

IS TWOFOLDNESS NECESSARY FOR REPRESENTATIONAL SEEING?

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Richard Wollheim claimed that twofoldness is a necessary condition for the perception of pictorial representations and it is also a necessary condition for the aesthetic appreciation of pictures. Jerrold Levinson pointed out that these two questions are different and argued that though twofoldness may be a necessary condition for the aesthetic appreciation of pictures, it cannot be a necessary condition for the perception of pictorial representations. I argue that Wollheim's use of the term 'twofoldness' alternates between two concepts: the simultaneous visual awareness of the surface and of the represented object on the one hand and the simultaneous visual awareness of the represented object and the way it is represented on the other. Finally, I argue that twofoldness in the first sense is a necessary condition for the perception of pictorial representations, whereas twofoldness in the second sense is a necessary condition for the aesthetic appreciation of pictures.

I

RICHARD Wollheim argued that the perception of pictorial representations is a special case of a certain kind of visual experience, which he calls seeing in. Further, he argues that the 'twofoldness' of experience is a necessary condition for seeing in. Both of these claims have been widely accepted even by those who give very different account of depiction from Wollheim's.

A visual experience of an agent is 'twofold' if she is simultaneously aware of both the represented object and the medium of representation. Whenever we look at a painting and see something in it, according to Wollheim, we are simultaneously aware of the canvas and the represented object. This paper aims to analyse the notion of twofoldness and examine whether it is really a necessary condition for the perception of pictorial representations or not.

The consensus is that it is. The notion of twofoldness plays an important role even in the most important non-Wollheimian theories of pictorial representation. Kendall Walton, for example, repeatedly argues that his theory is consistent with the claim that the twofoldness of experience is a necessary condition for the perception of pictorial representation.¹ Moreover, he continues, his theory can be

¹ Kendall L. Walton, 'Depiction, Perception, and Imagination', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 60 (2002), pp. 27–35, esp. p. 33. Kendall L. Walton, 'Reply to Reviewers', *Philosophy and*

regarded as an attempt to fill in the details of the rather general and vague notion of twofoldness Wollheim is using.² And Walton is not the only one.³ The consensus seems to be that the experience of a picture cannot be described without bringing in the twofoldness of this experience.

Unfortunately, this consensus has been broken recently. Dominic McIver Lopes and Jerrold Levinson both argued that twofoldness is not a necessary condition for the perception of pictorial representations.⁴ I will focus on Levinson's arguments here. Levinson differentiates two questions: (a) whether twofoldness is a necessary condition for the experience of pictures; and (b) whether twofoldness is a necessary condition for the aesthetic appreciation of pictures (or even for the experience of pictures *as pictures*).⁵ The two questions are obviously not the same and it would be a mistake to confuse them:

Plausibly *not* all seeing-in or registering of pictorial content is aesthetic in character, or even informed by the awareness of pictures as pictures; for instance, that directed to or had in connection with postcards, passport photos, magazine illustrations, comic strips, television shows, or films. Thus, any view that builds aesthetic character, or even awareness of pictures as pictures, directly into seeing-in would seem to have something amiss.⁶

Phenomenological Research, vol. 51 (1991), pp. 423–427, esp. p. 423. Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Boston, MA: Harvard U.P., 1990), esp. pp. 300–301.

² Walton writes: 'Seeing-in is an experience characterized by what [Wollheim] calls "twofoldness": one sees the marked picture surface, and one sees the subject of the picture. . . . These are not two independent experiences, he insists, but two aspects of a single one. It is hard to know what this means, and Wollheim offers little explanation. . . . I propose that my theory goes some way towards showing how two different intentional contents can be combined. The experience is a perception of the pictorial surface imagined to be a perception of . . . whatever is depicted' (Walton, 'Depiction, Perception, and Imagination', p. 33). In other words, according to Walton, his notion of twofoldness, which can be seen as an interpretation and explication of Wollheim's, is necessary for the perception of pictorial representations. (I recently argued against Walton's claim that his and Wollheim's concept of twofoldness are the same. Bence Nanay, 'Taking Twofoldness Seriously. Walton on Imagination and Depiction', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 62 [2004], pp. 285–289).

³ Robert Hopkins, for example, also embraces a version of the claim that twofoldness is necessary for the perception of pictorial representation. See Robert Hopkins, *Picture, Image and Experience. A Philosophical Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1998), esp. p. 77.

⁴ Dominic McIver Lopes, *Understanding Pictures* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1996), esp. ch. 2 (pp. 37–51); Jerrold Levinson, 'Wollheim on Pictorial Representation', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 56 (1998), pp. 227–233.

⁵ Since the experience of pictures *as pictures* is undoubtedly necessary for the *aesthetic* experience of pictures, I will focus on the question whether twofoldness is a necessary condition for the experience of pictures *as pictures*, which I take to be the more general notion. Twofoldness cannot be a necessary condition for the *aesthetic* experience of pictures unless it is a necessary condition for the experience of pictures *as pictures*. Thanks for Jerrold Levinson for drawing my attention to this point.

⁶ Levinson, 'Wollheim on Pictorial Representation', pp. 228–229.

Levinson argues that (b) is true, but that (a) is false:

If you see a woman in a picture in virtue of visually processing a pattern of marks, then of course in some sense you are thereby perceiving the medium in which those marks inhere or consist. But it is far from clear that when you see the woman in the picture you must in some measure be attending to, taking notice of, or consciously focusing on the picture's surface or patterning as such.⁷

Thus, according to Levinson, twofoldness may be necessary for appreciating the aesthetic qualities of a painting, but it is not necessary for just recognizing something as being depicted: for the perception of a pictorial representation.

In order to assess this objection, a thorough analysis of Wollheim's notion of twofoldness is needed. This is what I intend to give in the next section.

II

My main claim is that Wollheim uses the notion of twofoldness in two markedly different senses. He usually introduces the twofoldness of seeing-in in the following way:

We are visually aware at once of the marked surface and of something in front of or behind something else.⁸

Or, similarly:

I am visually aware of the surface I look at, and I discern something standing out in front of, or (in certain cases) receding behind, something else.⁹

Here the contrast is drawn between the awareness of the surface and of the depth of the painting. Arguably, this dichotomy was inherited from a claim of Gombrich's that Wollheim argues against, according to which our attention alternates between seeing canvas and seeing Nature. This sense of twofoldness can be summarized in the following way:

1. Twofoldness of the experience of a painting means that one is visually aware of the (two-dimensional) surface and the (three-dimensional) represented object simultaneously.

Wollheim also uses twofoldness in a slightly different sense. In *Painting as an Art*, he reconceived the notion of twofoldness and defined it as being aware

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁸ Richard Wollheim, 'On Pictorial Representation', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 56 (1998), pp. 217–226 at p. 221.

⁹ Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 1987), p. 46.

simultaneously of two aspects of one single experience, namely the recognitional and configurational aspects.¹⁰ Thus, according to this definition, twofoldness is not the simultaneous visual awareness of two different entities (the surface and the represented object), but of two different aspects of one single experience: of what is represented and of the way it is represented. In other words:

2. Twofoldness of the experience of a painting means that one is visually aware of the represented object and the way it is represented simultaneously.

Note that though Wollheim seems to have made a major change in the way he conceives twofoldness, he often uses these two ways of talking about the twofoldness of seeing-in interchangeably, sometimes even on the same page.¹¹ Thus, first of all, it has to be pointed out that these two senses are in fact different.

Some properties of the canvas are obviously part of the way the represented object is represented: the brushstrokes, for example. Some others, however, are not part of the 'how' of representations. Consider, for example, the quite visible small cracks in the paint of Petrus Christus's famous painting *The Portrait of a Young Woman* (Berlin, Staatliche Museen). These cracks are properties of the surface, but not of the way the face of the woman is represented. Being visually aware of them is part of being visually aware of the surface, but it is not being visually aware of the way the represented object is represented.

Conversely, part of what constitutes the way something is represented is not a property of the canvas. Being aware of the way a violin is represented in a Cubist painting is not just being aware of certain properties of the surface: we could not be aware of the way this violin is represented unless we recognized that this object is a violin.¹² Therefore, the way an object is represented on a painting obviously supervenes on the properties of the surface, but nevertheless, it is not itself a property of the surface. It seems that the two senses of twofoldness I differentiated above are very different indeed.

So the notion of twofoldness turned out to be not only problematic as a necessary condition for the perception of pictorial representations, but also inherently ambiguous. Did I add insult to injury? I think not. My claim is that this ambiguity of the concept of twofoldness may help us to answer the objection to the necessity claim.

¹⁰ Wollheim, 'On Pictorial Representation', p. 221. Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, p. 73.

¹¹ He also uses formulation of the twofoldness thesis that is ambiguous between these two notions. When he introduces this concept in 1980, for instance, he writes: 'The seeing appropriate to representations permits simultaneous attention to what is represented and to the representation.' Richard Wollheim, 'Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation', in *Art and its Object*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1980) pp. 205–226 at p. 213.

¹² Interestingly, Wollheim gave a very similar argument in another context. See Richard Wollheim, 'On Formalism and Pictorial Organization', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 59 (2001), pp. 127–137.

III

My proposal is quite simple: twofoldness in sense (2) is a necessary condition for appreciating pictures aesthetically, whereas twofoldness in sense (1) is a necessary condition for seeing a pictorial representation, that is, for recognizing a depicted object.

Levinson argued that the aesthetic appreciation of pictures is different from recognizing a depicted object and that Wollheim's notion of twofoldness posits a necessary condition for the former, but it cannot be a necessary condition for the latter. Levinson is undoubtedly right about the difference between seeing something in a painting and appreciating a painting aesthetically. I also agree with him in that the notion of twofoldness is supposed to characterize our aesthetic appreciation of a picture. I will argue that Wollheim can be interpreted as having two notions of twofoldness, one is a necessary condition for seeing something in a picture, whereas the other is a necessary condition for appreciating a picture aesthetically.

First, if the twofoldness of experience is a necessary condition for the aesthetic appreciation of a picture, then it must be twofoldness in sense (2), that is, the one between the visual awareness of the represented object and the way it is represented. In order to demonstrate this, I will briefly analyse one of Wollheim's original arguments in favour of his twofoldness claim in his 'Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation'.¹³ Let us see how the argument goes:

[I]n Titian, in Vermeer, in Manet we are led to marvel endlessly at the way in which line or brushstroke or expanse of colour is exploited to render effects or establish analogies that can only be identified representationally.¹⁴

Wollheim argues that we would not be able to appreciate the great examples of pictorial representations unless we are aware of what is represented and the way it is represented at the same time. Being visually aware of a woman reading a letter does not in itself make it possible for us to appreciate aesthetically the painting that represents this scene. Only if we are also visually aware of the way the painting represents this scene can we see the picture as a picture or, for that matter, as a masterpiece. The argument clearly applies the notion of twofoldness in sense (2) here. This is underlined by the analogy Wollheim draws here, between experiencing pictorial representation and poetry.

A comparison that suggests itself is with the difficulties that would have lain in store for us in our appreciation of poetry if it had been beyond our powers to have simultaneous awareness of the sound and the meaning of words. In painting and

¹³ Wollheim, 'Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation', pp. 214–216.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

poetry twofoldness must be a normative constraints upon anyone who tries to appreciate works of those arts.¹⁵

Thus, if Wollheim's argument is correct, then twofoldness *in sense (2)* is a necessary condition for the aesthetic appreciation of pictures. Note that Levinson does not question this Wollheimian argument. He agrees that twofoldness is a necessary condition for the aesthetic appreciation of pictures. What he does question is the claim that twofoldness is a necessary condition for seeing something in a picture. This is the claim I now turn to.

IV

I will argue that twofoldness in sense (1), that is, the simultaneous visual awareness of the surface and the represented object, is a necessary condition for seeing something in a painting. Wollheim has an argument for a version of this claim again in his 'Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation':

[A] salient fact about our perception of representations . . . is that any move that the spectator makes from the centre of projection, or the standard viewing-point, does not, at any rate for binocular vision, necessarily bring about perspectival distortion. Under changes of viewing point the image remains remarkably free from deformation and to a degree that would not be true if the spectator were looking at the actual object face to face or if the representation was photographed from these same viewing points. The explanation offered of this constancy is that the spectator is, and remains, visually aware not only of what is represented but also of the surface qualities of the representation.¹⁶

This argument undoubtedly aims to posit twofoldness as a necessary condition for seeing something in the picture and it does so by using the notion of twofoldness in sense (1), that is, in the sense of the simultaneous visual awareness of the surface and the represented object. If this argument (which Wollheim credits to Maurice Henri Pirenne and Michael Polanyi) is a good one, then twofoldness in sense (1) is a necessary condition for seeing something in a picture.¹⁷

Whether or not this argument is conclusive, it is worth making the following observation about representational seeing. Recognizing something in a painting is different from recognizing something face to face. Wollheim explains this difference by pointing out that whereas one is visually aware of the object in the latter case, one is simultaneously visually aware of the object and the surface of the painting (or photograph) in the former case.

Suppose I observe a postcard representing a street in Rome. Suppose I do not engage in aesthetic appreciation of the postcard. If someone asks me to touch a

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 215–216.

¹⁷ Maurice Henri Pirenne: *Optics, Painting, and Photography* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1970); Michael Polanyi: 'What is a Painting?', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 10 (1970), pp. 225–236.

house in the street, I will not try to reach through the picture to touch it; I simply touch the surface of the postcard. Even small children would behave similarly. If we see the street in Rome *in the picture* (and not face to face), then it seems necessary that we do not reach through the surface of the picture when prompted to touch a house in the street. But this would not be possible unless we are in some way visually aware of the surface (as well as of the street) when we recognize a street in Rome in the postcard. Hence, twofoldness in sense (1) is required for seeing something in a picture.

It is interesting to note the occasions where we do try to touch the represented object reaching through the surface. Taking aside the various anecdotes of insects that tried to fly through the canvas of a still-life, the obvious examples are *trompe l'oeil* paintings. If we are genuinely fooled by the *trompe l'oeil*, then we would readily try to reach through the canvas. This phenomenon is, of course, consistent with Wollheim's insistence that *trompe l'oeil* paintings are not pictorial representations, which constitutes an additional reason for supposing that Wollheim thought of twofoldness in sense (1) as a necessary condition for representational seeing.¹⁸

v

A possible objection needs to be addressed at this point. It may be true that recognizing something in a painting involves some awareness of the surface (in the sense that this awareness has some impact on our actions, for example), but it surely does not involve what Levinson calls 'attending to, taking notice of, or consciously focusing on' it.¹⁹ And Levinson argues that the notion of twofoldness, as Wollheim introduced it, implies 'attending to' the markings of the surface.

First, we have seen that it is far from clear what Wollheim meant by the notion of twofoldness. If we accept that he uses the term in two different ways, then we need to ask which of these two senses of twofoldness, if any, implies 'attending to, taking notice of, or consciously focusing on' the surface or of the way something is represented. I will argue that though twofoldness in sense (2) does require 'attending to, taking notice of, or consciously focusing on' the way something is represented, twofoldness in sense (1) does not require any such attitude towards the surface of the painting.

It must be clear from the above quote on perspectival distortion that in his analysis of twofoldness Wollheim did allow for visual awareness that would certainly not be akin to 'attending to' the surface. He says that the awareness of the surface

¹⁸ On the question of the role of *trompe l'oeil* in Wollheim's theory, see Susan L. Feagin, 'Presentation and Representation', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 56 (1998), pp. 234–240. See also Levinson, 'Wollheim on Pictorial Representation', pp. 228–229.

¹⁹ Levinson, 'Wollheim on Pictorial Representation', p. 229.

influences our perception of the represented object in such a way that its sight does not get distorted as we move around the painting and this counts as an argument for the twofoldness of our experience. Regardless of whether this claim is true or not, the argument itself indicates that the notion of visual awareness Wollheim uses when describing the twofoldness of the experience of looking at pictures is not necessarily ‘attending to, taking notice of, or consciously focusing on’ something.

My main point is that while such higher-order activity is needed in order to credit someone with a twofold experience in sense (2), no such higher-order mental activity is needed in order for an experience to be twofold in sense (1). In order to appreciate a picture aesthetically, one really does need to be ‘attending to, taking notice of, or consciously focusing on’ the brushstrokes and the composition. But in order to see an object in a picture, one only needs to register (without attending to it) the surface one sees this object in. And even little children looking at a photograph of their mother are capable of this.

Thus, twofoldness in sense (1) does not require ‘attending to, taking notice of, or consciously focusing on’ the surface and this is the sense in which twofoldness is claimed to be a necessary condition for seeing something in a picture.

To sum up, what is needed for the recognition of an object in a picture is not twofoldness in sense (2), that is, the simultaneous awareness of the represented object and the way it is represented (the brushstrokes, the composition), but twofoldness in sense (1), that is, the simultaneous awareness of the represented object and the surface. If someone is not aware of the surface visually, she does not see anything *in the painting*; she is fooled into believing that she sees something face to face.

VI

The objection I addressed in the previous section highlights a further important difference between the two concepts of twofoldness I differentiated. The original distinction between the two concepts of twofoldness was made in terms of the objects of perception. Twofoldness in sense (1) means that one is visually aware of the (two-dimensional) surface and the (three-dimensional) represented object simultaneously, whereas twofoldness in sense (2) means that one is visually aware of the represented object and the way it is represented simultaneously.

The discussion in the previous section points to a further difference between these two concepts of twofoldness: one concerning the attitude of the subject. Twofoldness in sense (1) requires simultaneous *visual awareness* between the surface and the object, whereas twofoldness in sense (2) requires a much more complex psychological attitude on behalf of the subject: it requires that one *attend to* (take notice of, consciously focus on) the represented object and the way it is represented simultaneously.

It is important to note that Wollheim himself does not distinguish between these two psychological attitudes of the subject; he uses them interchangeably. For example, he writes:

The explanation offered of this constancy is that the spectator is, and remains, visually aware not only of what is represented but also of the surface qualities of the representation. He *engages*, in other words, *in twofold attention*, and has to if he wants to see representations in the way that we have come to regard as standard.²⁰

Following Levinson, I would like to emphasize the difference between these two attitudes of the subject, but I have argued that they are different attitudes required by the two different concepts of twofoldness. Thus, in the light of this, we need to modify slightly the definition of the two concepts of twofoldness:

1. Twofoldness of the experience of a painting means that one is visually aware of the (two-dimensional) surface and the (three-dimensional) represented object simultaneously.
- 2'. Twofoldness of the experience of a painting means that one attends to (takes notice of, consciously focuses on) the represented object and the way it is represented simultaneously.

We have seen that it is twofoldness in sense (1) that is necessary for seeing something in the picture. We have also seen that it is twofoldness in sense (2') that is necessary for the aesthetic appreciation of a picture.

It is possible to have a twofold visual experience in sense (1) without having a twofold experience in sense (2'). This was Levinson's and Lopes's point that served as the starting point of my argument: it is possible to see something in the picture without appreciating it aesthetically.

An interesting question is whether the opposite is possible. Is it possible to have a twofold visual experience in sense (2') without having a twofold experience in sense (1)? Is it possible to have a twofold experience in sense (2') even if what one is looking at is not a representation but, for example, a *trompe l'oeil* painting? This would explain why some philosophers resisted the thought that *trompe l'oeil* paintings are not representations, because their perception does not involve twofold experience. Their perception does not involve twofold experience in sense (1), therefore they are not representations in Wollheim's terminology. Perhaps we can have a twofold experience of them in sense (2'), however, if we appreciate them aesthetically.

I cannot address these questions here. The focus of this paper was the notion of twofoldness in sense (1): the concept of twofoldness that is necessary for representational seeing. In analysing this notion, we pointed out that Richard Wollheim

²⁰ Wollheim, 'Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation', pp. 215–216 (emphasis added).

used the concept of twofoldness in two different senses, one of which is indeed necessary for representational seeing, but the other one is a much more complex experience that is necessary for the aesthetic appreciation of pictures.

VII

Finally, a brief note about the scope of the argument. It is important to note that twofoldness (no matter in which sense) is not a sufficient condition for either the perception of pictorial representations or for the aesthetic appreciation of pictures. Wollheim posits further necessary conditions for the experience of seeing something in a picture.²¹ In this paper I have focused on the twofoldness condition only and have examined whether or not twofoldness is necessary for the perception of pictorial representations.²²

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²¹ The two most important necessary conditions for seeing x in y are that (i) y is part of the characterization of the way I see x , whereas x is not the part of the characterization of the way I see y ; and (ii) It is not necessary that x can be localized in y (see, for example, Wollheim, 'Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation', pp. 223 and 211, respectively)

²² I am most grateful to Richard Wollheim for repeated discussions of the question of representational seeing and twofoldness from 1999 until 2003. I presented a version of this paper at the American Society for Aesthetics Annual Meeting (Houston, TX, 31 October 2004). I am grateful for the comments of my commentator, John Brown. I am also grateful for the comments of Peter Lamarque and especially of Jerrold Levinson on an earlier draft of this paper.