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# Pictorial Experience and Seeing

Michael Newall

*This paper proposes that pictorial experience, the experience that pictures give rise to when we understand them, involves the non-veridical experience of seeing the picture's subject matter. Using phenomenological analysis and material from philosophy of mind and perceptual psychology, it argues that both pictorial experience lacking awareness of the picture surface, such as illusion, and pictorial experience that includes this awareness, i.e. seeing-in, should be understood in this way.*

## Introduction

Pictorial experience is the experience that pictures give rise to when we understand them, placing us in an intentional relation to the picture's subject matter. This paper argues that pictorial experience involves the non-veridical experience of seeing the picture's subject matter. Despite the criticisms that have been made of such an idea in the past, it retains an obvious pre-theoretical appeal. We readily talk about seeing a picture's subject matter when we look at a picture, and this is the product of a deep-seated intuition that our experience of pictures is directly comparable to our experience of their depicta—that it does in some way involve the experience of seeing what is depicted. This intuition impressed E. H. Gombrich, and, as John Hyman has recently reminded us, Descartes.<sup>1</sup>

The intuition finds voice in Gombrich's claim that pictures 'trigger . . . non-veridical visual experiences', which forms the central article of his 'illusion' theory.<sup>2</sup> This theory, and the description of pictorial experience on which it was based, came to be rejected in part because it did not acknowledge that the experience of pictures is in important ways unlike the experience of seeing their subject matter. In particular, it failed to allow for the fact of 'twofoldness', that our experience of pictures often involves a simultaneous visual awareness of the picture surface.<sup>3</sup> While I will not consider Gombrich's particular account of pictorial experience here, the challenges of answering problems of this general kind—of explaining how pictorial experience differs from actual seeing—will occupy much of my discussion. I will approach these problems in two ways. I will make a phenomenological

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- 1 E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1960); pp. 21–23; John Hyman, 'Pictorial Art and Visual Experience', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2000), pp. 21–45. Hyman's discussion draws on Descartes' *Optics* (in René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. J. Cottingham *et al.* [Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1985]).
  - 2 Gombrich, 'Mirror and Map', in *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1982), p. 180. For Gombrich's illusion theory, see *Art and Illusion*, especially pp. 3–6.
  - 3 This is the criticism levelled at Gombrich by Richard Wollheim, 'Reflections on *Art and Illusion*', in *On Art and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1973), pp. 261–289.

analysis of pictorial experience, showing that pictorial experience does indeed involve the experience of seeing (and often too, the experience of seeing the picture surface); and I will draw on work on vision in philosophy of mind and perceptual psychology, showing that those features of pictorial experience that have in the past been thought to distinguish it from ordinary seeing are in fact features of ordinary seeing.

I develop my argument as follows. I first describe what I mean by ‘the non-veridical experience of seeing’. I then examine what seems to me the best existing account of pictorial experience, a ‘disjunctive’ account, such as that proposed by Dominic Lopes. On such an account, Richard Wollheim’s influential concept of seeing-in, which incorporates two-foldness, describes one kind of pictorial experience. But there are also others, which differ from seeing-in in lacking an awareness of the picture surface. I then discuss how such experiences can be described as non-veridical experiences of seeing, before turning to the harder task of showing that seeing-in also involves such experiences. This is hard because Wollheim claims that seeing subject matter in a picture surface, and actually seeing that subject matter, are ‘incommensurate’ experiences—i.e. the former cannot be analysed in terms of the latter. The remainder of the paper argues that Wollheim is wrong about this, and that seeing-in, like other kinds of pictorial experience, can be understood in terms of the experience of seeing.

Before I begin I should add one proviso. I take it that pictorial experience is visual, but this is not universally accepted. In particular, it has been argued that pictures can also be experienced through other sense modalities. Lopes, in particular, has argued that pictorial experience may be tactile.<sup>4</sup> As it is beyond the scope of this paper to enter this debate, I direct the reader to another writer’s argument against this claim.<sup>5</sup>

## The Non-Veridical Experience of Seeing

The account of seeing I give here is derived loosely from work by Mohan Matthen.<sup>6</sup> I understand seeing to be intentional, i.e. to see is to see something, some object X, or some kind or property X, instantiated in an object. Seeing X is a process that includes the following causally related items:

- (i) stimulation of a subject’s visual system;
- (ii) a consequent engagement of the subject’s ability to visually recognize X; and
- (iii) a consequent visual experience of X by the subject.

The visual system includes the eyes, the optic nerves, and the parts of the brain involved in vision. Ordinarily, in veridical seeing, light reflected from something, X, projects through the subject’s pupil, and stimulates the retina. Signals from the retina are sent through the

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4 Dominic McIver Lopes, ‘Art Media and the Sense Modalities: Tactile Pictures’, *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 189 (1997), pp. 425–440.

5 Robert Hopkins, ‘Touching Pictures’, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 40 no. 1 (2000), pp. 149–167.

6 Mohan Matthen, *Seeing, Doing and Knowing: A Philosophical Theory of Sense Perception* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), ch. 1.

optic nerve to be processed by the various parts of the brain devoted to vision. If the subject is to see X, this processing must involve the engagement of the subject's ability to visually recognize X. Recognition in turn gives rise to a certain conscious state in the subject, a visual experience of X. Matthen points out that experience should not be thought of as a side-effect—an epiphenomenon—of recognition; rather, it plays an important part in human cognition. Experience is 'the consciously available record' of recognition, and 'the *normal* means by which an observer . . . gains access to the results of sensory classification for the formation of beliefs'.<sup>7</sup> That is, visual experience plays a functional role in seeing, enabling visual information to contribute to the larger economy of the human mind.<sup>8</sup>

Two features of this account will particularly bear on my discussion. First, it will be clear that seeing includes both genuine, or what I shall call veridical, seeing, and non-veridical seeing. Non-veridical seeing could involve a visual hallucination of X, a dream of X, or a visual imagining of X. It could also involve visually mistaking some other object for X, or being subject to an illusion of X's presence—and, I shall argue, understanding a picture. I shall say more about non-veridical seeing below. Second, the experience of seeing is distinguished from, but dependent on, visual recognition. The distinction between recognition and experience is underlined by the fact that the former can, and does, occur without the later. Matthen sets this point out by examining examples, such as blindsight, in which recognition and experience are dissociated.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, since the experience of seeing is the conscious record of recognition, experience, when it does occur, is dependent on recognition. This will be important since below I will explain features of pictorial experience by appealing to the modular structure and robustness of our visual recognitional abilities.

While making a distinction between the veridical and non-veridical experience of seeing is appealing, it requires some care. Since this distinction is logical, it is not enough to say, for example, that the veridical experience of seeing depends on a causal link between the experience of seeing X and X itself, of the kind outlined above.<sup>10</sup> I define the experience

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7 *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 27, original italics. Matthen also entertains the idea that experience may be an indispensable part of human cognition: 'it may well be that *some* mental functions can *only* be exercised through conscious awareness' (p. 27, original italics).

8 This is only a partial account of seeing. For instance, this analysis is not intended to exclude the presence of other causally related items, as when seeing X is also consequent on someone drawing attention to X's previously unnoticed presence in our field of vision.

9 Matthen, *Seeing, Doing and Knowing*, pp. 25–26.

10 For what if the subject happened to have an experience of seeing X when they were presented with not just X, but any visual stimulus at all? When the subject is presented with X, it still initiates a causal chain culminating in seeing X, so it seems to satisfy the call for a causal link. However, since the subject's visual system is constituted so that it responds to any stimulus in this way, it can hardly be called a veridical experience. These concerns, and the following definition, are drawn from David Lewis, 'Veridical Hallucination and Prosthetic Vision', in Jonathan Dancy (ed.), *Perceptual Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1988), pp. 79–91. Note that Lewis talks about seeing rather than the experience of seeing. On my account the experience of seeing is a component of seeing (and the veridical experience of seeing is a component of veridical seeing, and the non-veridical experience of seeing is a component of non-veridical seeing).

of seeing X as veridical if and only if X is present before the subject's eyes, and the experience is counterfactually dependent on the presence of X before the subject's eyes. The relation of counterfactual dependence means that seeing X is dependent on X's presence before the subject's eyes *and*, if X was *not* so present (if, for example, X was to be obscured or removed from the subject's field of vision), then seeing X would not occur. It follows that seeing X is non-veridical just in case X is not present before the subject's eyes, or, if X is present, when this relation of counterfactual dependence does not hold. We may make a further distinction between two types of non-veridical experiences of seeing. In the first, the experience of X does not have a counterfactual dependence on the presence of anything in the viewer's visual field. Typically, in such cases, the visual system receives stimulation from elsewhere in the brain. This encompasses visual hallucinations and items seen in dreams and visual imaginings. This kind of experience will not concern me. In the second kind, there is some item, not X, present before the subject's eyes, on which the non-veridical experience of X counterfactually depends. The experience of X is thus dependent on the presence of some other item, let us call it Y, before the subject's eyes, such that if Y were not so present (if, for example, it was obscured or removed from the subject's field of vision), then seeing X would not occur. This is what happens when we visually mistake Y for X, or when we are subject to an illusion. I will argue that understanding pictures also involves this second kind of non-veridical experience of seeing.

### Kinds of Pictorial Experience

I set the stage for my analysis of pictorial experience by giving a brief account of what seems to me the best existing account of pictorial experience. This accords roughly with what Lopes has to say: that '[s]ome pictures, *contra* Gombrich, are experienced simultaneously as designed surfaces and as of their subjects; other pictures, *contra* Wollheim, preclude twofoldness'.<sup>11</sup> In other words, there is a variety of kinds of pictorial experience.

I begin with Wollheim's account. Wollheim claimed that all pictorial experience can be described as 'seeing-in', although we shall see shortly that it does not adequately characterize all examples of pictorial experience.<sup>12</sup> When we understand a picture, Wollheim held, we see the picture's subject in the picture; hence, 'seeing-in'. Seeing-in is distinguished by a feature Wollheim called 'twofoldness'. '[W]hen seeing-in occurs,' he wrote, 'two things happen: I am visually aware of the surface I look at, and I discern something standing out in front of, or (in certain cases) receding behind something else.'<sup>13</sup> Thus, a viewer looking at a picture undergoes a 'twofold' experience: on one hand, she is visually aware of the flat, painted, printed, or drawn surface of the picture; on the other, she discerns the subject matter of the picture, and discerns it as being a three-dimensional thing, standing (typically) out from a background, or in front of other depicted objects.

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11 Dominic McIver Lopes, *Understanding Pictures* (Oxford: Oxford U.P. 1996), p. 50. I ignore his later proposal that pictorial experience can also be tactile.

12 Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1987), pp. 46–77.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

As Lopes and others have pointed out, seeing-in does not accurately describe all pictorial experience. *Trompe l'oeil* paintings preclude seeing-in in those instances where they give rise to an illusion.<sup>14</sup> *Trompe l'oeil* is a genre of painting—typically still-life—intended to ‘trick the eye’—to trick the viewer into believing, if only for a moment, that what they have before them is not a picture but the depicted subject matter itself. Seeing-in is distinguished by its twofold character—it involves a simultaneous visual awareness of the picture’s surface and of the picture’s referent. But the illusion of *trompe l'oeil* does not have this twofold character—the viewer is unaware of the picture’s surface—he or she is aware only of the (illusory) presence of the referent. In such cases, depiction occurs without seeing-in. There are other exceptions too. Some paintings, similar to *trompe l'oeil*, are often experienced without any visual awareness of the painted surface, but unlike *trompe l'oeil*, are not apt to trick us into believing we are in the actual presence of the subject matter, nor are they intended to do so. Early Netherlandish painting provides copious examples of such pictures, Jan Van Eyck’s *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434, National Gallery, London) being one of the most famous and most effective in this respect. One might be tempted to dismiss such an example out of hand, for we are unused to such effects in our culture: even the most exacting print reproduction does not reproduce this effect. Beside the general techniques of realistic painting, two qualities contribute to this effect. First, Van Eyck avoids laying down any recognizable trace of brushwork that would be visible to the naked eye. Second, the details he depicts are so fine that they are beyond the resolution of the naked eye, and well beyond the resolution of print reproduction, except when a substantially magnified view is presented. The modern viewer, trained to attend to technique as much as subject matter, looks at a painting such as this expecting to see some trace of the brush or facture, but can only make out ever finer levels of detail of the objects depicted.<sup>15</sup>

Wollheim, foreseeing objections along this line, claimed that *trompe l'oeil* paintings, at least when they function as illusions, are not in fact pictures at all—they do not depict or represent. ‘[Some] paintings are non-representational . . . because they do not invoke, indeed they repel, attention to the marked surface. *Trompe l'oeil* paintings are surely in this category.’<sup>16</sup> However, Wollheim’s solution is inadequate, and has failed to convince subsequent writers. It requires that *trompe l'oeil*, and as we have seen, many other paintings as well, are not pictures. And that is too high a price to pay to preserve an account of pictorial experience.

14 Lopes, *Understanding Pictures*, p. 49. Martin Kelly has made the same point. (Martin Kelly, ‘Richard Wollheim’s “Seeing-In” and “Representation”’, in Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (ed.), *Visual Theory* [Cambridge: Polity, 1991], p. 161.)

15 I thank Richard Woodfield for drawing my attention to examples of this kind. It is worth noting that when he spoke of ‘illusion’, Gombrich may well have had this kind of pictorial experience in mind. For instance, he notes of the duck–rabbit figure, ‘[c]learly we do not have the illusion that we are confronted by the “real” duck or rabbit’ (Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, p. 4.) Woodfield makes this point in his ‘Peetz and Wollheim on Gombrich’s Illusions: A Note’, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1988), pp. 278–280.

16 Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, p. 62.

Summing up these results we find that, first, pictorial experience can, and in most cases does, involve seeing-in. Second, it can involve the visual awareness of the subject matter without an awareness of the picture surface. It may do this either as an illusion, as in the case of *trompe l'oeil*, or without, as in *The Arnolfini Portrait*. Between them these three descriptions cover all examples of pictorial experience.<sup>17</sup>

## Pictorial Experience and the Experience of Seeing

At this point we might conclude, as Lopes does, that the most that can be said about pictorial experience is that it involves one or other of these experiences, but that these different kinds of pictorial experience share no common feature. This, I think, would be unwarranted. Against this view, I now argue that all these kinds of pictorial experience involve the non-veridical experience of seeing the subject matter. In the case of most pictures, this experience is accompanied by the experience of seeing the flat configurations of shape and colour, and other features such as brushstrokes, that characterize the picture's surface. Here pictorial experience may be further characterized as seeing-in. In other cases, such as *trompe l'oeil* or *The Arnolfini Portrait*, the experience of seeing the picture's subject matter is not accompanied by a visual awareness of the picture's surface.

I think it will already be clear that the experience of seeing characterizes these instances of pictorial experience that involve visual awareness of the subject matter without a simultaneous visual awareness of the picture surface. For they do not differ from the veridical experience of seeing in terms of visual experience *per se*; it is only factors extrinsic to experience that set them apart: their non-veridicality, and in cases such as *The Arnolfini Portrait*, the belief that that experience is indeed non-veridical.

There is, however, a potential problem here. Non-veridical seeing, it could be objected, entails illusion or misrecognition, and this does not occur with *The Arnolfini Portrait*. Fleshed out a little, this line of thought would run as follows. If we have a non-veridical experience of seeing X, it is impossible to distinguish this, *qua* experience, from an experience of actually seeing X. Thus, if the latter results in a belief that we see X, it is reasonable to expect the former to do so too. If this is right, then non-veridical seeing entails illusion, and cannot give rise to non-illusory states, such as that we have viewing *The Arnolfini Portrait* (or, indeed, that involved in seeing-in). The first thing to note here is that reflection on our experience of paintings such as *The Arnolfini Portrait* shows that it is indeed possible to have an experience as of seeing something without believing we actually see it. So I have no doubt this line of argument is wrong: somehow it misunderstands the relationship between seeing and belief fixation. But how then should we conceive this relationship? I think the right approach is found in a modular theory of vision and mind. It is widely accepted that the visual system is modular: certain parts of the brain are devoted solely to processing visual information.<sup>18</sup>

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17 We might also separately list a pictorial experience that alternates between visual awareness of surface and subject matter, as described by Gombrich (*Art and Illusion*, pp. 4–5). However, since this involves an awareness of the subject matter without an awareness of the picture surface (plus an awareness of the picture surface without an awareness of the subject matter), it is already implicitly covered by my account.

18 See, for instance, Semir Zeki, *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1999), ch. 7.

Modular theories of mind provide a useful resource to draw on here. These hold that separate modules—neurologically hardwired mechanisms that are function specific—exist for separate cognitive faculties such as visual recognition, language, and so on. On Jerry Fodor’s influential theory, once modules have processed this input, it is processed by non-modular cognitive systems that ‘subserve the fixation of belief’.<sup>19</sup> On the basis of inputs that activate various modules, we develop beliefs regarding the cause of those inputs. Fodor held that modules themselves are informationally encapsulated: they process inputs independently of one another, so that information from one does not affect the processes of others. This means that the input analysis produced by various modules may be inconsistent, as it is with some optical illusions. For example, in the case of the Müller–Lyer illusion, if we measure with a ruler the ‘shafts’ of the two arrow figures we find they are the same length, while judging by visual perception alone, we will usually conclude that one is longer than the other.<sup>20</sup> On Fodor’s account, this inconsistency of input analysis is resolved by higher-level, non-modular systems. These mechanisms would allow us to develop a consistent belief, by discounting the input analysis of one module as the product of non-veridical perception.

Such a proposal is complicated by the fact that vision does not prove to be informationally encapsulated in a straightforward way. In particular, it is well established that vision is cognitively penetrable—information from our beliefs influences what we see in a range of ways. To take a familiar example, we may stare at a tree trunk with a camouflaged moth on it for some time without seeing it. Only when someone mentions its presence do we become visually aware of the insect. Another familiar example occurs when we have been given a verbal or written description of an individual previously unknown to us. Here a new belief (that X has certain distinctive, visually discernible properties) can give us the ability to visually recognize something (X) that we were not able to visually recognize before. Such examples make it more difficult to maintain that seeing is a process that occurs independently of belief-formation in the cases I need it to. For while the Müller–Lyer illusion may be impenetrable, other kinds of seeing are cognitively penetrable, and it might be that these include the non-veridical seeing that I attribute to pictorial experience.<sup>21</sup>

Recent work in cognitive science suggests that this difficulty may be surmountable. One possible way of tackling it is found in a proposal developed by Zenon Pylyshyn, which draws on a range of results in perceptual psychology. He holds that a particular stage of

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- 19 Jerry A. Fodor, *The Modularity of Mind: An Essay on Faculty Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), pp. 119–120. Some more recent accounts, such as Peter Carruthers’s massive modularity theory (Peter Carruthers, *The Architecture of the Mind: Massive Modularity and the Flexibility of Thought* [Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2006]) hold that belief generation is also a modular process, but these differences between modularity theories will not affect my general argument.
- 20 For the Müller–Lyer figure and a discussion of the Müller–Lyer illusion, see R. L. Gregory, *Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966), pp. 136–137, 140–160.
- 21 Indeed considered diachronically, even the Müller–Lyer illusion may not be impenetrable. Environmental conditioning has been shown to markedly influence subjects’ susceptibility to the illusion. See Robert N. McCauley and Joseph Henrich, ‘Susceptibility to the Müller–Lyer Illusion, Theory-Neutral Observation, and the Diachronic Penetrability of the Visual Input System’, *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2006), pp. 1–23.

vision—‘early’ vision—is cognitively impenetrable.<sup>22</sup> Early vision involves the processing of ‘specifically visual’ properties of a scene, including outline shape, colour, textures, and properties as complex as volumetric form.<sup>23</sup> In this sense it is an important part of what we ordinarily regard as vision as a whole. Pylyshyn holds that penetration, where it does occur, happens either prior to early vision, or following it. Noticing the moth is an example of the first kind of penetration: when we are told of the moth’s presence we adjust our attention to the scene accordingly, raising our chances of seeing it. Visually recognizing an individual from a description is an example of the latter kind of penetration. It involves matching the description with the properties that early vision processes.<sup>24</sup>

Pylyshyn’s proposal is controversial, so I do not want to tie myself to it.<sup>25</sup> However, my position does require that something like it is correct: that some parts of visual processing are cognitively impenetrable. Would such a limited impenetrability suffice to support my position? It will, so far as the penetrability of vision corresponds with the respects in which depiction is cognitively penetrable—i.e. with the ways in which beliefs can influence what pictures can occasion visual experiences of. Without committing to a particular account of the cognitive impenetrability of vision, there is little point in developing a detailed account the impenetrability of depiction here. Still, it is worth noting that the examples of impenetrability I have mentioned have equivalents in depiction. Like the moth on the tree trunk, pictures often depict things that we do not notice until their presence is mentioned to us. And just as in life we may visually recognize someone when armed with a description of them, so a description of the sitter may allow us to identify a portrait’s subject.

Let us assume that vision is cognitively impenetrable in the way I require. We can now understand how our perception of a picture such as *The Arnolfini Portrait* can be considered as another example of inconsistency of input analysis. On one hand we have an experience of seeing the subject matter. On the other, there are contextual cues that also allow us to realize that the painting is just that, a painting: the painting’s frame, its place on the wall in the National Gallery, the distinctive parallax effects as we move about it, the fact that we recognize its subject matter as that of the famous *Arnolfini Portrait*, and so on. As with the Müller–Lyer illusion, these inconsistent inputs are resolved at the level of belief fixation, where we discount the first input as non-veridical. Such modular accounts thus allows us to understand how seeing need not be believing. The experience of seeing thus can be, but need not be, illusion.

## Analysing Seeing-In

I now argue that seeing-in, too, involves non-veridical seeing. The crucial challenge to this claim lies in Wollheim’s conviction that seeing-in is phenomenologically irreducible to

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22 Zenon Pylyshyn, ‘Is Vision Continuous with Cognition? The Case for Cognitive Impenetrability of Visual Perception’, *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1999), pp. 341–365.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 343.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 344.

25 See the commentaries to his article in *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1999), pp. 366–401.

seeing. Speaking of an example that involves seeing the figure of a boy in the marks on a wall, he claims,

We get lost once we start comparing the phenomenology of our perception of the boy when we see him in the wall, or our perception of the wall when we see the boy in it, with that of our perception of boy or wall seen face-to-face. Such a comparison seems easy enough to take on, but it proves impossible to carry out. The particular complexity that one kind of experience has and the other lacks makes their phenomenology incommensurate.<sup>26</sup>

There is good reason to doubt this. Seeing-in, I propose, typically involves the veridical experience of seeing the picture surface, and the non-veridical experience of seeing the depicted subject.<sup>27</sup> The first, despite what Wollheim says, is obvious and uncontentious: seeing a picture partly involves the experience of seeing its surface, for we do in fact see its surface. The second point is a matter of contention, for it is not immediately obvious that seeing X in Y involves the experience of non-veridically seeing X. This is the point I now argue.

Wollheim has made us used to the idea that we are capable of seeing things in pictures, and other flat surfaces. But the reverse is also true: we are capable of seeing flat surfaces in three-dimensional objects. That may sound an odd idea, but it is one that painters, especially, are familiar with. In looking at their subject matter, painters are often taught, or come by a process of their own, to see it as a picture. Looking at their subject, they see in it the two-dimensional shapes they will draw on their canvas, and the colours of the pigments that they need to apply to create their intended effect. They may see scumbled areas of paint in roughly textured subject matter, blurred areas of ink or watercolour in a dark cloud, broad brushstrokes in reflections on water, and so on. Such an ability to see-in is no doubt often of use in picture-making, and many art teachers have encouraged it. For instance, the common technique of attending to negative shapes essentially involves seeing flat shapes in the subject matter, and reproducing them on paper or canvas. Similarly, the technique of looking at subjects through a viewfinder is in part intended to encourage seeing the framed subject as a picture.

This ability raises the possibility of a useful comparison. Say we see a picture's subject matter, Y, in the flat, marked surface of the picture, X. We will also be capable of seeing X, the picture, in Y, the subject matter. How will these two experiences compare? Take the following example, where X is Paul Cézanne's painting *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (1904–06, Philadelphia Museum of Art) and Y is the landscape it depicts, viewed from the point Cézanne painted it. The art historian John Rewald has taken a photograph from this

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26 Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, pp. 46–47.

27 John Hyman makes a similar statement about this passage: 'the boy looks like a boy, and the marks on the surface of the wall look like marks that depict a boy. So . . . it seems to me as if I were seeing a boy' (John Hyman, *The Objective Eye: Color, Form and Reality in the Theory of Art* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006], p. 142). However, while I believe Hyman is right, this position also requires argument in its support. Wollheim's contrary opinion shows that the point cannot be taken as self-evident.

position, which can be used in place of the landscape itself to demonstrate the points I make below.<sup>28</sup>

Looking at the painting, we see the mountain in it: we remain visually aware of the painting's patchwork of brushstrokes, and we see the mountain in this as if behind pale veils of atmosphere. Standing in front of the mountain itself, and without ever losing visual awareness of that fact, we can, with a little effort, see-in it Cézanne's painting. That is, we can see-in the scene a flat surface on which is inscribed the characteristic features of Cézanne's composition, the colours of his pigments, and, in the rough geology of the mountain, the faceted, patchwork quality of his brushstrokes.

Now, when we say we see the picture in the landscape, the implication is that we do not merely see-in the two-dimensional design of the picture; at the same time we are visually aware that this picture we are seeing-in *depicts that landscape*. It might be objected that this is not so, that we just see-in the picture's design, colours, and brushwork in the mountain view, and that is the end of the matter. But that would be untrue: the surface we see-in does not seem to us an abstract painting; it is unmistakably a painting of the mountain view. Thus, seeing-in must figure *twice* in our account of this experience. That is, we see the design of a Cézanne in our view of the mountain, *and* we see in that design the view of the mountain.

It is here that we come to appreciate that seeing-in must be further analysable, for when we consider the actual nature of this experience it is clear that it does not have this order of complexity. As I have said, we are visually aware of the seen-in painting as depicting the mountain; but at the same time, we do not have a double awareness of the mountain. Rather, our experience of the actual mountain exists in a relation to our experience of the seen-in picture surface that also allows it to function as the experience of the seen-in landscape. How could this be? The puzzle is solved if we accept that seeing Y in X involves the experience of seeing X and the experience of seeing Y. For if on top of this, Y is a pattern in which we can see X, this adds nothing to our overall experience, for it simply reiterates the fact that we see X. Seeing Y in X therefore involves the experiences of seeing X and Y—typically, the veridical experience of seeing X and non-veridical experience of seeing Y.<sup>29</sup>

### Some Objections Considered

It is important to note that I do not mean that the experience Cézanne's painting occasions of seeing the mountain is identical with the experience of actually seeing the mountain. In general, the non-veridical experience of seeing X, occasioned by a picture, may well differ from our experience of actually seeing X. This often happens when we see X as having fewer kinds of properties than we would actually see it as having. For example, a schematic outline picture might allow us only to see X as having a certain kind of general shape

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28 Rewald's photograph, which also demonstrates that Cézanne was largely faithful to the scene before him, is reproduced in Pavel Mochotka, *Cézanne: Landscape into Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale U.P., 1996), p. 116, fig. 90.

29 The atypical example, of course, is that I have just considered: where we see Y in X, and then are apt to see X in Y, the second instance of seeing-in involves the veridical experience of seeing X and non-veridical experience of seeing Y.

standing out from a ground. A black-and-white picture will allow us to see X as having light and dark tones, being illuminated and shaded in certain ways, but it will not allow us to see X as having properties of hue. An impressionist painting, or a painting such as Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, will allow us to see its subject as having all those properties, but will not allow us to see it as having any kind of fine details. As I have said, when we consider seeing Cézanne's painting in the landscape, and then consider seeing the landscape in the seen-in painting, we find that the original, actual, experience of the landscape is the only experience of the landscape that we have. But this experience is not identical to that we would expect the seen-in painting to occasion. Rather, it exceeds that experience; it includes the experience of seeing the properties of the landscape we would expect to be included in our experience of the painting, and it also includes the experience of those fine details of the landscape that we see in life. Thus, when we see the painting in the landscape, and ask ourselves about the nature of the experience we might have seeing the landscape in that painting, we may be slightly disconcerted by the fact that there is already a more vivid experience of the landscape present, that does not simply coincide with, but matches and exceeds the experience of the landscape that we would expect to have in front of the actual painting.

This raises another question. How is it, given that our experience of seeing X occasioned by a picture might only in some respects be like our experience of actually seeing X, that it can be an experience of seeing X at all? This will not seem so strange when we consider that we often have an experience of seeing the same object under different aspects. That is, actually seeing an object is often like other instances of actually seeing it only in some respects. For instance, seen in daylight and at close quarters we will be able to see an object as having many of its visually discernible properties. But when we see an object at night, we cannot see its hues. At a distance, through fog or otherwise blurry vision, we cannot make out details of its shape. Through a screen of foliage, or amongst a moving crowd, we might see only certain parts of the object. In all these situations we are often still able to see that this is the same object (although we might not do so as reliably as we would in more forgiving conditions). This 'robustness' is a capacity that can be understood as characteristic of our visual recognitional abilities, for it allows seeing, and so the experience of seeing, under adverse viewing conditions (night, fog, when glimpsed, etc.), sacrificing a degree of accuracy in the interests of efficiency.<sup>30</sup> The non-veridical experience is in this respect just like the veridical experience: it can involve the experience of seeing X as having many of the visually discernible properties it in fact has, or it can involve the experience of seeing X as having relatively few of those properties.

Another kind of concern is this: my proposal that seeing Y in X involves the experience of seeing X and seeing Y might be thought to sit uncomfortably with the way we ordinarily think about seeing. We might be concerned that this would imply that the subject believes (absurdly) that both X and Y are at once present to our gaze. This worry can be quickly

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30 Lopes, *Understanding Pictures*, pp. 136–140. It should be added that our capacity for recognition on the basis of relatively minimal information does, however, allow for misrecognition. We can, for example, sometimes mistake a stranger for someone we know under adverse viewing conditions.

dismissed, for we have already seen that a modular account of mind allows that non-veridically seeing Y need not imply belief in it. Two contradictory inputs, X and Y, occur, but this contradiction is resolved at the level of belief fixation, where the non-veridical input, Y is discounted.

This response does not entirely banish the concern that there is something awkward in the notion of seeing both X and Y in the way I have described. My account requires that we have an experience of seeing X and of Y, simultaneously, such that one appears in front of the other. Each part of X, the picture surface, will be seen as either in front of or behind the part of Y that it depicts. Each such part of the picture surface will appear to precisely overlap, or to be overlapped by, what it depicts. They do so, though, without appearing to obscure, or be obscured by, the subject matter. So, in seeing Y in X (taking the case now where we see X as in front of Y) we will see the various parts of X as precisely overlapping the parts of Y they depict without obscuring those parts of Y. The concern here is that seeing things as overlapping typically involves a *reduced* visual awareness of the overlapped item—it appears obscured or occluded. This, however, is not the case in my account of seeing-in.

First, I would stress that however odd it may seem, my description of the twofold phenomenology of seeing-in is accurate. In the case of the Cézanne, we have an experience of seeing the brushstrokes as marks on a flat proximate surface, and also, through them, a faraway landscape that is not at all obscured by them. Second, this phenomenology is not unique to seeing-in. Far from being a disreputable notion, twofoldness, as I have described it, is recognized as a feature of another kind of visual experience: the perception of transparency.

The perception of transparency involves the seeing of one body through another, transparent or translucent one. Like seeing-in, perceptual transparency is twofold in the sense that it involves simultaneously seeing two objects as overlapping without the overlapped object being obscured. The phenomenology of transparency, and the conditions under which it is perceived, have been well studied.<sup>31</sup> It is generally accepted that the perception of transparency does involve the kind of twofoldness I describe: ‘At the retina, each location can have only one value of luminance or colour. When transparency is perceived, however, different surface qualities can be redistributed to two or more apparently superimposed layers.’<sup>32</sup> A transparent pane of red glass overlapping a blue object will, at the point of overlap, transmit light that we would ordinarily perceive as violet. In the context of the perception of transparency, the phenomenal components of violet—red and blue—are ‘redistributed’, the red to the transparent pane and the blue to the object seen through it. That is to say, rather than simply seeing a violet area where they overlap, we will have a more complex, and phenomenologically distinct experience: an awareness of a blue surface seen through a transparent red layer. Such redistribution can apply to properties of ‘texture and motion, as well as colour or brightness’.<sup>33</sup>

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31 Fabio Metelli, ‘The Perception of Transparency’, *Scientific American*, vol. 230, no. 4 (1974), pp. 90–98. Metelli points out that the presence of physical transparency is neither necessary nor sufficient for the perception of transparency (p. 90).

32 T. Watanabe and P. Cavanagh, ‘Surface Decomposition Accompanying the Perception of Transparency’, *Spatial Vision*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1992), pp. 95–111, at p. 95.

33 *Ibid.*

It should be noted that there are also differences between the phenomenology of seeing-in and transparency. For example, picture surfaces are not typically perceived as transparent. We are, for instance, visually aware of the Cézanne's surface as made up of opaque, rather than transparent, brushstrokes. Another difference is that seeing-in does not simply involve one visual awareness 'overlaid' with another, in the manner of two transparent surfaces superimposed. Rather, particular parts of the subject matter, say various features in the case of a portrait—the eyes, nose, mouth, hair, etc.—are seen in particular parts of the picture—in particular shapes, brushstrokes, areas of colour, etc. But this does not detract from the fact that both seeing-in and the perception of transparency are twofold. The perception of transparency thus shows that visual experience can present the kind of twofoldness I have attributed to seeing-in.

## Conclusion

Pictorial experience should be understood in terms of the experience of seeing. This applies to both instances of pictorial experience that lack visual awareness of the picture surface, and to seeing-in. Seeing something, *Y*, in a picture surface, *X*, involves the experience of seeing *X* and the non-veridical experience of seeing *Y*. We have found phenomenological reasons for averring this, and now we have established that the twofoldness it implies is itself already recognized as a feature of ordinary vision.<sup>34</sup>

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