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The Macro and the Micro: Andreas Gursky's Aesthetics

Andreas Gursky is the darling of philosophers and art theorists of all kinds of traditions and denominations. He has been used as a prime example of the return of the sublime in contemporary art, as a trailblazer in the use of the digital manipulation of images in order to represent something abstract, and even as a philosopher of perception who makes some subtle point about the nature of visual experience. All of these arguments are based on some or another technological innovation Gursky uses: the size of his photos, their postproduction (often digital) manipulation, and their unusually high resolution.

The aim of this article is to shift the emphasis from these arguments on the significance of the new technology in Gursky's oeuvre to a much more important role technology plays in his works, namely, in their aesthetics. I begin by saying a bit more about the philosophical analyses of Gursky's photographs and the role new technology plays in them and then elaborate on the proposal that the aesthetics of Gursky's photographs heavily rely on these technological innovations—more precisely, high-resolution, postproduction manipulation, and sheer size—in three different ways.

I

One important and influential argument about Gursky's photographs (and one that taught many analytic philosophers Gursky's name) is that his pictures make a subtle point about the nature of our visual experiences. Here is Alva Noë's summary:

> Part of the effect of Gursky's piece [*99 Cent*] is that it presents a "view" of the shop that is utterly contrived. We never *experience* so much detail, not all at once like that.[1]

Noë takes Gursky to make the same point as the one he himself argues for: that our visual experience is not like a snapshot. Snapshots can have full resolution in every square inch of the picture, whereas our visual experience only has high resolution where we are focusing our attention. It does appear to us (under normal circumstances) that our visual experience is like a snapshot, but in fact it is not: change blindness and inattentional blindness experiments clearly show that we fail to notice very significant changes in our visual field if we are not attending to them. Noë replaces the snapshot conception with a more dynamic one, whereby our eyes are zipping around our visual field, giving us the illusion that we see everything clearly. In fact, there is very little that we do see clearly.[2]

What is important for our purposes is not whether Noë is right, but that he recruits Gursky as his ally in the fight against the snapshot conception of experience. In a later paper, Noë goes further and even says that the snapshot conception is "caricatured" by Gursky.[3] And he does so with the help of the use of new technology: of unusually high photographic resolution.

One thing to note, again, without taking sides in the debate about the nature of visual experience and the grand illusion, is that one can make pictures with very high contrasts and resolution without explicitly caricaturing the snapshot conception of visual experience. One example that springs to mind is Bronzino. Here is Heinrich Wölfflin on Bronzino's paintings, surprisingly similar to the first quotation by Noë above:

> No human eye can see things in this way—I mean with this even firmness of the line. Not for a moment does the artist depart from the absolute distinctness of the object. It is as if, in the representation of a bookcase, an artist were to attempt to paint book by book, each equally clearly outlined, while an eye attuned to appearance only grasps the shimmer playing over the whole.[4]

Wölfflin contrasts Bronzino's "metallic distinctness of lines and surfaces" with Velasquez's paintings, but he also emphasizes that many of Bronzino's contemporaries used effects similar to Bronzino's (in fact, the distinctness of lines and surfaces is one of the many characteristics of the 'linear style' for Wölfflin).[5] So it may not be justified to take Gursky to do anything particularly original or philosophical here.

Many of Gursky's photographs are digitally manipulated: the films are pieced together digitally and then often manipulated even further. The colors are also often adjusted digitally, most often by increasing their saturation. This is another important technical aspect of Gursky's photos, but some art critics and theorists have argued that this digital manipulation serves a more theoretical purpose. More specifically, as Katy Siegel argues, it allows Gursky to create representations that are in some sense of, or depict, an abstract idea.[6]

Here is an example. Gursky's *Untitled V* (1997) is a photo of a display of athletic shoes on six extremely long shelves. Apparently, the photographer had encountered a similar display in real life, but thought that it "would not have sufficed for a convincing photograph. The real shoe display was pictorially ineffective and harmlessly presented," as he said in an interview.[7] Instead, he had a short shelf fixed, filled it with various models of shoes, photographed it from six different angles, and then digitally pieced the films together. This is the technique. The interpretation is that thereby Gursky created a representation of something that could be described as an abstract idea.[8]

Whether this claim is correct, of course, depends heavily on the concept of representation (or depiction) one uses. In the analytic tradition of philosophy of art (not Siegel's own), there has been a lively debate about what properties are represented in a picture, what are depicted, and what are neither represented nor depicted.[9] Consumerism could only be a candidate for something that is represented in the picture (not depicted), but even this seems controversial. But the most important aspect of this argument about Gursky's photographs is not whether it is sound, but that it, again, aims to trace the consequences of a new technology Gursky uses, namely, digital manipulation.

The third argument I want to mention concerns the "sublime" in Gursky's photographs. The argument is that Gursky brings the Kantian and Burkean concepts of the sublime back into debates about contemporary art, and he achieves this mainly by the sheer size of his photographs (mainly but not exclusively: his choice of themes is also supposed to contribute). Gursky's sublime is supposed to be different from Kant's and Burke's, though, inasmuch as he depicts the human-made world, and not nature, which was the prime example in the eighteenth century.[10]

These are, of course, not the only philosophical and theoretical discussions of Gursky's oeuvre; in fact, most discussions on Gursky focus on the content of his photographs, for example, trying to decide whether he critiques or endorses globalization.[11] But what is important for my purposes, and the reason why I picked out the three philosophical interpretations, is that they all focus on three technical aspects of Gursky's work: the size of his photographs, their high resolution, and their postproduction (often digital) manipulation. According to these philosophical interpretations, these three technical aspects all help Gursky make some abstract philosophical point. I am not sure this is correct, but my main argument is that these three technical aspects play a much more important role in Gursky's work: they determine and make possible the aesthetics of these pictures. This is the claim I argue for in the remainder of the article.

II

The starting point of my argument is that Gursky's pictures operate on two levels. They need to be seen from two different perspectives, both close up and from far away. If we take only one of these perspectives into consideration, we are missing out on something.

Gursky himself often explicated the same point. As he says in an interview, "I see both microscopically and macroscopically."[12] In terms of the aesthetics of his pictures, this comment can be reformulated: his pictures should be seen "both

microscopically and macroscopically." As he says in another interview:

> You never notice arbitrary details in my work. On a formal level, countless interrelated micro and macrostructures are woven together, determined by an overall organizational principle.[13]

In short, in order to properly appreciate a Gursky piece, we need to appreciate three aspects of the photograph:

(a) the microstructure,
(b) the macrostructure, and
(c) the relation between the two.

To put it simply, if we are looking at a large (say, twelve- by six-foot) Gursky print from a couple of centimeters, we will see details we could not see from farther away, but we will be missing out on a lot that matters for the aesthetics of the picture. If we are looking at the same print from the other end of the exhibition hall (say, from five meters away), we will see compositional elements that we could not see close up, but we will be missing out on a lot of details. So what we need to do is to go back and forth. And if one observes the spectators at a Gursky exhibition, this is exactly what they in fact do: walk away from the print to take in the entire composition and then walk closer to check some details and then walk back again, and so on. Gursky's photos must be among the pictoral works of art that require the most legwork.

If you look at Gursky's *Cable-car, Dolomites* (1987) from far away, you notice no cable car on the photo: all you see is an approximately symmetrical mountain landscape, a rocky slope in the lower half of the picture, and clouds in the upper half. There is also what looks like a tiny speck of dirt just left of the center of the picture. If you walk closer to the print, you see that what looked like a speck of dirt is in fact the cable car the title is referring to. But when you are close enough to the print so that you can make out the details of the cable car, you can no longer see the overall composition of the photograph (Gursky's *Madrid* [1988] is built on the very same compositional principles).

Another example: looking at Gursky's *Pyonyang III* (2007) from a distance, we have no idea what it is supposed to depict. All we see is a symmetrical composition of a long rectangle at the middle of the picture, and some yellow and light blue dots in front of it, that are organized geometrically (one line yellow, one line blue). Going closer, we see that the yellow and blue dots are in fact performers, and what seems like a rectangle in the middle of the picture is the audience of North Koreans enjoying the performance. The close-up view and the view from a distance give us two completely different experiences, and they are equally important for the appreciation of Gursky's photograph. In addition, the relation between these two experiences is as important as the experiences themselves.

The duality of the macro- and the microlevel of appreciating Gursky's photographs may remind one of one of the most important concepts in contemporary analytic aesthetics: the concept of twofoldness and of the general debate about the aesthetic appreciation of pictures.

What happens when we appreciate pictures aesthetically? Note that this question is different from asking what happens when we see something in a picture. We can see something in a picture even when we do not appreciate it aesthetically, for example, when we are watching a baseball game on TV.[14]

There are two very influential philosophical accounts of what happens when we appreciate pictures aesthetically. According to the first one, our attention alternates between the depicted object and the canvas.[15] According to the second, the experience we are supposed to go through when looking at pictures is a twofold one: we are simultaneously aware of the picture surface and the represented object.[16] We have a twofold experience in this sense.[17] As Richard Wollheim puts it, "The spectator is, and remains, visually aware not only of what is represented but also of the surface qualities of the representation."[18]

Which account is the correct one? It has been argued that we may not need to choose between the two. Maybe some pictures are to be appreciated, as Gombrich suggests, by alternating our attention between the two-dimensional surface and the three-dimensional depicted object, but some other pictures are to be appreciated in a Wollheimian twofold manner.[19] I argue at the end of this article that the appreciation of Gursky's photographs shows an interesting combination of Wollheim's and Gombrich's perspectives, and it also demonstrates how varied and complex twofold pictorial experiences can be. But before that, I argue that what underlies the

three crucial compositional attributes of Gursky's photographs are the technological innovations I mentioned in the previous section: postproduction manipulation, extremely high resolution, and extremely large prints.[20] I analyze these three aspects in turn before returning to the question of twofoldness and the aesthetic appreciation of pictures.

III

I start with the "macroscopic" aspect of Gursky's photographs: the experience we have if we are looking at his pictures from a distance. It has been often noticed that many of Gursky's photographs, if seen from a distance, look like abstract paintings. Take his *Rhine II* (1999). What one sees from a distance is a thick, gray, horizontal stripe across the picture at the middle, a thinner green one just above it, and two thicker green ones just below it, divided by another thin light green stripe. The comparison with some of Rothko's or, even more appropriately, Barnett Newman's paintings (rotated by ninety degrees) is very tempting. But Gursky's picture is, of course, a photograph of a river (the gray horizontal stripe) and its banks (the green stripes). The point is not limited to one or two of his photographs: most of them are carefully and consciously composed to be seen from a distance as an abstract picture (another clear example is his *Schwimbad Ratingen* [1987], with its striking similarity to the composition of Motherwell's paintings).

What it is important to take from this comparison is that Gursky devotes a lot of attention to the way his photographs look from a distance, that is, to the overall composition of his pictures.This composition is almost always symmetrical (or almost symmetrical), and it is very often organized around a rectangle in the middle of the picture.[21] A few examples are *Untitled V*, *Prada I* (1996), and *Prada II* (1997), where the rectangle is a row of shelves, *Paris Montparnasse* (1993) or *Avenue of Americas* (2001), where it is a large apartment building, *Untitled VI* (1997), where it is a Jackson Pollock painting, and *Toys "R" Us* (1999), where it is composed of two large buildings next to one another. This rectangle is often tilted, as in *Ruhrtal* (1989), where it is the area between the overpass and pillars holding it, or in *Schiphol* (1994), where it is the floor-to-ceiling window. And it also often has bent contours, as in *Bibliotek* (1999), *Stateville, Illinois* (2002), or *Shanghai* (2000). Although these photographs are almost symmetrical, this symmetry is never exact. There is always imbalance and counterbalance, but this is most often provided by the "microscopic" aspect of the photos, so I postpone its discussion until the next section.

Another salient aspect of Gursky's composition is repetition; most of his photographs are structured around repeated motifs: windows in *Paris Montparnasse* and *Avenue of Americas*, balconies in his *San Francisco* (1998) and *Shanghai*, prison cells in *Stateville, Illinois*, cows in *Greeley* (2002), cars in *Salerno* (1990), the lights of Los Angeles in *Los Angeles* (1999), parasols in *Rimini* (2003), roads in *Bahrain I* (2005), and people in the majority of his pieces, but the most strikingly in the Pyongyang series.

Interestingly, and conveniently for our analysis, Gursky's early photographs use exactly these compositional principles. A good example is his little-known series of security guards (*Pförtner*, 1982–1985). In each of these small-scale color photos, there are two security guards standing side by side and always behind a rectangle-shaped occluder (desk, counter, and so on).

An even more striking early Gursky piece is *Gran Canaria* (1979), a small-scale black-and-white photograph, where we can find all the important features of the large-scale compositional elements of Gursky's later work. The comparison between this small black-and-white photo and the gigantic color photographs that Gursky is famous for can help us to understand both the macroscopic and the microscopic aspects of his pictures.

Gran Canaria is a picture of a bus in front of a wall. Behind the wall, we see a row of apartment buildings (or maybe hotels). The rectangle of the bus is situated at the middle of the composition in the same way that the rectangles are situated in the middle of later Gursky compositions, and the repetition of the buildings in the background also anticipates the importance of repeated compositional elements in his later works. Finally, the picture is delicately balanced. Although its main features are symmetrical (the bus and the wall), in the background, we get the delicate imbalance and counterbalance that Gursky likes in his later compositions: the row of buildings is off-center to the left, and on the right we get the counterweight of a lamppost. Not only are all the

compositional principles present, but they are also combined in the way they will be in Gursky's later photographs. There is an almost perfect similarity between this composition and his *His Sha Tin* (1994).

The surprising similarity between the compositional principles of this small black-and-white photo and Gursky's later pictures is important for two reasons, one biographical, the other technical. First, the standard account of the influences on Gursky's art is that he comes from the objectivist and documentarist Becher school. And it is indeed true that he studied under Bernd and Hilla Becher at the Kunstakademie in Dusseldorf (together with Josef Beuys and Gerhard Richter). But that was in the early 1980s, and it seems that Gursky had already figured out how he would compose his photographs when he made *Gran Canaria*, that is, in 1979. Gursky's biographers often ignore (or fail to emphasize) those two years that Gursky spent at the Volkwangschule in Essen in the late 1970s. The Volkwangschule was led by Otto Steinert, and some have pointed out the influence Steinert's more subjectivist approach made on Gursky (bringing about creative tension with the objectivism of the Becher school), but given that Steinert died the year Gursky started his studies at the Volkwangschule, this influence may be somewhat overstated.[22] But the influence of one of Gursky's young teachers, Michael Schmidt, has not been sufficiently acknowledged. Schmidt's compositions at that time, for example, his *Berlin-Wedding* (1976), have structural features very similar to those in *Gran Canaria*. But as Schmidt's oeuvre is very clearly a continuation of the modernist black-and-white photography of the 1920s and 1930s, in the tradition of Andre Kertesz and Henri Cartier-Bresson, this places the early Gursky compositions squarely in this modernist tradition. And, as his macroscopic compositional principles do not seem to have changed since then, at least one aspect of his photographs is to be appreciated in the same way as these modernist photographs—quite ironic for a photographer who is most often referred to as "postmodern."

But what is more important from our point of view about *Gran Canaria* is not only what it shares with later Gursky photographs, but also how it differs from them. It differs from them in many ways: it is a black-and-white small photograph, taken with a Leica camera. The photos Gursky is famous for are huge and have very vivid color schemes. Nonetheless, they seem to have the same macroscopic compositional features.

And it is at this point where the new technology Gursky uses becomes not just relevant, but crucial for understanding the macroscopic composition of Gursky's photographs. It is easy to create modernist compositions with geometrical order of large expanses of homogenous areas in a small black-and-white photograph. It is not so easy in a huge, high-resolution color photograph. Take the compositional element of the monochrome light gray stripe of the top end of the wall, a horizontal thick gray line cutting across the middle of the composition in *Gran Canaria*, and compare it with the third aisle in Gursky's *99 Cent* (1999), which has the same role in the composition (a horizontal stripe at the middle of the composition cutting the picture in half). How can you use an area of high-resolution motley details as a building block for a modernist composition? This is the main challenge for Gursky's macroscopic compositions.

And Gursky's answer is postproduction manipulation. In *99 Cent*, he digitally manipulates the saturation of the colors to such a degree that the highly saturated orange and yellow colors are unreal enough to form a compositional feature that could be compared to a monochromic stripe in a black-and-white photograph in terms of its salience in an abstract composition. A piece that illustrates the importance of digital manipulation of colors (and maybe even explicitly reflects on it) is *Cans—Seurat* (2007), a photo of various soda cans stacked into a wall, as pixels of a photograph (or as the brushstrokes of Seurat's pointillist paintings). If we look at this photo from a distance, we can see an abstract composition, but what is important for our purposes is that the large-scale composition works only because the colors of the "pixels," that is, of the soda cans, are digitally manipulated: the red of the Coke and the blue of the Pepsi are much more saturated than the original color. This gives us only a small number of highly saturated colors, which then combine into a very salient abstract composition.

A more radical way in which Gursky manipulates the colors of his photographs digitally is the following. In some of his photos, he gets rid of all the hues except for one (or two). This serves the same purpose as the high saturation, namely, to allow him to compose macroscopically. Take *Shanghai* and *Kamiokande* (2007), where

the color scheme is digitally manipulated to such an extent that only one hue remains. As a result, Gursky can build up his composition as if it were a black-and-white modernist piece, as there are only the shades of this one hue that he varies.

An even more radical way of using digital manipulation for the same purpose is by piecing together the films of different pictures digitally. This is what happens in *Times Square* (1997) and *Rhine II*. In both cases, Gursky's aim was to get rid of unnecessary details so that nothing distracts from the macroscopic composition of the picture. The bottom line is that it would be very difficult to preserve Gursky's macroscopic compositional principles without the use of postproduction technology—there would be too many distracting details and colors to appreciate the modernist composition of these pictures. In this sense, postproduction manipulation is a necessary feature of the macroscopic aspect of Gursky's photographs.

IV

Gran Canaria shares the most important macroscopic features with Gursky's later photographs. But it lacks all the microscopic features that made Gursky so famous. *Gran Canaria* has no microscopic layer—no details to look at, nothing to verify or explore from close up; after all, it is a small black-and-white photo. So while the similarities with *Gran Canaria* helped us to analyze the macroscopic aspect of Gursky's later oeuvre, the differences from *Gran Canaria* help us to analyze the microscopic aspects.

There is, of course, a huge amount of detail in Gursky's photographs, and these details are not just there to distract us from the appreciation of the modernist composition from a distance. Importantly, besides being fascinating in their own right, these details often contribute to the appreciation of the macroscopic composition in important ways.

More specifically, the microscopic details are important for breaking the symmetry of the large-scale composition. As we have seen, Gursky's compositions are very often almost, but not completely, symmetrical. And the asymmetrical elements get all the more emphasis because of the overall symmetrical structure. Take some of his most symmetrical compositions, his hotel atrium photographs. In *Times Square*, *Shanghai*, and *Atlanta* (1996), the composition is almost perfectly symmetrical, just as the atriums of hotels usually are. But as a result, we pay more attention within this strictly symmetrical structure to those details that are not symmetrical. In the case of *Atlanta*, they are the janitor trolleys, which are carefully (and, as it turns out, digitally) placed at various parts of this symmetrical grid to break its monotony. In *Shanghai*, they are a woman in a wheelchair and a dog, counterbalanced by a man admiring the view.

It is clear that the only way this effect can be achieved is by increasing the resolution of the photograph. And this is the point at which the microscopic structure of Gursky's photos also relies on the use of new technology: of extreme resolution. Without that, it would not be possible to have a cable car in the middle of the picture that looks like a speck of dirt from a distance but when we get closer, we see its tiniest details. Likewise, what appears to be geometrically organized colorful dots from a distance in the *Pyongyang* series have high enough resolution so that when we get closer, they turn out to be North Korean performers, and we can even make out the smile on their faces.

But there is also another way in which the microscopic structure of Gursky's photos relies on the use of new technology. Gursky proudly exclaims in an interview that "you never notice any arbitrary details in my work," and he is right: the details of the microstructure of his pieces are never superfluous.[23] But the only way of achieving this is by using postproduction (often digital) manipulation for getting rid of the superfluous details.

For example, in *Paris, Montparnasse*, we see a large apartment building with several hundred windows. If we look at the photo from afar, we see the windows arranged, like pixels, in an interesting, abstract geometrical pattern. But if we walk close to the print, what we see in these windows is carefully arranged with the help of digital manipulation: we often see the same pieces of furniture or the same curtain in different windows, for example.[24]

An even more subtle example is Gursky's *Prada I* (1996), where we see two very long shelves with shoes on them. (*Prada III* [1998] works on the same principle.) The overall composition is very similar to *Untitled V*, where we see six long shelves of athletic shoes, but in the case of *Prada I*, there is a twist. If we look closely, we can see that the shoes

are both from the Fall and the Spring collections; therefore, they would never be displayed together. The microstructure of Gursky's photographs has all kinds of surprises in store for those who are willing to explore the details (as soccer fans could confirm in the case of *EM Arena I* [2000] and *EM Arena II* [2000]). And this is achieved by the digital manipulation of these details.[25]

v

We have seen how important both the macroscopic and the microscopic aspects of Gursky's photographs are, and we have also seen that they are both intimately connected with the new technology Gursky uses: postproduction (often digital) manipulation and high resolution. The question I now turn to is how these two aspects of Gursky's pictures combine.

Gursky himself says that in his photographs, "interrelated micro and macrostructures are woven together, determined by an overall organizational principle."[26] This is true in some sense but very misleading in another. It is true that the microscopic and the macroscopic compositions are carefully crafted to work together. But this slogan is also misleading inasmuch as we can never see the microstructures and the macrostructures at the same time. In fact, it is an important feature of Gursky's work that our experience of the microstructures and that of the macrostructures is supposed to alternate.

When we are looking at a Gursky print from a distance, this view is rarely satisfying: we feel the urge to get closer to the print.[27] This may happen for a variety of reasons. Most often, we have no idea what we are looking at. We see a geometric composition of pretty colors, vaguely along the lines of the compositional principles of modernist photographs, but we have little or no idea what this is a photograph of. So we walk closer to the print and check. In some other instances, the reason why we may feel the urge to walk closer is because although we do recognize what the detail is, we want to see it more clearly: we see that there are soccer players in *EM Arena I* and *EM Arena II*, but we may want to know which teams are playing or who the players are. So we walk all the way to the print to check these details. Then we walk back to take in the full composition, having figured out the details. Then we notice a further detail, walk closer again, and so on.

This aspect of the appreciation of Gursky's work is clearly only possible because of the large scale of the prints. If the prints were smaller, we could take in both the microstructure and the macrostructure from the same vantage point. The size of the prints makes us realize, because of all the walking back and forth, the difference between the vantage point that is appropriate for appreciating the microstructure and the one that is appropriate for appreciating the macrostructure.

To sum up, Gursky's photographs rely on the new technology in three ways: the appreciation of the macrostructure relies on postproduction manipulation, the appreciation of the microstructure on both high resolution and digital manipulation, and the appreciation of the relation between the two on the extreme size of the prints.

A last important aspect of the appreciation of the relation between the microstructure and the macrostructure of Gursky's photographs needs to be mentioned. We have seen that we can never see the microstructures and the macrostructures at the same time. In fact, it is an important feature of Gursky's work that our experience of the microstructures and that of the macrostructures is supposed to alternate. This aspect of Gursky's photographs is especially important in the light of the current debate in contemporary analytic aesthetics about the appreciation of pictures, a debate to which I now turn.

vi

We have seen above that a seemingly obvious concept that we could use for describing the duality of the macro- and the microlevel in Gursky's work is the concept of twofoldness. I want to argue now that things are much more complicated. In fact, Gursky's photographs help us to understand how complex and varied twofold pictorial experiences can be.

In order to show this, I want to connect the contemporary discussion about the appreciation of pictures with a much older one that comes from Heinrich Wölfflin. Wölfflin argued that one important shift from the linear style of the sixteenth century to the painterly style of the seventeenth century is that the appropriate way of looking at the picture has changed: while the linear style presupposed that the viewer alternated her viewpoint, the painterly style of the following

century was working with one unified viewpoint only. As Wölfflin summarizes:

> The distance required for distinct seeing is relative: different things demand different vicinities of the eye. In one and the same form-complex, totally different problems may be presented to the eye. For instance, we see the forms of a head quite distinctly, but the pattern of the lace collar beneath it requires closer approach, or at least, a special adjustment of the eye if its forms are to become distinct. . . . The demand for unified visual perception is radically non-existent for this type of [linear] art.[28]

Wölfflin uses Holbein's paintings as examples for this nonunified way of seeing and contrasts them with the portraits of Frans Hals, who, rather than painting the most exquisite details of objects in the background, uses just one carefully executed brushstroke that nonetheless looks appropriate from where the portraits are to be looked at.

It is crucial to note that the distinction Wölfflin talks about and the one about twofoldness are not the same. The debate about twofoldness is about whether we are simultaneously aware of both the depicted object and the design features of the picture surface: the brushstrokes, for example. Wölfflin's distinction has nothing to do with the design features of the picture surface. It is about our awareness of different depicted objects in the picture—and whether we can be aware of their details simultaneously.

It must be clear that Gursky's photos provide an extreme example for what Wölfflin means by the perceptual engagement required by the linear style: the appreciation of different features of these works require different vantage points, just as the appreciation of Holbein's paintings (that Wölfflin uses as the example for the linear style in this context) requires different vantage points. Gursky is very much a "linear" photographer.

The question is how these two different ways of appreciating Gursky's photos relate to one another. And here we need to go back to the twofoldness debate. When we look at these photos from afar, the microstructure is part of the design features of the surface, which makes it possible for us to see the macrostructure in the picture. But if we look at the picture close up, the very same details are what are depicted in the photograph. They serve both as the design features and as depicted objects. And this amounts to an unusual form of twofold experience.

Remember, according to the original concept of twofoldness, we are simultaneously aware of both the depicted object and the design features of the surface that make it possible for us to see the depicted object. This is the simultaneous awareness of two different entities: depicted object and design. In the case of Gursky's photographs, in contrast, we simultaneously see the very same pictorial elements, the microstructure, as both design features (as seen from afar) and depicted objects (as seen close up).

Gursky is, of course, not the first person in art history who utilized this special case of twofold experience in appreciating pictures. Another obvious example would be Giuseppe Arcimboldo, whose portraits work in a similar way: we see the fruit both as the depicted object and as the design feature that make it possible for us to see the portrait. Although Arcimboldo is the best-known representative of this way of composing pictures, the so-called "anthropomorphic landscapes" were very widespread from the second half of the sixteenth century, especially in the Low Countries.[29] In these paintings, we see the objects in the picture in two ways: both as various elements of the landscape—cows, walls, shrubbery—and as parts of a human face—eyes, nose, beard. In other words, we see them both as depicted objects (in the landscape) and as design features that make it possible for us to see a human face in the picture.

Gursky, somewhat surprisingly, falls into this tradition, as far as the use of twofoldness is concerned. But what is unique about Gursky's use of this form of twofoldness is that because of the large size of the photographs, it relies on the alternation of one's attention (and as a result, of one's vantage point) to bring about this twofold experience. If we are looking at an Arcimboldo painting, we can switch back and forth between seeing a fruit basket and seeing a face merely by shifting our attention. In the case of Gursky's photographs, this requires moving closer to and away from the print.

In this respect, Gursky's photographs are somewhat similar to Anselm Kiefer's paintings. Some of Kiefer's large-format pieces work on the very same principle as Gursky's large-format photographs. You have to go to the other end of the hall in order to have a chance to take in the

overall composition, whereas the details, which, in the case of Kiefer, often mean various objects stuck in the paint, are only visible if one walks back to the painting to have a closer look. We see these objects both as parts of the microstructure of Kiefer's pieces and as the design features that make it possible for us to see the macrostructure. (It would be very interesting to have a thorough comparative analysis of Gursky's and Kiefer's compositional methods, especially in the light of the fact that they were both students at the Dusseldorf Kunstakademie.)

In short, Gursky's photos provide an elegant demonstration of instances where both Gombrich and Wollheim are partially right about the appreciation of pictures. Wollheim is right because this experience is a twofold one: we are simultaneously aware of both the macrofeatures and the microfeatures. But, and here is the twist, this twofold experience is not the awareness of two different entities: the depicted object and the design features that make it possible for us to see this depicted object in the picture. It is the awareness of the very same pictorial elements, namely, the microstructure, as both depicted objects and as design features that make the perception of the macrofeatures possible. Importantly, we would be missing out on a crucial feature of these photos if we were not aware of the microfeatures when appreciating the macrofeatures and vice versa.

At the same time, just as Gombrich says, we cannot be fully aware of both simultaneously because we cannot be both ten yards away from the print and a couple of feet away from it at the same time. Our attention and, because of the large size of the prints, our spatial position need to alternate. Gursky's photographs show how unusual and varied the uses of twofold pictorial experiences can be.

BENCE NANAY
Department of Philosophy
University of Antwerp
2000 Antwerp, Belgium

and

Department of Philosophy
Peterhouse, University of Cambridge
Cambridge, CB2 1RD, UK

INTERNET: bence.nanay@ua.ac.be

1. Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (MIT Press, 2004), p. 71.

2. Noë, *Action in Perception*, "Pictures and Mind," chap. 2, pp. 35–74; see also the papers in the "grand illusion" special issue of *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 9 (2002), issue 5–6.

3. Alva Noë, "Experience without the Head," in *Perceptual Experience*, ed. Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 411–434, at p. 419.

4. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History* (New York: Dover, 1915), p. 46.

5. Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, p. 45.

6. Katy Siegel, "Consuming Vision," *ArtForum* 39 (2001): 104–108. A similar, but more nuanced version of this claim is also made in Gregg Horowitz, "Photoshop, or, Unhandling Art," in *Action, Art, History: Engagements with Arthur C. Danto*, ed. Daniel Herwitz and Michael Kelly (Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 82–102.

7. Michael Krajewski, "Kollektive Sehnsuchtsbilder: Andreas Gursky im Gespräch mit Michael Krajewski," *Das Bulletin* 5 (1999): 8–15, at p. 14.

8. Supposedly, the idea of consumerism; see Siegel, "Consuming Vision," p. 105.

9. Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton University Press, 1987); Richard Wollheim, "On Pictorial Representation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 217–226; John Armstrong, "Non-depicted Content and Pictorial Ambition," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 37 (1997): 336–348; Bence Nanay, "Narrative Pictures," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67 (2009): 119–129.

10. See Alix Ohlin, "Andreas Gursky and the Contemporary Sublime," *Art Journal* 61 (2002): 22–35, for a version of this argument; for some objections, see Jacinto Lageira, "Andreas Gursky: A Hellish World," *Parachute: Contemporary Art Magazine* 110 (2003): 56–75, and Siegel, "Consuming Vision."

11. One representative example is Alex Alberro, "Blind Ambition," *ArtForum* 39 (2001): 109–114, who argues that while Gursky in his early work was fighting globalization, he later betrayed this cause and just wanted to make pretty pictures.

12. Krajewski, "Kollektive Sehnsuchtsbilder," p. 15.

13. Veit Görner, "...I Generally Let Things Develop Slowly," in his *Andreas Gursky: Fotografien 1984–1998* (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum, 1998), pp. vii–x, at p. viii.

14. On this distinction, see Jerrold Levinson, "Wollheim on Pictorial Representation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 227–233; Bence Nanay, "Is Twofoldness Necessary for Representational Seeing?" *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 45 (2005): 263–272; and Bence Nanay, "Inflected and Uninflected Experience of Pictures," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Depiction*, ed. Catharine Abell and Katarina Bantinaki (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 181–207.

15. Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, 1961).

16. Richard Wollheim, "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation," in his *Art and Its Object*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 205–226; Wollheim, *Painting as an Art;* Wollheim, "On Pictorial Representation"; Bence Nanay, "Taking Twofoldness Seriously: Walton on

Imagination and Depiction," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62 (2004): 285–289; Nanay, "Is Twofoldness Necessary for Representational Seeing?"; and Bence Nanay, "Picture Perception," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 10 (2011): 461–480. See also Dominic McIver Lopes, *Understanding Pictures* (Oxford University Press, 1996); and Dominic McIver Lopes, *Sight and Sensibility* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

17. A recently popular way of putting this is to say that our experience of the picture is inflected. See Michael Podro, "Depiction and the Golden Calf," in *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 163–189; Michael Podro, *Depiction* (Harvard University Press, 1998); Lopes, *Sight and Sensibility*; Robert Hopkins, "Inflected Pictorial Experience: Its Treatment and Significance," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Depiction*, pp. 151–180; and Nanay, "Inflected and Uninflected Experience of Pictures."

18. Wollheim, "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation," pp. 214–215.

19. Lopes, *Sight and Sensibility*, "The Puzzle of Mimesis," pp. 20–48.

20. It is worth noting that these "innovations" are not particularly original or radical, especially if we compare them with some more recent attempts to use technological innovations in photography, such as Olivier Buchet's mold-eaten diapositives.

21. Interestingly, these compositional principles are very similar to those of a contemporary of Gursky's, Thomas Struth, who also studied under Bernd and Hilla Becher in Düsseldorf (but a bit earlier than Gursky). In the case of Struth's photographs, the central rectangle is very often a painting in a museum, surrounded by visitors. It is surprising that no systematic comparison has been made between Gursky's and Struth's compositions—especially given the importance of high-resolution large prints in both cases.

22. Notably, Peter Galassi, *Gursky's World* (New York: MoMA, 2001) pp. 6–9, at p. 6.

23. Görner, "I Generally Let Things Develop Slowly," p. viii.

24. See Siegel's "Consuming Vision" for an analysis of the relevance of this.

25. An interesting comparison here is Alexander Apóstol, who also often digitally manipulates his photographs and who also seems to be aiming at the recreation of a version of modernist aesthetics. But while Gursky manipulates the details, Apóstol removes them: in his most famous series, he digitally erases all the windows and doors of 1950s modernist buildings of Caracas.

26. Görner, "I Generally Let Things Develop Slowly," p. viii.

27. Siegel, "Consuming Vision," makes a similar point.

28. Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, p. 22.

29. See *The Archimboldo Effect: Transformations of the Face from the 16th to the 20th Century,* ed. Pontus Hultén (Milan: Bompiani, 1987), for a good summary of the development of this subgenre.