a woman – to understand it as depicting, say, three Siberian garage mechanics.

[17] I owe the painterly aspect of this example to Sebastian Gardner, lecturing on pictorial representation.

Make-Believe In Kendall Walton's make-believe view of pictorial representation, looking at a picture is participating in a fiction. The successful picture is a prop which allows the viewer to enter into a 'game of make-believe'. That is, pictures represent their subject matter in virtue of our (correctly) making believe what is represented is actually there before us. Resemblance plays no part. This seems to capture well the role of imagination in understanding pictures. The problem occurs in identifying exactly what is to be make-believedly seen when looking at a picture, for to get this right one needs to know what the picture represents – which is precisely what the theory is meant to be explaining. Like the semiotic view above, the make-believe view has difficulties, for example, in explaining how young children can learn to recognise familiar and unfamiliar objects by first seeing them in picture books.

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What I have laid out here are only thumbnail sketches of the most popular theories of pictorial representation. I believe that if one compares the prevalent theories, and asks of them explanatory power over our understanding the especially diverse range of photographs we find around us, then it is the intentional theory that is best placed to respond. It is, in the very least, a useful starting point. Seeing-in, guided by an intentional standard of correctness, attempts to explain our understanding of not only figurative and realistic works, but also fictional works, those which depict both types and tokens, and pictures of events. The seeing-in thesis also offers an explanation of how we can understand subject matter depicted within the diversity of historical styles, cultural styles and artistic movements which exist – pictures as diverse as Lascaux cave paintings, Dutch still-lifes, Hopi motifs, Cubist works and abstract drawings. Surely such a theory of depiction comes well equipped to welcome and explain our understanding of the ubiquitous photograph in its many and diverse guises.

Despite the favourable foundations the seeing-in thesis prepares, Wollheim strikes, I believe, an odd chord concerning how we understand photographs. He distinguishes between a special ‘species of seeing appropriate to photographs’ and a ‘species of seeing appropriate to pictorial representations’, which marks a difference of kind between how photographs depict on the one hand, and how paintings, drawings, pastels and all the other depictive media depict on the other. And it is with this oddity I begin in Chapter 2. Although the seeing-in project is one I support, ultimately I reject this aspect of it, which seems an *exaggeration* of common experience, and appears to accept too quickly notions concerning the necessary degree of importance of the causal element in the photographic process.

1.4 Outline of My Method of Investigation

Chapter 2 In Chapter 2, I examine Wollheim's position on photographs as articulated in 'Essay V' appended to his *Art and its Objects* (1980) by addressing the following questions: (1a) Is the standard of correctness for appropriately seeing pictures such as paintings *uniquely* set by an artist's intentions? (1b) Is the standard of correctness for appropriately seeing photographs always *not uniquely* set by an artist's or photographer's intentions? (2) Is the difference between our understanding of photographs and paintings as sharp as the subject-model distinction suggests? (3) Do artists or photographers *use* photographs as representations? By attempting to draw photographs and paintings closer together within an intentionalist view, I argue that the difference between our seeing and understanding photographs and paintings is one of *degree*, rather than kind, and therefore the seeing and understanding is the same for both.

Chapter 3 In Chapter 3, through an exploration of Roger Scruton's 'ideal photograph' thesis, I query whether we can in fact dispense *altogether* with intention as regards understanding photographs. I query whether photographs are transparent, and whether they can be likened to mirror images, frames held up to the world, and television, and question parallels made between still photographic images and moving images. Ultimately I find too little overlap between 'ideal' photographs and what we might call 'ordinary' or 'real' photographs for the latter to be explicable in terms of the former. Photography does appear to be a representational art, and it is correct that photographs do convey intention (and, as a result, sometimes do inspire aesthetic interest).

Chapter 4 Through an exploration and critique of various 'likeness theses', I attempt to further support my earlier claims for an intentionalist understanding of photographs by

dispelling what I take to be some common preconceptions concerning photographic realism and the likeness of photographs to their subject matter.

Chapter 5 Conclusion