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Abstract: When we try to understand what a picture represents, how we experience the picture, I argue, plays a key role in determining the content the picture represents. More specifically, I argue that understanding pictorially represented content requires two tasks—visually grasping the picture’s design (an image) and interpreting what the design represents (what it is an image of). Neither task is done without the other, meaning that the viewer’s success in the former—visually identifying the image—depends on their success in the latter—determining what the image is of. Because of this interdependence, I argue, when the viewer succeeds in understanding the picture, they find their interpretation of the picture perceptually convincing.

### Making Images Visible

#### I. Introduction

Pictures are easy to understand, partly because they seem to show what they represent. When we look at a picture and understand what it represents, it is as though we ‘see’ what it represents in the picture. Richard Wollheim (2015) introduced the term ‘seeing-in’ to refer to the experience through which we grasp what a picture represents. When I see a picture, Whistler’s portrait of his mother, for instance, I ‘see’ the painter’s mother—the depicted scene—in the picture. This paper is a study of what is special about pictorial experience, with an eye toward what *we* bring to the experience as an attentive perceiver. The way we experience pictures, I seek to show, plays a key role in the way we understand what is pictorially represented. More specifically, I propose that the notion of seeing-in—seeing something in a picture—is a method through which we interpret pictorial representations.

The procedure is as follows. In section 2, I present what I call ‘the Abstraction Thesis’, which is:

The vehicle of pictorial representation itself is an image and in order to understand the picture as a means of representation, the viewer needs to visually abstract the image from the picture surface.

I claim that the vehicle of pictorial representation is not the surface property of the picture but a pattern of two-dimensional shapes and colors visually abstracted from the picture surface. Thus, to understand

what a picture represents, the viewer needs to attend to the picture in the right way so that they visually grasp its vehicle. In section 3, I discuss Robert Hopkins's account of seeing-in. Hopkins (1998) defines seeing-in as experienced resemblance in outline shape. I identify a problem with his view and suggest that adopting my 'Abstraction Thesis' can resolve the issue. In light of this discussion, in section 4, I propose that Hopkins's notion of seeing-in, in conjunction with my Abstraction Thesis, provides the structure for our interpretive engagement with pictures. On the one hand, the viewer needs to visually identify the vehicle of pictorial representation. On the other hand, the viewer needs to determine what the vehicle is experienced as resembling in outline shape. I argue that neither task is done without the other, meaning that successfully grasping the vehicle depends on understanding the item whose outline shape we experience the vehicle as resembling and vice versa. Because of this interdependence, our interpretive engagement with the picture is accompanied by a distinctive phenomenology. In section 5, I discuss an implication my account of pictorial understanding has for the study of depiction. The way we interpret pictures as pictorial representation, I argue, cannot be sharply separated from the way we understand them as plastic art.

## II. The Abstraction Thesis

In this section, I present my Abstraction Thesis:

The vehicle of pictorial representation itself is an image and in order to understand the picture as a means of representation, the viewer needs to visually abstract the image from the picture surface.

I claim that the vehicle of pictorial representation is not the surface (or marks on the surface) of the picture but a pattern of two-dimensional shapes and colors visually abstracted from the surface. Thus, in order to understand a picture, the viewer needs to visually abstract the vehicle from the picture surface.

I'll elaborate on this claim by analyzing Chuck Close's pixelated portraits and Ellsworth Kelly's line drawings; I use 'the vehicle of pictorial representation' and 'design' interchangeably.

*Expressive Abstract Patterns are the Vehicle: Chuck Close's Pixelated Portraits*

Chuck Close's pixelated portraits are enlarged headshots. The entire picture surface is often filled up with the depicted figure's head. Sometimes you don't even see the neck or the shoulder of the depicted figure. What's so special about looking at these portraits is that the colors on the picture surface, while representing a face, seem to interfere with their own representing function. One can visually discern the shape of a human head in the picture surface and recognize a face in it. And yet, it is as if one is confronted with something like the Ishihara color blind test made for face recognition; it is as if some marks on the surface are placed where they are so that it makes it difficult for the viewer to recognize a face or facial features. This unique experience is brought about by the distinctive way those paintings are made (including their size).

In producing pictures, it is often the case that visible distinctions on the picture surface correspond to visible distinctions in what is represented. For instance, in Roy Lichtenstein's still life paintings, each item depicted (a vase, a bottle, a spoon, etc.) has a clearly defined outline. A clear distinction between objects (represented content) results from a clear distinction marked among the parts of the picture surface. So, there is an overlap between the surface and the scene represented in terms of visible distinctions. This is not the case in Close's pixelated work. There's no visible distinction on the canvas that corresponds with the shape of the face represented, but an appearance of an overlap. Seen as a whole, his work represents a face but it is difficult to tell how it manages to represent what it represents. That is because only when the painting is seen from a certain distance can the viewer see the

design features—a pattern of two-dimensional shapes and colors that functions as a representational vehicle. If we get too close to the picture surface, close enough that we don't have the entire canvas (e.g., 102  $\frac{1}{16}$  x 84  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 3  $\frac{1}{16}$  in.) in view<sup>1</sup>—then we lose not only the face represented but also the design features responsible for representing the face. For instance, we can't trace the shapes that define the face or any facial features. What we can observe instead is a multi-colored abstract pattern. The entire canvas is covered by small squares so as to establish a grid. Each square appears to have circles in it and consists of several colors. This—a multi-colored square with circles in it—is the basic unit out of which the picture is materially constructed. A picture-maker can seek to establish distinctive ways of making pictures with respect to the way they embody or materialize design properties; for example, the painter might construct a design feature (e.g., a shape) by using horizontal lines only or by using one-centimeter-long marks only. By the basic unit of construction, I mean a unit in terms of which the plastic material is organized so as to embody shapes and colors. Application of the units is what's distinctive about Close's picture-making activity and we might even say that this is what defines his style of painting as a plastic art.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is the size of the work I saw in person at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *Lyle*, Oil on Canvas, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Close says: 'Think of the metaphor of golf, which I believe is the only sport that moves from the general to the specific. Say you're playing a par four hole. On the first stroke you can't even see the pin; you just know it's over there somewhere. The second stroke is a correcting stroke. On the third stroke you hope to chip the ball onto the green and be in putting position, and on the fourth stroke you have to move some place very specific. I wanted to make a painting in which I would approach each square as a par four square. And just to make it more interesting, I would tee off in the opposite direction. I know a square will eventually be a dull, orangeish brown, so the first stroke is purple. Then the second stroke has to correct like crazy because I'm going in the wrong direction; so now I make a red stroke on top of the purple. Now it's moving there but it's not orange enough, so maybe I'll make a yellow stroke on top of the red. It's wet, so it's going to pick up some of the color underneath—it's going to physically mix. Plus there are little pieces of the old color streaking through, so it shows where I was when I made the first stroke. I like to leave a record of where I've been. Then finally I've moved it to the right generic color, an orange—but it's still too bright. So the last stroke is a little dab of blue right in the middle that will optically mix, lowering the intensity down to the dull orangeish brown. Hopefully I come in within four strokes. Sometimes I come in a stroke early, and have a birdie; or I come in a stroke or two later and have a bogey or a double bogey. I can also have the aesthetic equivalent of being mired in a sand trap, and keeping on making stroke after stroke without getting anywhere' (2004, p. 36).

What's extraordinary about Close's work is that the unit of expression—colored circles or ellipticals confined in a square or rhombus—is the same as the unit of representation; figurative representation is accomplished through the arrangement of those units. As you step back from the picture, something like the contour of a face begins to emerge *because those squares appear to be clustered in a certain way*. A shape that is supposed to represent the shape of a face is not delineated by one continuous line (unless the picture represents a Lego figure). Nevertheless, one can visually trace the shape of the figure. It is analogous to visually tracing a line even when it is interrupted or partly disconnected; or when lines seem to be part of one continuous line.

Suppose that you are far enough to see the face depicted but close enough to see the brushstrokes that make up those units. The pictorial surface appears to be divided into regions that each correspond to different parts of the represented scene; the background, the head, the eyes, etc. At the same time, you see those variously colored marks that sustain the appearance of the represented space. Because of this the figure/background distinction appears to be tentative at least from this distance. We have to visually uncover the contour of a face while the marks that are supposed to belong to the figure and those that belong to the ground seem more or less continuous. Close's later work provides a rare case in which we experience the surface appearance and the scene appearance as competing equally for our attention. While those appearances compete for our attention, we manage to recognize a face in the picture because we see a cluster of those units as a variation of brightness of one surface color. It becomes explicit, when we experience the painting from this distance, that recognizing the face in the picture is something we do; in this respect, it's similar to the experience of the duck-rabbit drawing. For instance, we attend to the square units in such a way that they reveal a certain shape; a cluster of the squares appear to be unified in terms of chromatic information. The painter was very conscious about

the visual labor his viewers need to undertake.<sup>3</sup>

If you step back further the contours that define facial features become a bit more explicit. This is because the units of the picture begin to appear as a pile of colors rather than brushstrokes, and the expressive abstract pattern seems to recede into the background. (If you stare at the picture with unfocused eyes, the contrast between lightness and darkness in the represented scene becomes sharper.) Depending on the distance from the picture, some similarities among those units become salient (e.g., chromatic similarities) over and above their differences. Likewise, depending on the way the viewer attends to the picture surface, some differences (e.g., differences in brightness) become more noticeable; that is, even the contrast between lightness and darkness is not a static feature of the picture but a variable. In Close's pixelated work, representationally significant design elements are revealed only if the picture is seen in a certain way from a certain distance; only then the relationships among the surface features are recognized as representationally significant.

### *Lines are the Vehicle: Ellsworth Kelly's Plant Drawings*

One might think that Chuck Close's pixelated portraits represent the rare occasion where it makes sense to say that the picture's design—as a vehicle of pictorial representation—is made available through the viewer's visual abstraction. With respect to the way the picture surface materializes, Close's pixelated painting is no doubt extraordinary. It is not extraordinary, however, with respect to the fact that a picture's design is not a property that belongs to the picture surface. In line drawings, as I'll argue,

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<sup>3</sup> Close says: "I want to make the painting so big that from an average viewing distance you cannot see it as a whole. That forces you to read it—to go from the flat surface to the image and back to the flat surface to see the marks across it, to view it from a distance and then walk up close enough so you don't even know what you're looking at. Those are the kinds of experiences that I've tried to build into the work." From "Chuck Close," in Judith Olch Richards (ed), *Inside the Studio: Two Decades of Talks with Artists in New York* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2004), 34-37, at 37.

lines—as the picture’s design—are also the byproduct of the viewer’s visual abstraction.

In line drawings, under the condition that we see them as pictorial representation, lines, not the surface, are where the experience of seeing-in occurs. The kind of line drawings I have in mind are those with simple outlines with no modeling or shading; e.g., Ellsworth Kelly’s plant drawings.<sup>4</sup> Suppose you see a simple line drawing of a plant made on paper. The shape of the plant is defined by lines. That is, the plant *seen-in* the picture has a shape that is the same as the one made visible by the lines on the surface. One might experience the shape as a property that belongs to the picture surface. However, strictly speaking, the shape is not a property of the picture surface. Rather, the shape is made visible by the lines drawn on paper; it is a byproduct of the lines. My claim is *not* that we see the lines on paper and that in light of perceiving those lines we see a shape defined in the surface. Rather, it is that we see the lines (marks on paper) as a whole as a design and by doing so we recognize the lines—as a 2D entity—as a shape, and the lines (as a 2D shape) are what invites us to see something in it.

One might say, *isn’t this the shape of the part of the paper demarcated by the lines?* Yes, but I don’t think the shape is a property that belongs to the paper surface. Imagine that the drawing is made on a transparent material. You would still see the same shape defined by the lines. The shape does not solely belong to the lines either. Lines (marks on paper) themselves don’t have the shape of the plant. Even if there are a few spots disconnected or if the entire drawing is made with dotted lines, the shape made visible by the lines remains more or less the same. The shape is made visible by the lines (marks) drawn on the paper and we see the shape when we see the lines *as a whole (as a 2D shape)*. This is why I think it’s important to distinguish seeing a picture *as a picture* from seeing it as just an observable object.

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<sup>4</sup> Simple line drawings without modeling or shading highlight the fact that seeing a picture as a picture, as design, involves visually isolating the depictive vehicle, as the lines can themselves be the vehicle. However, I don’t mean to suggest that my claim that the recognition of design depends on the viewer’s visual abstraction exclusively applies to a certain kind of pictures.

Seeing a picture as a picture is to see the surface features as forming a certain relationship. And that is to say that we see the picture as design. When we see a simple outline drawing as a pictorial representation, the lines alone suffice to be a depictive vehicle. With respect to the kind of drawings I'm concerned with, the lines are the primary vehicle of depiction. The paper surface plays only a supportive role to make those lines (marks) visible. Imagine that the paper surface is cut out so as to leave only the parts that are covered by the lines visible. As long as the lines (marks) are visible and recognizable as lines (2D shape), we have the drawing. The whole of design does not coincide with a rectangular-shaped white paper.

I anticipate a further worry. *What about the relation between the surface and the lines? Isn't their relation also part of the whole design? The key component of design in this case might be the lines, but the margins are part of the design. If so, the paper surface is also part of the whole design and that's what we see when we see the drawing as design.*

Seeing a picture as a picture is to see certain surface features as forming a relationship, and that's what I mean by seeing the picture as design. If the shape of the part of the paper demarcated by the lines belongs to the picture, that's because we see the picture as design; we see the shape against the background of the whole of design. Regarding the question of where the 'whole' lies, yes, the margins of the paper can be part of the whole design. The point is not to discount the paper surface as a depictive medium but to explain why it's important to qualify seeing a picture 'as a picture or as design'. Our ability to see a line drawing as a drawing does not always depend on perceiving one continuous flat surface on which lines are laid down or identifying four edges of a paper surface. Consider line drawings made on an uneven surface or those that are made on subway tiles. We see a line drawing as a drawing because we recognize the lines as having a certain relationship with each other—*as design*—so as to contribute to representing what the drawing represents; otherwise, we would see the line drawing as

mere marks. Recognition of a line drawing as a drawing depends on visually isolating the lines that form the drawing from its immediate surroundings that are also visually presented in the experience. That is to say that recognition of design as a vehicle of pictorial representation depends on the viewer's visual abstraction from lines as marks on paper to lines as a 2D shape.

### III. Hopkins on Seeing-in

In this section, I discuss Hopkins's account of seeing-in. According to Hopkins, seeing-in is experienced resemblance in outline shape; 'to see something O in some part P of a surface S is to see P as resembling O in outline shape' (1995, p. 443). The viewer experiences the surface features of a picture as resembling what it represents (which is absent) in outline shape.

Outline shape is something like a solid-angle shape. Imagine a dog on a pillow and a point in space external to the dog. Further imagine a ray of lines being emitted from the point toward the direction of the dog and the pillow. Among the imaginary lines projected, if we isolate those that just touch the outer surface of the dog and the pillow, the shape defined by the set of those lines—directions—from the point is the outline shape of the object—the dog on the pillow as one target.<sup>5</sup> Outline shape is a property of an object relative to an external point in space. It is similar to a silhouette in that, as Hopkins notes, it is 'the shape things have if we ignore the dimension of depth' (2003b, p. 147). Nevertheless, one important difference between outline shape and silhouette is that in the former a nesting structure is possible; 'the outline shape of an object may include the nested outline shape of its parts' (1998, p. 57). For instance, the border between the dog and the pillow, or the textural differences on the pillow cover, can instantiate an outline shape and that outline shape is nested in the outline shape

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<sup>5</sup> I find John Kulvicki's explanation of 'outline shape' helpful. See Kulvicki (2014, 56-60).

of the dog on the pillow as a whole; ‘the outline shape of an object is relative to which of its features we wish to take into account’ (1998, p. 57). In addition, unlike silhouettes, outline shapes can be instantiated by objects that may not have a firm surface or those that do not have clearly visible boundaries; ‘If something has a 3-D shape, it has an outline shape’ (1998, p. 57).

Outline shape is a property of an object at a point. As Hopkins notes, ‘It is a genuine property of things in our environment’ (2003b, p. 148).<sup>6</sup> It’s not a subjective property—meaning, for instance, its existence does not depend on being perceived. It is something we see, and as with other visible objects, we don’t always perceive outline shape with perfect precision. One notable reason for varying degrees of precision concerns the determinacy of the point from which the outline shape of an object is seen. The precision of the outline shape of an object at a point depends partly on the determinacy of the point from which it is seen. Under normal circumstances, we see things with our both eyes, from a certain location, occupying a region rather than a point. Outline shape is an objective property instantiated by an object in relation to a point in space, but the outline shape we perceive won’t be perfectly precise (Hopkins, 2003b, p. 148).

Objects that differ in their 3D shapes can share the same outline shape. It’s also possible for a 3D object and a relatively flat object to share the same outline shape. Hopkins’s view is not, however, that a picture and what it depicts share the same outline shape. His claim is that the viewer experiences the picture (or part of it) as resembling the depictum in outline shape; ‘seeing-in is the experience of resemblance in outline shape’ (1998, p. 80). If you see one of Ellsworth Kelley’s drawings, *Seven Oranges* (graphite on paper, 22  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 28 $\frac{1}{2}$ , 1966), for instance, you see pencil marks on the picture surface (seven imperfect circles) as resembling seven oranges in outline shape.

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<sup>6</sup> Outline shape is also referred to as ‘visible figure’.

Hopkins's view of seeing-in is a central component of his 'experiential approach' to depiction—an attempt to define depiction by analyzing the distinctive experience pictures elicit (1998, p. 15). In his view, we experience the picture as resembling X, and X is what the picture represents. Giving an account of seeing-in alone is not sufficient to explain depiction though. It is accompanied by 'the standard of correctness'—what makes it right to see certain things in a picture but not others.<sup>7</sup> One might want to critically examine the role seeing-in (as defined by Hopkins) plays in defining depiction, but that's not what I'm going to do.<sup>8</sup> The question I have is about seeing-in itself.

Seeing an object or scene, O in a picture surface S is experiencing P (part of S) as resembling O in outline shape. My question concerns our perception of P, the relevant part of S whose outline shape we experience as resembling O in outline shape. Suppose that we see a black and white drawing that depicts a face. The drawing depicts mostly the shadows cast on the face and does not provide many details of facial features. It is not that difficult for us to notice that this is a depiction of a face, but how much of the surface is relevant to the experience of seeing-in? Where are the parts of the surface whose outline shape(s) we experience as resembling what it represents? If we look at one of Alex Katz' black and white works (e.g., *Porcelain Beauty 2*), the drawing does not delineate the entire shape of the face or any other facial features. There are only two colors in the entire drawing, black and white. Parts of the drawing that are black seem to represent the figure's hat, sunglasses, lips and the shadows under the nose and the chin. The black shape that represents the sunglasses is continuous with the black part that represents the hat. Part of the face that is white is continuous with the part of the figure's neck and also with the abstract background. The shape of the figure's face is in a sense disrupted because the black and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. See also Wollheim (1987).

<sup>8</sup> For critical assessment of Hopkins's account of depiction, see Lopes (2003, 2006). For Hopkins's responses to Lopes, see Hopkins (2003a, 2006).

white that are part of the face is continuous with parts of the hat or the background. It seems the outline shape of part of the surface that is supposed to be experienced as resembling the outline shape of the figure represented is disrupted. Do we see the shape of black parts and infer the shape of the face? If so, do we see the outline shape of the surface that is experienced as resembling the outline shape of the face depicted?

Consider the dalmatian picture by R. C. James. In looking at the picture, initially one might only see scattered black marks on the surface, but eventually a dalmatian will emerge from the black dots. The dalmatian is seen but it seems we have a ‘seeing-in’ experience without the experience of resemblance in outline shape. If this were the case, the link between seeing-in as experienced resemblance in outline shape and depiction can be questioned.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, my question is local. It’s about how seeing-in defined as experienced resemblance in outline shape applies to the way we *experience* pictures. Is experienced resemblance really experienced?

### *Resolving the Problem*

My Abstraction Thesis can resolve this problem. The vehicle of pictorial representation is a pattern of two-dimensional entity abstracted from the picture surface. It’s what the viewer sees when they see the picture as a vehicle of pictorial representation, not a property the picture surface possesses. If we understand Hopkins’s notion of outline shape as a vehicular property (in my sense of the term), not a surface property, then seeing it—the outline shape embodied in the picture—involves visual

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<sup>9</sup> Hopkins’s discussion of ‘separation’ provides a way to navigate the complex relation between seeing-in and depiction. Separation occurs when there is a discrepancy between the content of seeing-in and that of depiction. For example, in a stick figure, what is seen-in is determinate in the way that what is depicted is not; the shape of the depicted figure is indeterminate. The issue here is about the relation between seeing-in and depiction. For more on this see Hopkins (1998, pp. 122-158). The question I’m raising in this section is about seeing-in.

abstraction. The shape of the dog is defined by the pattern of the black and white abstracted from the picture surface. That this *shape* is not clearly delineated by marks on the picture surface does not mean that the outline shape is not experienced. In the next section, I suggest that we consider Hopkins's notion of seeing-in, in conjunction with my Abstraction Thesis, as a method for interpreting pictures.

#### IV. An Experiential Approach to Pictorial Understanding

In section 2, I've argued that the vehicle of pictorial representation is a two-dimensional entity we visually abstract from the picture surface, not a property that the picture possesses. This claim is referred to as 'the Abstraction Thesis'. Applying the thesis to Hopkins's notion of seeing-in yields the following:

The vehicle (an image abstracted from the surface) is experienced as resembling the content represented (what it is an image of) in outline shape.

In this section, I seek to show that this modified version of Hopkins's notion of seeing-in offers a guide to understanding pictures and thus we consider this notion as an interpretive method.<sup>10</sup> More specifically, my claim is this. In order to understand a picture, we have to accomplish two things simultaneously:

Task A: visually grasping the picture's design (an image)  
Task B: interpreting what the design represents (what it is an image of)

When we search for an image embodied in the picture, we search for an image that we can see as an image of something and that seeing-in as experienced resemblance in outline shape provides a correct account of this interpretive activity.

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<sup>10</sup> I'm suggesting that we use seeing-in as experienced resemblance in outline shape as a means by which we determine the represented content. This is different from—though compatible with—the role seeing-in plays in Hopkins's view; in his account, seeing-in as experienced resemblance in outline shape is an experiential state in which we grasp what is represented.

The significance of experienced resemblance is twofold. First, it accounts for the vehicle-content relation—the relation between an image and what it is an image of. The vehicle (an image) is experienced as resembling the content (what it is an image of) in outline shape. Second, seeing-in as experienced resemblance in outline shape provides the structure where the two activities—visually grasping the vehicle and interpreting the content—depend on each other. The viewer’s success in the former—visually identifying the image whose outline we’re to experience as resembling what it is an image of—depends on their success in the latter—determining the item whose outline shape the picture’s design is experienced as resembling.<sup>11</sup>

On the one hand, the viewer seeks to visually grasp the picture’s design—two-dimensional shapes and colors abstracted from the picture surface: Task A. On the other hand, the viewer interprets the relation between design and content represented: Task B. Neither task is done without the other. Successfully grasping the picture’s design, I will argue, depends on successfully interpreting the content represented and vice versa. I’ll begin with how the determination of content depends on the determination of vehicle—experiencing the vehicle in the right way.

*Task B depends on Task A: we try to ‘see’ an image*

Interpreting content depends on the way we experience the vehicle. More specifically, when we try to understand what a picture represents, we try to visually grasp an image—a pattern of shapes and colors—the picture is supposed to embody. Because we often succeed without much effort, visually grasping an image the picture is supposed to show, the idea that we try to see something in a picture (so that we understand what the picture represents) might seem contrived. However, it is often the case that

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<sup>11</sup> Hopkins’s view is open to respects other than outline shape in terms of which we experience pictures resembling what they represent.

not everything we see on a picture surface is doing the work of representing. When we understand what a picture represents, at least implicitly, we take into account the relations by which surface properties reveal an image. In mosaic art, for example, the shape of each tile has little representational significance; even if it's clearly visible, you would ignore the shape of each tile because it's the shape constructed by a certain arrangement of the tiles that is representationally significant.<sup>12</sup> It's also up to the way the viewer visually attends to the picture, at least in principle, to figure out which part of a picture constitutes the figure as opposed to the ground. This is especially the case when we are dealing with pictures that consist of two colors or two shades of the same color; e.g., a Greek vase. Pictures (as a means of representation) require an interpretation of their vehicular features, at least in the sense that disambiguation is called for among the candidate designs it could embody. In the dalmatian picture, if you recall, without us attending to the picture in a certain way and thus grasping a certain image in it, we do not have a pictorial representation to interpret.

*Task A depends on Task B: we try to see an image 'of something'*

Understanding what a picture represents depends on finding a way to see the picture in the right way so that we visually grasp the picture's design. On the other hand, there is a sense in which the viewer's visual experience of the picture depends on their interpretation of the content; that is, the determination of what image to see depends on the determination of what it is an image of. Here I don't mean to describe the temporal order of experience. The point I'm making is a structural one. When we manage to understand a picture, we see the picture's design D as resembling an object O in outline shape.

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<sup>12</sup> We ignore certain features of a picture surface so as to arrive at a coherent understanding of what the picture represents. Kulvicki discusses the significance of this aspect of our interpretive practice in his book, *Images* (New York: Routledge, 2014), esp. 127-8.: and in his paper "Pictorial Diversity," in *Philosophical Perspective on Depiction*, C. Abell and K. Bantinaki, eds. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), pp. 25-51.

My claim is that when we search for O, we also search for what it is that we see as resembling O, namely D.

As a skillful picture perceiver, we may immediately grasp what the picture represents; thus, we may not need to consciously interpret what a picture represents. However, that we search for what we're supposed to be looking at might accord with the way we experience pictures, if we consider seeing a picture with whose style we're not familiar or a picture that seems to be half figurative and half abstract. Milton Avery's *Hens* (oil on canvas, 1947) or Tom Thomson's *Sunset* (oil on board, 1915) might be helpful cases to consider. Some of Avery's chicken paintings might, initially, look like an arrangement of abstract shapes and colors. As we try to understand how those shapes and colors are related, we find an image *of a chicken*. Even in the cases when most viewers quickly grasp the image they're supposed to grasp (thus it doesn't seem like we try to see something in the picture), we succeed in understanding what the picture represents because we manage to see the right image that we can see as what it is an image of. Consider Andy Warhol's line drawing of foot (with or without flowers). Warhol's line drawings often look to be made by one continuous line. As discussed earlier in section II in relation to Ellsworth Kelly's line drawings, no single line (here I mean a mark on the surface) is the bearer of the foot shape. The foot shape is made visible thanks to the line but no part of the line possesses the foot shape. The foot shape is what the marks on the drawing *aim* to exemplify. We visually grasp the foot *shape* because we can see the drawing as an image *of a foot*. We don't even bother to describe the left-over shape that we could in principle visually attend to.

### *Pictorial Interpretation and Its Phenomenology*

When we try to understand a picture, we try to figure out what we're supposed to be 'seeing' in

the picture. We don't simply wish to know what the picture represents. Even if it were the case that we're informed about the content represented, we search for the right way to visually attend to the surface so that we find a reason to attribute a certain property to the scene represented; that is, we seek for an interpretation of the picture that is perceptually convincing. The modified version of seeing-in as experienced resemblance can account for this feature, namely that our interpretive success yields a distinctive phenomenology. We look for an image that we can experience as resembling in outline shape what it is an image of. This engagement with the picture yields a distinctive phenomenology because within this experience, the vehicle and the content are integrated in such a way that we experience a continuity between our interpreting effort and the visual search; thus, both the vehicle and (part of) the content appear to be part of what is experientially given.

## V. A Holistic Approach to Depiction

One might ask: isn't seeing-in as experienced in outline shape more than an interpretive method? Perhaps seeing-in *is* pictorial interpretation?<sup>13</sup> In many cases, we grasp both the vehicle and content intuitively; thus, it might seem that all the work is done by seeing-in. The reason why I think seeing-in is an interpretive method rather than interpretation itself is because the way we understand pictorial representation depends on our understanding of the picture as plastic art. What the picture accomplishes as a means of representation depends on the possibility of the medium, and we interpret the former based on our knowledge of the latter. Here I'm crossing the border between pictorial representation and pictorial art. In this last section, my aim to show that understanding artistic aspects of pictures is not something to be accommodated after defining pictorial representation. Rather it is something that

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<sup>13</sup> I thank [name-redacted-for-blind-review] for raising this question.

contributes to our understanding of how we communicate through pictures. Thus, I hope to make a case for a holistic approach to depiction.<sup>14</sup>

Hopkins distinguishes the following four questions:

Q.1 What is a picture?

Q.2 What is pictorial representation?

Q.3 What is the experience pictures characteristically generate?

Q.4 What is it to understand a picture?

(2003a, p. 653)

In philosophical inquiries about pictures, we aim to explain what is distinctive about pictorial representation as a representation. That is, we want to answer Q2. We could try to answer Q2 by answering Q1; first we explain what pictures are and then define pictorial representation as the kind of representation pictures deliver. However, this might not be the most desirable strategy because, as Hopkins notes, the representational function pictures serve may not be confined to pictorial representation (2003a, p. 653). We could try to answer Q2 in light of our answer to Q4. Answering Q2 in terms of Q3, as noted in section III, is the route Hopkins prefers; that is, Hopkins (1998) explains depiction in terms of seeing-in.

Answering each of these questions (Q1~Q4), I hold, cannot be done in isolation. In this paper, I proposed that we approach the question ‘Q.4 What is it to understand a picture?’ through the question about pictorial experience, ‘Q.3 What is the experience pictures characteristically generate?’. My approach to Q4 and Q3 has an implication for how to approach Q1 and Q2. When we understand what a figurative picture represents, the picture is treated as the scene itself. What I mean is this: a picture-maker builds an appearance (the vehicle of pictorial representation in my sense) to represent an

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Crowther (2008) explicitly questions the sharp demarcation between what makes depiction possible and characteristic features of paintings as an art.

appearance (how a worldly object appears).<sup>15</sup> Pictures materialize the vehicle (an image), thus conferring a visible appearance upon it, and viewers, when they examine pictures, visually grasp the vehicle embodied in each picture. In a sense the picture producer accomplishes materially what the spectator (including the picture-maker themselves) accomplishes visually. A picture (a tangible object) is a device through which we see an image; how the device is made conditions how the image appears.

The point I'm trying to make is that the expressive possibility of the medium is something we interpret in light of what we know about the medium and how it is used in other paintings. In order to understand what the pixelated work represents qua pictorial representation, we need to appeal to our understanding of Close's work as pictorial art. In my view, what is pixelated is the vehicle. It is the *image* of a face, not the face, that is pixelated. The face is not represented as having the property of being pixelated. In Close's pixelated portrait, the vehicle of pictorial representation is exemplified in an expressive manner through the unit—variously colored ellipses confined in a rhombus—by which the painter covers the picture surface. By 'expressive' I mean something like embellishing; analogous to the way the main theme is expressed in a musical variation.

Of course, the possibility of pictorially representing the face as having the property of being pixelated is not excluded. This issue is now in the realm of interpretation. The viewer's experience of seeing-in is itself something that needs to be interpreted; in that sense, the experienced resemblance functions as an extension of the vehicle of *pictorial representation*. We don't simply visually isolate a shape that functions as a vehicle of representation. The shape is experienced, meaning that we take into consideration how the shape *appears* to us. My preferred view is that being pixelated is not a property attributed to the face but to the vehicle; the face is not represented as being pixelated. The other reading

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<sup>15</sup> This is a thought I extracted from Richard Tuttle's remark, 'The work isn't about representing phenomenon, it's about making phenomenon' (2004, p. 192).

is that the face is represented as being pixelated; being pixelated is a property that belongs to the face. If the question whether the property of being pixelated belongs to the face represented or not is taken seriously—if one thinks this issue is worth debating—I take it to be a partial vindication of my holistic approach to depiction.

## VI. Conclusion.

In this paper, I argued that the way we experience pictures plays a key role in the way we understand what is pictorially represented. More specifically, I proposed that we take the notion of seeing-in—'seeing something in a picture'—as a method for interpreting pictorial representations. In order to establish this, first I argued that the vehicle of pictorial representation is a two-dimensional entity visually abstracted from the picture surface—referred to as 'the Abstraction Thesis'. I then discussed Robert Hopkins's account of seeing-in. Hopkins defines seeing-in as experienced resemblance in outline shape. Combined with my Abstraction Thesis, I've argued that Hopkins's conception of seeing-in correctly characterizes the structure of pictorial understanding. On the one hand, we visually identify the vehicle of pictorial representation—an image. On the other hand, we interpret what the vehicle stands in for—what it is an image of. These two activities are interdependent. We grasp an image when it is experienced as resembling what it is an image of in outline shape. Without the viewer's interpretive effort—grasping what it is an image of—the vehicle of pictorial representation is now shown. Because of this interdependence, I suggested that the viewer's interpretive engagement results in or is accompanied by a distinctive phenomenology. I also discussed an implication my account of pictorial understanding has for the task of explaining depiction and suggested that understanding what a picture represents *qua* pictorial representation depends on our understanding of the picture as an art.

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