Discussion

Resemblance, Restriction, and Content-Bearing Features

The failings of resemblance-based views of depiction are well known. For example, the claim that the physical surface of a painting resembles its subject matter seems arbitrary, in that everything resembles everything else in some respects but not in others, while also being clearly untrue in other ways, in that paintings as flat painted objects more resemble each other than they do their typical worldly three-dimensional subject matters.

In a recent article, "A Restriction for Pictures and Some Consequences for a Theory of Depiction."[1] Michael Newall tries an unusual tactic to defend a general resemblance view. His idea is to concentrate on a carefully circumscribed kind of subject matter for a picture X, namely, a perpendicular view of the physical surface of another picture Y, and to argue that the actual restrictions on what picture X can depict of Y's physical surface are best explained by a strict resemblance or exact similarity view. He then argues that other broad theories of depiction, including conventional (Goodman, so forth) and experience-based (for example, Wollheim) theories, are unable to explain, for lack of the right kind of theoretical resources, the relevant resemblance-based restriction on such pictures X of the physical surfaces of other pictures Y.

Specifically, Newall argues that a picture X has some features that "bear Y-related content," along with other features that do not do so. For example, typically, shapes bear content concerning Y, whereas textures do not. But there is also, he argues, a restriction "R" on the relations of the two pictures.

A picture, X, which depicts a picture Y, will only depict those physical features of Y's surface that are among X's content-bearing features. (p. 381)

Later, in Section V, he considers a resemblance theory that accommodates a more complex version ("R2," p. 388) of this restriction "by stipulating that a picture's content-bearing features be features it shares with its subject matter" (p. 391). Thus, in his view, the restriction favors broadly resemblance-based depictive theories over conventionalist or experiential theories that, in his view, cannot adequately account for the restriction.

Now two major theoretical issues arising from Newall's restriction are the clarity or otherwise of his concept of a "*content-bearing feature*," and his prosaic concept of content as a straightforward, realistic presentation of subject matter as such, independent of the stylistic and expressive kinds of content that provide most of the artistic and aesthetic interest of pictorial artworks. But discussion of those issues will be postponed until the final section so as to address more directly the evidential status of his restriction, and to present a series of immediate counterexamples to it.

To begin, though Newall's defensive strategy is perhaps unusual in aesthetics, its outlines are familiar from other areas of human investigation, including the sciences. For any theory T, carefully select a limited range of cases C that initially seem to be best explained by one's own theory T rather than its competitors. At the same time, ignore any other cases in which theory T fares no better, or does worse, than its competitors. Then, claim a potential victory over rivals because of their relative lack of initial success in explaining one's favored, tightly circumscribed set of cases C.

Clearly, such a strategy cannot deliver a decisive overall victory for a theory T, since its rivals R, S, … can make similar one-sided claims based on their own favored evidence set. A related point against Newall is that even if he were completely successful in his arguments for the resemblance-based restriction for pictures X of the physical surfaces of pictures Y as such, he would still have done nothing to overcome the usual other kinds of evidence that *prima facie* count strongly against resemblance views of depiction.

Now these points could perhaps be rebutted if the method Newall uses on pictures of pictures could be generalized to any kind of subject matter. However,

this is not possible, and he does not claim that it is. But this failure of generalizability raises another strategic issue: if Newall is right, resemblance-based depiction specifically of the perpendicularly viewed physical surface of pictures is fundamentally unlike depiction of any other kind of subject matter. Such a mysterious asymmetry of explanation would surely be a serious problem for supporters, which could easily outweigh any claimed advantages for his procedure. Thus, in giving the various following reasons as to why Newall's restriction does not hold, I may, somewhat paradoxically, be relieving resemblance supporters of a burden that they are better off without.

I. FLATNESS, ORIENTATION, DISTANCE, AND SIZE

One simple counterexample to Newall's restriction is provided by the *flatness* of a depicted picture Y, which flatness I claim is depicted by the relevant picture X. This would be a counterexample because, according to Newall, the flatness of picture X is not one of its content-bearing features (presumably for reasons such as that standard pictures are all flat, so that there is no differential depictive work to be done by flatness on a resemblance view—and also, a critic might point out, because most subject matters are not flat and so do not resemble X's flat surface).

This case is a hard one for Newall to deal with, because he recognizes that, for example, a picture depicted at an oblique angle would be depicted as flat (for example, on p. 387), so he specifically excludes such cases from his final restriction R2 (p. 387). But surely a viewed surface of a flat painting Y will *look* flat, independent of its angle to the viewer. Whether oblique or perpendicular, any depiction of Y that depicts its flatness in oblique cases will depict it in the perpendicular cases as well. To be sure, it is possible that a perpendicularly viewed portion of painting Y may look flat but not actually *be* flat. However, the possible nonveridicality of depicted flatness in the perpendicular case is no argument against its being depicted *as* being flat.

As a related point, Newall specifically excludes depiction of a nonflat picture surface Y that is crumpled or damaged because a crumpled surface would not be content-bearing (pp. 387–388). However, since a picture X can easily depict a picture Y that is nonflat for other reasons, it is hard to deny that Y would be depicted as flat in the clear absence of any depiction of it as nonflat. But if either of these points about depicted flatness is correct, Newall's restriction will fail to work for any depicted paintings at all—since every painting is at some angle to the viewer and either flat or nonflat.

A further related criticism is as follows: a picture X of picture Y depicts not just Y's flatness but also, more broadly, its spatial relation to the viewpoint of the painter, both in orientation, as just discussed, and in distance from him or her relative to other depicted objects or environmental factors. But since Newall has already conceded that any genuinely depicted flatness of a painting Y is relevant to his restriction, and hence that it is a broadly physical feature of the surface of Y, he has already conceded that some *relational* properties of Y are among its physical properties, since flatness is about the relations of parts of a painting to each other—and possibly about their relations to the surrounding space as well.

But then it is hard to see how he can deny that other relational spatial properties of the surface of Y are relevant to his restriction too, including both the distance and orientation of Y as depicted in picture X. Since these are external relational features involving a viewpoint, no corresponding features will be available among X's possible content-bearing features (since its features presumably concern only X's internal features, whether relational or otherwise). Hence the restriction will fail, for this reason too, for all depicted pictures.

Physical size is another feature that undermines the restriction. To give a somewhat exotic example, one could create a picture "*Mona Lisa* Among the Molecules" depicting da Vinci's painting *Mona Lisa* as being the same size as surrounding molecules, as if viewed through a microscope—an incorrect depiction to be sure, but still a depiction of it. Now the physical size of a picture Y is surely among the physical features of its surface and, equally, the corresponding size of the relevant area of picture X is a content-bearing feature of X, since different sizes of features of X are used to depict different sizes of subject matter features, including of the surface of Y. But in such a case the actual size of the relevant area of picture X bears no resemblance to the depicted size of picture Y, the *Mona Lisa*—a clear violation of the restriction. In general, for depicted pictures, the size they are depicted as having need not, of course, precisely correspond to the relevant size-related content-bearing feature of picture X, so that most depicted pictures will contravene Newall's restriction for size-related reasons.

II. DEPICTIVE MISREPRESENTATION

A fundamental problem for resemblance-based accounts of depiction is the possibility of depictive *mis*representation—a little-noted problem in aesthetics, but long recognized as a critical issue for any account of representation in the philosophy of mind. Perhaps surprisingly, depictive misrepresentations of

pictures are in fact ubiquitous in our culture, since practically every illustration of the work of artists in art books, films, and so on—which are of course pictures X of other pictures Y—misrepresents them in some significant way, whether in color, balance, size, lack of clarity in details, and so on.

Thus in the real world, Newall's restriction is almost always violated by the depicted pictures that we see, since they typically depict actual features of the physical surfaces of those pictures Y that are *not* among the inaccurate, content-bearing features of the reproductive pictures X that depict them. To make matters worse, there is no limit on the degree and kind of misrepresentation that might be involved, whether as a result of poor quality control during printing, or from what one might almost assume to be deliberate malice toward a disliked painter. To all appearances, a resemblance theory of depiction simply cannot handle such misrepresentation cases.[2]

III. SYSTEMS OF DEPICTION AND DISSIMILARITIES

Newall does note some other potential counter-examples to his restriction, such as the depiction of a painter's heavy brushstrokes in painting Y by an illusionistic technique involving highly detailed smaller brushstrokes (for example, as in the depiction of a Frank Auerbach painting by Glenn Brown, pp. 383–384). To rule out such cases, he introduces the idea of a "system of depiction," and argues that his restriction holds only if.

X's content-bearing features are among the type employed by the system of depiction used to make Y. (p. 384)

For example, since Auerbach's rough brushstrokes, used as one type of feature in his system of depiction in painting picture Y, are not themselves content-bearing features of Brown's picture X, this additional condition will ensure that such pictures no longer violate the strengthened restriction.

The relevant concepts of a "type of feature" employed by a "system of depiction" will be discussed further in Section IV, but for present purposes a recipe for producing violations that specifically address the strengthened restriction will be sufficient to show its inadequacy. (Previous counterexamples to the restriction have also applied to the strengthened version, which will simply be referred to as "the restriction" hereafter.)

The recipe for counterexamples is as follows. Consider a picture Y that uses a system of depiction involving some *dissimilarities* between Y and its subject matter. For example, some high- or low-key photographs are such that they depict scenes using tones that are significantly lighter or darker, and

hence dissimilar, to those of the actual scene photographed. Or consider Fauve-style movements in painting, in which colors significantly brighter than natural colors are used to depict those natural colors. Or a color photograph taken through a color filter that shifts all of the colors in the subject matter a constant amount. Then in all such cases, depict picture Y by another picture X using the same system of dissimilarity involving depiction. Thus a high-/low-key photograph of a high-/low-key photograph, or a Fauve painting of a Fauve painting, or a shifted-color photograph of a similarly shifted-color photograph will violate Newall's restriction. Here again, as in related but distinct misrepresentation cases—since a high-key portrait is a way of presenting rather than misrepresenting its subject—depiction does not require resemblance, and certainly not exact resemblance.

IV. CONTENT-BEARING FEATURES AND KINDS OF CONTENT

As mentioned in the introduction, two significant theoretical issues arising from Newall's restriction are the clarity or otherwise of his concept of a *content-bearing feature*, and his *prosaic* concept of content as a straightforward, realistic presentation of subject matter as such, absent any consideration of the kinds of stylistic and expressive content for which we primarily value pictorial artworks. As an initial example of the latter point, arguably an adequate account of why a Fauve painting or high-key picturing, as mentioned in the previous section, do not involve any simplistic misrepresentation of their subject matter would require an appeal to specifically stylistic kinds of content.[3]

Turning now to Newall's distinction between content-bearing and non-content-bearing features, arguably it is fundamentally unclear in its current formulation. Recall that his view is that pictures are made using a *system of depiction*, which employs *types of features*, some of which are content-bearing in the system, and others of which are not. For example, on page 382 he says that

in a pen and ink drawing, the shapes and areas of tone made by the pen's marks usually bear on the drawing's content, whereas features such as the color of the ink and the color and texture of the paper are not likely to bear on its content. The color and texture of the drawing's paper, or the color of the ink used, could be changed without changing the drawing's content, whereas the configuration of shapes demarked on the paper cannot change in a visually discriminable way without changing the content to some degree.

From this passage two criteria may be extracted: first, that a feature, or type of feature, is *non-content-bearing* if

there are *no* visually discriminable changes in its value that would alter the content; and second, a feature is *content-bearing* if *any* (that is, *all*) visually discriminable changes in its value would alter the content. But those choices present a false dilemma: an alternative view is that some, most, or even all features in a system of depiction are *mixed*, having some content-altering values and some non-content-altering values—even if a particular employment of the system for a given picture might only use values of one kind. My suspicion is that all types of features are mixed, so that Newall's desired distinction cannot be made out in the manner that he wishes.

For example, if the ink color were changed to the same color as that of the paper, or vice versa, then clearly the resultant content would be changed also. Hence by the first criterion above, ink and paper color are also content-bearing features. (How exactly the content would change presumably would depend on the specific artistic context. It might count as the content of a minimalist artwork of some kind, or as providing a status similar to that of Rauschenberg's 1953 work *Erased de Kooning Drawing*.) Also, the paper color and texture could be non-content-bearing in some areas of a picture, but content-bearing in others, such as when the shape of an unpainted portion of a Chinese scroll represents a waterfall.[4]

At the same time, with respect to the second criterion—namely, that a feature is *content-bearing* if *any* (that is, *all*) visually discriminable changes in its value would alter the content—there are minor, but still visually discriminable, changes in the "configuration of shapes demarked on the paper," such as a somewhat nervous tracing of a technically assured drawing, that would result in *no* changes in the content. Hence by this second criterion, shape would turn out to be a *non*-content-bearing feature. Even texture is arguably a mixed feature as well, since a rough enough texture would render any previous content on smooth paper unrecognizable.

Returning to the issue of prosaic versus stylistic and expressive kinds of content, I would argue that when the latter are considered as well, *all* visually discriminable features of a picture are potentially relevant, in some concrete employment of a system of depiction, to its total content. For example, printing a monochrome etching in different colors would produce significantly different expressive renderings of its prosaic content—a fact known to photographers for generations, for many of whom even very subtle differences in warm (reddish) or cool (bluish) tones in black-and-white photographs aesthetically make all the difference to the content of their resulting photographs.

Nevertheless, if one thus distinguishes the prosaic, subject-matter-related content from the broadly stylistic and expressive content of a picture, one may plausibly distinguish those features that, for some particular range of their values, and in the context of a particular picture, primarily influence its prosaic content from those that in a similar manner primarily influence its stylistic and expressive content.[5] Thus, from the perspective of that somewhat broader and more complex distinction, it seems to me at least that the concepts used in Newall's essay deserve further investigation, in spite of the failures of his restriction thesis to support resemblance views of depiction.[6]

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1. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61 (2003): 381–394.

2. Whereas, if I may add, a broadly recognitional view based on depictive intentions plus recognizability of the result could still handle such cases. See, for example, my paper "Internal Versus External Representation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62 (2004): 23–36.

3. I discuss different kinds of content in various places, including a paper "Medium, Subject Matter and Representation," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41 (2003): 45–62.

4. My thanks to Susan Feagin for this example.

5. See my forthcoming book *The Double Content of Art* (Prometheus Books, 2004) for more details.

6. My thanks to the editor, Susan L. Feagin, for very helpful comments on an earlier version of these remarks.

Picturing Pictures: Reply to Dilworth

Before replying to Dilworth's criticisms, I draw some encouragement for the general line of argument I presented in "A Restriction for Pictures and Some Consequences for a Theory of Depiction" from John Kulvicki's article "Image Structure," which appeared in the same issue of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* as my article.[1] Kulvicki and I differed on many points, but our general lines of thought, developed independently, shared a number of common turns. Most notably, to my mind, we both focused on the case of pictures that depict pictures; we both found that there are restrictions on the content a picture of a picture may convey; and we both argued that this supports a resemblance theory of some sort.

While I am encouraged in my general line of thought by Kulvicki's article, it still falls to me to defend my own formulation of it. Let me begin by clearing up two general points regarding resemblance. First, my

article supports theories that propose a resemblance between pictures and their subject matter, but as I described there, I construe "resemblance" in a broad way. In particular, resemblance need not entail a sharing of intrinsic properties, as Dilworth suggests when he speaks of a "strict resemblance or exact similarity view"; it might, for example, be no more than a shared disposition to engage certain visual recognitional abilities and, indeed, I am inclined toward a theory of this latter sort. Second, the arguments against resemblance theories that Dilworth mentions in his opening paragraph come from Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art*; these have been so often rebutted that I think it best to pass over them, referring the reader to a few germane articles.[2]

Dilworth begins by noting, rightly, that in developing and defending my formulation of the restriction on the content of pictures that depict pictures, I depend on an empirical approach. Thus the group of examples and putative counterexamples I gave there is necessarily limited. Clearly, the results of such an approach rely on the representativeness of the "evidence set," so the opportunity to sketch some responses to Dilworth's proposed counterexamples is very welcome. However, before presenting his counterexamples, Dilworth also suggests that if I am right in my formulation of the restriction, I am faced with a further problem: that the specificity of my evidence set itself demands explanation that may be impossible to give. "[I]f Newall is right," he notes, "depiction specifically of the perpendicularly viewed physical surface of pictures is fundamentally unlike depiction of any other kind of subject matter." But this is not so. There are many limits on what any given system of depiction will depict. Focusing on pictures that depict pictures is no more than a reliable way of isolating a subset of these features. For example, if a system cannot depict brushstrokes beneath a certain size, it will be unable to depict a great many other similarly small details, regardless of whether its subject matter is another picture or any other object.

Dilworth first turns to four features that he thinks pictures can represent other pictures as having under the conditions I describe. These are a picture's flatness, the orientation of its surface to the viewer, the distance of the picture from the viewer, and its size. These examples do call for a refinement of my restriction, which I make in the following way: while I agree with Dilworth that X may depict Y as having these features, *the part of X that depicts Y's surface* is not able to depict these features. This is easily demonstrated. Carefully cover up all parts of X that do not depict Y's surface, including any depicted frame, easel, and so forth. Now look at the uncovered part of X—one will not be inclined, in my experience, to see in it a flat surface (nor, it follows, do we see such a

surface as oriented toward us in some way, at a certain distance, or of a certain size).[3] Rather, we are inclined to see in X the subject matter that Y depicts. Under these conditions, we see not Y, but Y's subject matter in X. The features of Y that the visible part of X may depict are therefore limited to those that Y shares with its subject matter, and so must exclude flatness and associated features.[4] The part of X that depicts Y's surface thus does not suffice to depict these features; for this we are reliant also on parts of X that do not depict Y's surface, but instead depict items such as a frame, easel, and other nearby objects. Another way of demonstrating this point is to consider the confusions that arise when features such as a frame are not clearly depicted by X. Such pictures are in fact not uncommon—Velázquez's paintings *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (1618) and *The Supper at Emmaus* (c. 1620) are good examples. In each of these paintings, what might be understood to be a picture frame might also be understood to be the edges of a window set into the wall. Without an unequivocal cue it becomes impossible to determine whether a picture or a view through a window is depicted, as differences among art historians attest in this case.[5] Certainly, in these instances, flatness, orientation, and so on are not depicted, for if they were, such confusions could not arise.

Dilworth goes on to argue that depictive misrepresentation presents a counterexample to my restriction. Some pictures of pictures, especially photographic reproductions of pictures, "depict actual features of the physical surface of those pictures Y that are not among the inaccurate, content-bearing features of the reproductive pictures X that depict them." But Dilworth is wrong to say this. Such pictures, X, do not depict those features of Y that they misrepresent; instead, they depict other features in their place. Let me take what seems to me an unequivocal case of misrepresentation along the lines Dilworth has in mind. I have a book of Delacroix's paintings that reproduces a detail of his *Massacre at Chios* (1824), showing the left arm of the old woman in the foreground.[6] The lower arm is mostly covered in reddish shadow and the accompanying text draws attention to a single, apparently green, dab of paint that conspicuously punctuates the red. The text describes it as green and discusses it in relation to the young Delacroix's interest in the science of complementary colors, but looking at the actual painting in the Louvre, the purportedly green dab of paint appears, to me at least, not green at all, but a less conspicuous, muted blue. In this case, the blueness of the dab of paint is not depicted at all in the illustration. Rather it is greenness that is (falsely) depicted—and this causes no problem for my restriction, which places no limits on the depiction of features of Y's surface that Y does not in fact have.

Dilworth then presents a "recipe" that produces further putative counterexamples to my restriction. This involves devising "a system of depiction involving some dissimilarities between Y and its subject matter," and then considering a picture X that depicts Y using that same system. The thought is that X will depict Y's surface as having certain features, but that these will differ from the features of X that depict those features. My response here is to point out that while all pictures are surely dissimilar to their subject matter in a great many respects, these points of dissimilarity do not bear on depictive content. To take the first of Dilworth's examples, in the case of a dark or light photograph, it is not the absolute tones that bear on content. In the case of a Fauve painting, where color properties are most often "arbitrary"— entirely unrelated to those of the subject matter— they do not bear on the painting's depictive content at all. This causes no problem for my restriction, for in each case, turning a system of depiction upon a picture made according to that same system will not depict these points of dissimilarity. A dark photo of a dark photo, or a light photo of a light photo, will depict tonal relations (if they depict anything at all)— not absolute tonal values. A color-shifted photo of a color-shifted photo will depict relations between hues, not the exact hues themselves. We will not expect a Fauve painting that depicts another Fauve painting to tell us anything about the depicted painting's color properties. (Here one might consider Matisse's *The Red Studio* (1911), which prominently depicts another painting of Matisse's, *Le Luxe II* (1907–1908), using colors entirely unrelated to those of the actual depicted painting.)

Dilworth then turns to the distinction I make between content-bearing and non-content-bearing features of pictures, criticizing it as unclear. So far as my remarks suggest that every feature of a picture must either be content-bearing or non-content-bearing, and cannot be both, he is right. Many features are "mixed," and some of those that I discussed in my article, I now agree, are mixed in subtle ways. Still, I hold that a version of the distinction I made can be upheld, namely, that *all mixed features can be analyzed into features that are either content-bearing or non-content-bearing*. Thus I continue to hold that all pictures can be analyzed into features that are content-bearing or non-content-bearing. Ink color, for instance, in a "black-and-white" drawing, can be considered a mixed feature, for while most changes in color will not bear on the picture's content, the color of the ink must be distinguishable from the ground if it is to have any depictive content. So we may identify one feature of ink color—its distinguishability from the ground—as content-bearing, and identify its other color properties as non-content-bearing. A similar analysis can be made of Dilworth's examples of a wavering line and textured paper. Poussin's late drawings provide an excellent example of the former: his line wavers due to infirmity, but one is nevertheless able to distinguish the general shapes his line is intended to delimit from the line's wavering component. It is these general shapes that are content-bearing whereas the wavering of the line is non-content-bearing. In much the same way we may distinguish the adventitious graininess that results from drawing on textured paper from the content-bearing shapes the drawing delimits.[7]

I have little argument with Dilworth's final thought—certainly, distinguishing depictive content from other types of content related to style and expression may assist one in distinguishing the features of pictures that primarily bear on depictive content. But thinking of some examples, like Poussin's wavering line, and the strange, yellow and blue canvases that Daniel Wildenstein has suggested emerged from the episodes of color-blindness experienced by Monet very late in his career, I would add that in at least some cases more is needed to correctly distinguish a picture's content-bearing properties.[8] In these cases, aspects of a picture's appearance are, or may be, determined by factors outside its maker's style and depictive and expressive intentions. The task of distinguishing a picture's content-bearing features is one that ideally calls for a wide understanding of the conditions under which the picture was made.

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1. John Kulvicki, "Image Structure," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61 (2003): 323–340; see especially pp. 330–335. Kulvicki's article presents a "structural" account of depiction that draws on Goodman while rejecting his refusal "to admit that similarity can play any semantically significant role in representation" (p. 339).

2. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1968), pp. 3–5. Those who take issue with these arguments include: James W. Manns, "Representation, Relativism and Resemblance," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 11 (1971): 281–287; David Pole, "Goodman and the 'Naïve' View of Representation," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 14 (1974): 68–80; Douglas Arrell, "What Goodman Should Have Said about Representation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46 (1987): 41–49, Karen Neander; "Pictorial Representation: A Matter of Resemblance," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 27 (1987): 213–226; Randall

R. Dipert, "Reflections on Iconicity, Representation, and Resemblance: Peirce's Theory of Signs, Goodman on Resemblance, and Modern Philosophies of Mind," *Synthese* 106 (1996): 373–397; and Tony Skillen, "Passing Likeness," *Philosophical Papers* 25 (1996): 73–93.

3. In speaking of "seeing in," I make no commitment to Wollheim's theory; I use his descriptor for pictorial experience for convenience.

4. These are, according to my account, coextensive with the content-bearing features *Y* is depicted as having, and are also among *X*'s content-bearing features.

5. The differing opinions as to whether these paintings depict pictures, views through windows, or—a third possibility—mirrors, are recorded in José López-Rey, Velázquez, 2 vols. (Cologne: Taschen, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 22, 42.

6. Tom Prideaux, *The World of Delacroix* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1966), pp. 54–55.

7. The example of blank paper that carries depictive content in some parts of a Chinese painting but not in others is somewhat different. Although too complicated to fully address here, I suggest it may be resolved by understanding the different parts of the painting as being subject to different pictorial systems and conventions. For example, around the edges of a picture, blank paper may perform a conventional vignetting or framing function and so not bear on content. In other parts of the picture, the meaning of a blank area of paper may be governed by a system of depiction—as when a white or pale object, such as a waterfall, snow, or mist, is depicted. In this case, the blank area of paper is content-bearing.

8. Daniel Wildenstein, Monet, 4 vols. (Cologne: Taschen, 1996), pp. 426–429, 434, 934–935.