

**SEEING IN: TWO-FOLD, THREE-FOLD?**

Carl Robinson

University of Derby

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## SEEING IN: TWO-FOLD, THREE-FOLD?

### Introduction

My current research interrogates the relationship between mimetic, or representational, painting and digital photography and digital photographic printing through practice based research and I am going to take Richard Wollheim's twofold theory of seeing-in pictures as a starting point to briefly touch on aspects of this here. This paper raises a number of questions around this subject which I aim to answer through my on-going research.

Richard Wollheim's theory of 'seeing-in' holds that looking at pictures involves a twofold visual experience; between the marked surface of the picture, which he terms the *configuration*– and seeing the representing objects *in* this physical dimension – which he terms the *recognitional*. Originally conceiving this as two simultaneous perceptions Wollheim later reconceived this as being a single experience with two aspects which he termed 'twofoldness'.<sup>1</sup> He understood this twofold experience of seeing simultaneously both the physical surface of the picture and the depicting objects within to be a phenomenologically unique type of seeing that is irreducible and differentiated from what we might term 'ordinary' seeing of objects in everyday life. A number of theorists<sup>2</sup> have challenged, or expanded on, Wollheim's theory by noting there are added layers of complexity to the viewing and perception of pictures with, for instance, Regina-Nino Kurg stating that seeing-in comprises of a *three-fold* experience.<sup>3</sup> Kurg expands on Wollheim's concept by drawing on Edmund Husserl's theory of 'image consciousness' which claims seeing-in is a three-fold experience due to the relationship of *configuration*, (the physical surface / dimension); *representation* – the representing object *in* the surface, and *figuration* - the represented subject of the object. For example in Cartier-Bresson's photograph of Simone de Beauvoir the photographic paper holds the representing object which deviates from the real woman in many respects – the representing object is black and white, it has a particular size, it is static, cropped and so on. The represented subject of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Richard Wollheim, "On Pictorial Representation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, no. 3 (1998):

<sup>2</sup> See Kendal Walton, Michael Newall, Patrick Maynard, Bence Nanay, John Dilworth, John Kulvicki, Katerina Bantinaki, Jerrold Levinson, Edward Winters.

<sup>3</sup> Regina-Nino Kurg, "Seeing-in as Three-Fold Experience", *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics*, 11(1) 2014, pp. 18-26.

picture is de Beauvoir herself who exists outside of the picture and perceiving *her* as *subject* in the picture, for Kurg, therefore involves a third *fold* of the perceptual experience.

Developing his twofold theory Wollheim states that pictures comprise of representations of either ‘particular objects’ - for instance that the object represents a particular woman; or ‘objects of a particular kind’ – for instance those that represent *a* woman. He cites Ingres *Madame Moitessier* as an example of depicting a ‘particular object’ and Manet’s *La Prune* as an example of the depiction of an ‘object of a particular kind’. Kurg wonders if the difference between these depicting objects adds yet another fold into the perceptual experience, and I will touch on what happens when these are combined in one picture shortly. Nevertheless, regardless of the status of the object, for Wollheim seeing-in remains a twofold experience.

Kendal Walton expanded on Wollheim’s theory by claiming we do not actually *perceive* the *subject* of the picture but we *imagine* perceiving the subject: ‘The viewer imagines seeing a fire engine as she looks at a picture of one, imagining her actual visual experience to be of a fire engine.’<sup>4</sup> As this second stage involves imagination and not perception Walton’s position remains anchored to a two-fold experience of perception.

However Walton’s statement would appear to relate to paintings and other mediated pictures because with regard to photographs he states that we are in direct contact with the objects in the picture and because of this we directly perceive them: ‘A mechanical connection with something, like that of photography, counts as contact, whereas a humanly mediated one, like that of painting, does not.’<sup>5</sup> From this I take it that, for Walton, there are different perceptual experiences with photographic subjects and painted subjects; the former involving direct perceptual access to the subject, the latter involving imagining perceiving the subject.

Wollheim also sees differences between seeing-in paintings and seeing-in photographs. He notes that ‘the sitter / model distinction, which holds for paintings does not hold for photographs.’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kendall Walton, "Depiction, Perception, and Imagination: Responses to Richard Wollheim," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no. 1 (2002): 27.

<sup>5</sup> Kendall Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984): 246- 277.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects: With Six Supplementary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 208.

Madame Moitessier's twin may have sat for the painted portrait and the representing object can still be Moitessier herself. If her twin had sat for a photograph the representing object would be her twin. Kurg notes Husserl defines the distinction as that which is 'non-positing' depiction, for example a painted portrait of an imaginary person, and a 'positing' depiction, a portrait of an actual person, where positing comes from a physical object and non-positing is imagined.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear that there is a difference between photographs and paintings with regard to the nature of their representing objects. Photographs can only comprise of 'particular objects', given these are a trace off the real, whereas paintings, given they are mediated, *may* comprise of either particular objects, *or* objects of a particular kind. Because of their casual nature photographs are positing depictions whereas paintings do not have to be.

#### Prompts, Cues and Clues

Wollheim states that 'if a picture represents something, then there will be a visual experience of that picture that determines that it does so.'<sup>8</sup> Wollheim talks here in terms of the *viewer* not the artist / maker. The perceptual experience of the painter or photographer in making pictures is another issue, which cannot be covered in the scope of this paper. He states that a 'suitable spectator' in looking at the picture will have the 'appropriate experience' of seeing-in. He defines a suitable spectator as 'suitably sensitive, informed, and, if necessary, suitable prompted'. This sensibility must include a 'recognitional skill for what is being presented':<sup>9</sup>

Even if a spectator has the relevant recognitional skills, he may not be suitably informed unless he is told, thing by thing, what the picture before him represents. Without this information, he will not have the appropriate experience.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kurg, Regina-Nino. "Edmund Husserl's Theory of Image Consciousness, Aesthetic Consciousness, and Art" PhD diss., la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Fribourg en Suisse, (2014). 73-74.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Wollheim, "On Pictorial Representation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, no. 3 (1998): 217.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

Ernst H. Gombrich notes: 'the chance of a correct reading of an image is governed by three variables: the code, the caption and the context', where 'code' refers to that in the picture which directs the viewer to an understanding of what it represents and where 'context must be supported by prior expectations based on tradition.'<sup>11</sup> This sits within of the broader context of the status of a work of art being defined as such through '...its particular historic and cultural context.'<sup>12</sup>

If telling the viewer, 'thing by thing', about one of my pictures leads to greater, or different, understandings of it, will this affect the perceptual experience of seeing-in the work?

Fig. 1 shows an artwork I created.

It is a physical object – A print on paper.

Its dimensions are 90cm x 66.67 cm.

Its title is *Art Students in the Studio: Alek*

It is a Digital Photographic print on Epson enhanced matt paper.

Oil paint was used in the creation of the work.

The picture comprises of - Oil paint on Digital Photographic print on Epson enhanced matt paper.

One part of the picture is painted.

That the whole figure of Alek is painted.

Does an altered understanding, a greater awareness, of how the picture was made – its productive activity - alter the perceptual experience of seeing-in? What is happening between the awareness of the physical mediation of the painted component in contrast to the sense of immediacy of the photograph? Early sampling of viewer engagement with this work around the point of revelation would seem to indicate different experiences for each individual; ranging from no perceptible difference in how the picture looks, to the figure hovering off the image, to the figure

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<sup>11</sup> Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP 1982):142.

<sup>12</sup> Stefan Deines, "Art in Context: On cultural limits to the understanding, experience and evaluation of works of art" in *Gimme Shelter: Global Discourse in Aesthetics*, ed. De Mul, Jos. and Van de Vall, Renee. (International year Book of Aesthetics. Vol. 15. 2011): 24.

oscillating on the image surface whilst the photographic 'background' remains static. As we would expect each viewer has a uniquely phenomenological experience in seeing the work.

Not only does Wollheim understand that viewers, when looking at pictures, move around them and see them from various angles, he sees doing this as supporting his twofold theory. Anne Tüscher says, 'In Wollheim's opinion, one major consideration in favour of "twofoldness" is that it yields an explanation of the *perceptual constancy* phenomenon'<sup>13</sup> – that is that as the viewer moves around a picture perception of the image remains constant, (that, for instance, perspective in the picture does not warp), due to a simultaneous awareness of the picture's surface and its content. The viewer performs perceptual adjustments to the objects that sit 'in-depth' in the picture by maintaining an awareness of these at right angles to the perpendicular surface. There must be simultaneous perception of the surface and depth in the picture for this to happen. This complex theory enters into psychophysics.

However I believe Wollheim does not fully acknowledge the degree to which the *actively dynamic* act of viewing pictures enriches the perceptual experiences of seeing them.<sup>14</sup> When looking at pictures we move close, then away, then closer still, to one side and another; we peer and squint in order to inspect the object under examination, in order to better *understand* it.<sup>15</sup> Why does the viewer lean forward when aware that part of the picture is painted? In order to better concentrate, focus and *see* it and, from that, better perceive it. An active interrogation of the picture as physical object, and from this the depicting objects and depicted subjects within, must develop perceptual experience of the picture. In order to see *in* the picture in any meaningful way it helps to understand what type of picture it is we are engaging with.

This raises the question as to what degree, or in what way, does an understanding, or misunderstanding of, and expectations placed on, the pictures before the viewer affect the perceptual experience of engaging with them? Does an understanding that what is looked at is a painting rather than, say, a photograph affect the perceptual experience of seeing-in? Is the way in which the viewer imagines seeing the depicted subject of the *painting* different to the way in which the viewer

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<sup>13</sup> Anne Tüscher, "Seeing-in Theory of Depiction and the Psychophysics of Picture Perception." Accessed November 15, 2016. [http://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/ijn\\_00000071](http://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/ijn_00000071)

<sup>14</sup> See Patrick Maynard, "Seeing Double," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 2 (1994): 157

<sup>15</sup> Fig. 2,3,4

imagines seeing the subject of the photograph, whether we argue photographs are ‘transparent’ or ‘representations’?

We are conscious that when standing in front of a painting we are looking at a mediated picture. We intuit that when looking at a photograph we are perceiving more directly the objects in the picture. Surely our perceiving one is different to perceiving the other as, at the very least, in one we are more conscious of the *intentionality of production*.

Can there be a single phenomenological perceptual experience of seeing-in a picture that comprises of both paint and photograph, or is it necessary to perceptually move between them in order to engage with one then the other? Physically standing back enables seeing a unified whole that is a single experience of seeing-in the picture, (whether twofold or threefold), and moving closer enables an engagement with the physicality, the surface qualities, of the medium(s). This is necessary to enable a fuller perception of what is being looked at and, I believe, is one of a number of ways of perceiving pictures. Dominic Lopes states:

An adequate theory of depiction should explain the full range of our experience of pictures including those which are twofold, those which require a shift in attention from content to design and back again, and those rare pictures whose contents we experience even when their designed surfaces are not visible.<sup>16</sup>

The ‘rare pictures’ Lopes refers to here include those such as trompe l’oeil paintings – that ‘deceive the eye’ - and to which I will refer shortly.

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<sup>16</sup> Dominic Lopes, *Understanding Pictures*, Clarendon Press, Oxford quoted in *Seeing-in Theory of Depiction and the Psychophysics of Picture Perception*. Anne Tüscher. Accessed November 15, 2016. [http://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/ijn\\_0000007](http://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/ijn_0000007)

## Surfaces -Walls.

Photographs *must* always be of ‘particular objects’, which come directly from that which sits outside of the picture.<sup>17</sup> Paintings *may* be either of ‘particular objects’ or ‘objects of a particular kind’ and I will briefly look at this relationship in two pictures of mine.

Fig. 5 shows a digital print of photographed paint marks, found on a studio wall, with actual paint marks that I have applied to the physical picture. The photographed paint marks are specific, a by-product of another painting activity in a studio, and unrepresentative of anything other than what they are in themselves. This is a photograph of these ‘particular objects’. My intention when painting other marks onto the photographic print is for these to mimic the photographed marks, or rather the *type* of marks photographed, already present in the photographic image.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in this picture, unlike the photographed marks, the marks I paint onto the surface, because they do not re-present specific paint marks but *represent* the *type* of photographed paint marks in the photograph therefore represent ‘objects of a particular kind’.

The physically applied mark that I have painted on the print not only exists in its own right but also, simultaneously, as representing an identical paint mark in the context of the photographic marks. This is also true of the object that is the photographed paint mark with its subject bound up in it yet simultaneously absent. Is there a difference in the perceptual experience of seeing the physically painted mark’s object / subject relation compared to the photographed paint marks object / subject relation? Would Walton have it that in perceiving the physically painted mark the viewer *imagines* perceiving the type of mark this represents, whilst having direct perceptual access the photographed marks? Added to this, as noted above, does the awareness of the physical mediation of the painted elements, its productive activity, in contrast to the immediacy of the photograph of the picture, play a part in adding to the perceptual experience or does this force a perceptual shift between one and the other?

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<sup>17</sup> See Canhui Zhang, Hans Rainer. Sepp, and Kwok-ying Lau, *Kairos: Phenomenology and Photography* (Hong Kong: Edwin Cheng Foundation Asian Centre for Phenomenology, Research Institute for Humanities, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Fig. 6



Fig. 7 shows another painted-on digital photographic print. Here we have the photographed paint marks - photographed 'particular objects' - painted on marks that are of the *type* of photographed paint marks - painted 'objects of a particular kind' - and painting of particular pieces of masking tape - painted 'particular objects'. Do these differences add further layers to the perceptual experience of seeing in the picture, or are these bound up collectively as objects seen as one in the surface allowing a unified perceptual experience?

I believe that because of the highly mimetic nature of the painted elements within them these pictures combine into aesthetically unified wholes that can also be viewed separately. This demands a particular viewing experience; one that is about differentiated seeing. This differentiation lies in both a perceptual shift back and forth between that which is painted and that which is photographic, *and* containing the painted and photographic elements as a single whole. The former, that is perception of the physical qualities of the mediums, is achieved by coming physically close to the work, and the latter, that is seeing-in the picture as unified whole, by standing back from it. Both these activities are necessary in order to gain a fuller perceptual experience of the picture.

### Trompe l'oeil

As a mimetic project, in its imitation of the 'real', the painting hides itself within and 'through' the photograph, and, at the same time, it draws attention to itself as artifice. This moves into aspects of trompe l'oeil, that is, a 'deception of the eye'. Wollheim holds that trompe l'oeil, because it denies the surface of the picture and fools the viewer into thinking the representing object is the actual object, is not representational. Where the viewer cannot perceive the surface there can be no twofoldness between surface and the depicting objects within. He states, '[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>19</sup> However Wollheim fails to take into account that trompe l'oeil only truly 'works' when the deception is revealed. This revelation brings about a forcible perception of the surface of the picture, which must lead to a heightened twofold

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, p. 62, quoted in "Pictorial Experience and Seeing - University of Kent," accessed November 15, 2016, [https://kar.kent.ac.uk/31630/1/Newall, 'Pictures and Seeing'.pdf](https://kar.kent.ac.uk/31630/1/Newall,%20'Pictures%20and%20Seeing'.pdf).

experience of the whole. I anticipate that a trompe l'oeil revelation with my pictures will heighten the sense of surface qualities that potentially bring about a closer engagement for the viewer with the work and heighten the sense of *difference* between the two mediums of paint and photography whilst at the same time reinforcing *representational similarities*. It is anticipated that through this heightened awareness in the act of viewing a heightened awareness of the historical dimension of the work *in its making* and the present dimension of the work's *formal qualities* is made. Caroline

Levine states:

In the case of trompe l'oeil art, painting proclaims not only that it is a being-for-another, but that it is also a being-in-itself, an object in its own right that differentiates itself from nature. By flaunting the skill of the artist, parading its capacity to imitate the real, the picture, while looking very much like the reality it represents, actually compels us to recognize its status as painting.<sup>20</sup>

I agree with Levine that trompe l'oeil 'prompts a particular narrative of 'spectatorial experience'<sup>21</sup> in that here the splitting of paint and photograph creates a reflective experience for the viewer bound up in a set of responses between what constitutes the picture, that is the photographic and painted, and self. I would argue this reinforces for the viewer the performative nature of looking and perceiving. For Levine, "The self-reflexive character of ... trompe l'oeil urges us to reflect on the production of representation and trompe l'oeil is, therefore, the *critical art par excellence*."<sup>22</sup> Rather than denying twofoldness trompe l'oeil, at the point of revelation, emphatically reinforces this perceptual experience.

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<sup>20</sup> Caroline Levine, "Seductive Reflexivity: Ruskin's Dreaded trompe l'oeil," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, no. 4 (1998): 368.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1.

Carl Robinson, *Art Students in the Studio: Alek*, 2016, Oil on Digital Photographic Print on Epson Enhanced Matt Paper, 90 cm x 66.67 cm



Fig. 2.

Viewing *Art Students in the Studio: Alek*, at Backlit studios Nottingham, November, 2016



Fig. 3.

Viewing *Art Students in the Studio: Alek*, at Backlit studios Nottingham, November, 2016.



Fig. 4.

Viewing *Art Students in the Studio: Alek*, at Backlit studios Nottingham, November, 2016.



Fig. 5.

Carl Robinson, *Surfaces, Walls (i)* 2016, Gouache on Digital Photographic Print on Epson Enhanced Matt Paper, 66.5 cm x 90 cm



Fig. 6.

Carl Robinson, *Surfaces, Walls (i)* 2016, Digital Photographic Print on Epson Enhanced Matt Paper, prior to painting, 66.5 cm x 90 cm

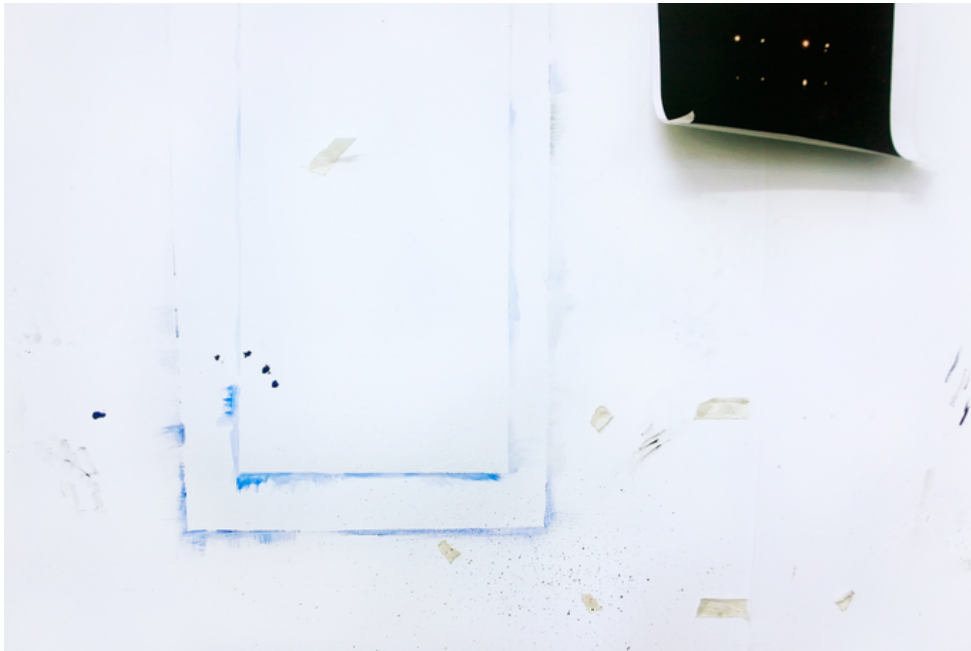


Fig. 7.

Carl Robinson, *Surfaces, Walls (vii)* 2016, Oil and Gouache on Digital Photographic Print on Epson Enhanced Matt Paper, prior to painting, 66.5 cm x 90 cm



Photographed 'particular objects'

Painted 'objects of a particular kind'

Painted 'particular objects'

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