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## Photographic Art: An Ontology Fit to Print

A common, indeed standard, art-ontological position is that repeatable artworks are abstract objects with multiple concrete instances.<sup>1</sup> Since artworks in the medium of photography are widely thought to be repeatable works, it seems reasonable to identify them with abstract objects. I argue, however, that identifying photographic artworks with abstracta mistakenly ignores photography's printmaking genealogy, specifically its ontological inheritance. The products of printmaking media (*prints*) must be construed in a manner consistent with basic print ontology. Since the most plausible ontology of prints is nominalist, photographic artworks should be construed not as abstracta but as individual and distinct concreta. So if photography ought to inherit basic print ontology, then insofar as photographic artworks are photographs, the correct ontology of photographic art is also nominalist—it treats photographic artworks as individual and distinct concrete artworks.<sup>2</sup>

### I. PHOTOGRAPHIC ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY ON THE REPEATABILITY MODEL

I take the standard model of repeatable work ontology, broadly construed, to be as follows: for a work to be a repeatable work, that work must be a multiply instantiable abstract object. More precisely, that work must be an abstract object (that is, a nonphysical type, individual, or particular necessarily lacking spatial, if not also temporal, location) that, in principle at least, has multiple instances (copies, tokens, embodiments), each of which is a concrete object (that is, a physical object necessarily possessing spatiotemporal location).<sup>3</sup> So described, the repeatable work model ought to be sufficiently narrow to support the substantive philosophical discussion to come but also

sufficiently broad to capture a variety of disparate, robust art-ontological views about the nature of repeatable artworks, of which photographic art is at least standardly assumed to be a part.

Given the repeatable work model, if photographic artworks are standardly repeatable, then photographic artworks are standardly multiply instantiable art-abstracta.<sup>4</sup> For example, if Sean Scully's *Deptford Blue Door* (1999) names a work of photographic art, then *Deptford Blue Door* names an art-abstractum for which there can be, and in fact are, multiple (full, proper, authentic, Scully-sanctioned or editioned) concrete instances. It follows that the physical object displayed in the art gallery, archived in the wealthy collector's flat file, or tacked to the wall of Scully's studio is not itself the artwork *Deptford Blue Door*, but merely a concrete instance of that photographic artwork. Moreover, the destruction of one of these instances does not itself constitute the destruction of *Deptford Blue Door*—vandalizing the concrete instance on display in Galeria Bernd Klüser can no more damage or destroy *Deptford Blue Door* than can dog-eating the book sitting on my shelf damage the literary work *Moby Dick*. The destruction of an instance of *Deptford Blue Door* fails to constitute a metaphysical loss with respect to *Deptford Blue Door*, the photographic artwork.<sup>5</sup>

While this model nicely conforms to general intuitions about repeatable works imported from other repeatable work domains, it fails to tell us exactly why we should think that the standard repeatable work ontology is a good model for photographic art. What exactly about the nature of photographic art makes the model suitable for photography? One obvious source of support is what I call the *inheritance principle for*

*photographic art*, which I take to be as follows: if *being a photographic artwork* entails *being a photograph*, then photographic artworks should be of the same ontic kind as photographs. Of course, this claims only that the general ontological model for photographs, whatever it is, also applies to photographic artworks. So, should one accept the standard repeatable work ontology for photographic art and also endorse the inheritance principle for photographic art, one must also accept standard repeatable work ontology for photographs. The principal question then becomes whether photographic ontology can plausibly be viewed in terms of the standard model for repeatable works—photographic art’s ontological inheritance depends on the answer.

Obviously, anyone endorsing the inheritance principle for photographic art alongside the repeatable work model for photographs should unsurprisingly arrive at the repeatable work model for photographic artworks. After all, if photographic artworks are photographs, then if photographic prints are not themselves photographs but merely instances of photographs, then photographic prints are not themselves photographic artworks. For instance, if the object hanging on the gallery wall is a photographic print of Robert Mapplethorpe’s *Tulips* (1979), then that object is not a photographic artwork—it is not even a photograph—but merely a non-art instance of the photograph that *Tulips* names, and it is this photograph and not its instances that is the photographic artwork.

Moreover, once we suppose that the standard repeatable work model is correct, it unsurprisingly follows that the principal ontological debate becomes one between various competing views of abstracta and their corresponding existence, identity, and individuation conditions. While some customizations may look more promising than others, anyone embracing repeatable work ontology for photographs would find that the standard model for *Tulips* at least has the same general structure as the standard model for *Moby Dick*, *The Wasteland*, and the *Eroica*, and so they would find photographic works to be no stranger sort of object than literary or musical works (that is, novels, poems, symphonies, and so on—and photographs). Any further ontological debate involves competing robust models united in their assumption that repeatability tracks multiply instantiable abstracta. For example, while Saul

Bellow’s *Herzog*, Sergei Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 2, Akira Kurosawa’s *Ran*, and Marilyn Minter’s *Prism* may be radically divergent objects at the level of their particulars, insofar as novels, concertos, films, and photographs are repeatable works as standardly conceived, all belong to the same general ontic kind.

The above should provide a rough yet informative characterization both of the standard ontological terrain with respect to repeatable works as well as the scope and limits of photographic ontology taken to be contained therein. In the next section, I provide an alternative ontological model for photography also derived from an ontological inheritance principle, not between photographic art and photography, but instead between photography and printmaking.

## II. PRINTMAKING AND PHOTOGRAPHY ON THE RELEVANT SIMILARITY MODEL

The standard repeatable work model for photography derives the bulk of its *prima facie* plausibility from an implicit and illicit ontological bootstrapping. Construing photographs according to the standard repeatable work model makes sense only in a selectively backward direction—first endorsing the inheritance principle for photographic *art* and then working backward from photographic art to photography. There is, however, another starting point from which we can proceed in a forward rather than backward fashion. I propose another inheritance principle, according to which photography ought to inherit basic print ontology.

Basic print ontology, I claim, is nominalist—the works of printmaking (that is, the products of printmaking forms, processes, or techniques) are concrete, individual, and distinct prints. So, given that photography is a form of printmaking, no less so than other printmaking forms (for example, intaglio, lithography, relief printing, aquatint, silkscreen, sugar lift, gum printing, and the like), *being a photograph entails being a print*. Just as a lithograph is the print product for lithography, a photograph is the print product for photography (that is, the print product of photographic processes). From this, it follows that photography ought to inherit basic print ontology, and so photographic ontology is nominalist—works of photography are concrete, individual, and distinct photographs. If being a photographic artwork entails being a photograph, then photographic art

should inherit photographic ontology, and so the ontology of photographic artworks is also nominalist—works of photographic art are concrete, individual, and distinct photographic artworks.

To be a print is to be the individual and distinct concrete product of a printmaking process (typically operating over a template and onto a support). Furthermore, prints are characterized according to and have their character largely determined by the processes of which they are the products (for example, a lithograph is the print product of the printmaking process known as lithography, a screen print is the print product of the printmaking process known as screen printing, and so on). Most importantly, being a print itself entails neither being a copy nor being a reproduction. That is, prints are individual, distinct works, and this fact nevertheless remains consistent across the vast majority of printmaking processes, save the varieties of monotyping, being capable of producing multiple (what I call) *relevantly similar prints*.

Much of my project depends on my ability to capture intuitions about the putative repeatability of photography without having to construe photographs as multiply instantiable abstracta. To this end, I employ the following notion of relevant similarity: two prints are relevantly similar to each other if and only if they share all constitutive appreciable properties in common in virtue of sharing a causal history. Prints share a causal history if and only if they are printed from the same template (for example, a particular etched copper plate), by the same process (for example, intaglio), onto the same support (for example, paper).<sup>6</sup> Note that the relevant similarity relation is not a stand-in for the tokening-the-same-type relation. Viewing it as such misses the point. While standard repeatable work ontology posits types as abstract objects, of which concrete objects can be tokens, appeal to relevant similarity models the repeatable aspects of printmaking without entailing a corresponding increase in the number of objects posited. To be sure, one may continue to posit abstracta, of which concrete prints may be instances; however, positing such abstracta is not implied by the basic print ontology itself. Insofar as basic printmaking ontology is concerned, there need be no such thing as an abstract object.

In order to move forward toward photographic artworks, we can simply appeal to yet another equally evident inheritance principle, namely, one

between prints and photographs. According to the inheritance principle for photography, if being a photograph entails being a print, then photography should simply inherit the basic print ontology. From this, we can extend basic print ontology to photography.

A print is the individual and distinct concrete product of a printmaking process to which other individual and distinct concrete products of that printmaking process may be relevantly similar. Of course, not all printmaking processes produce multiple relevantly similar prints—some simply cannot, while others by design do not. For instance, in monotyping, the pressure required to transfer the image from the template onto the support destroys the image on the template, so that to be the product of such a process (a monotype) is to be a print to which no other print can be relevantly similar. Other processes, though capable at least in principle of producing multiple relevantly similar prints, are designed to produce multiple *unique* prints. For instance, in monoprinting, the ink is manipulated in each successive printing from the same (unaltered) template so as to produce a unique edition of prints (an edition of unique prints). To be the product of such a process (a monoprint) is to be a print to which (ceteris paribus) no other print, even those within that unique edition, is relevantly similar. Repeatability in printmaking seems to require printmaking processes that are able, if not also designed, to yield multiple relevantly similar prints.

Given the inheritance principle for photography, it follows that a photograph is the individual and distinct concrete print product of a photographic process (that is, the printmaking process of photography) to which other individual and distinct concrete print products of that printmaking process may be relevantly similar. Of course, not all photographic processes produce multiple relevantly similar photographs—some simply cannot, others by design do not. For instance, daguerreotyping allows for no direct transfer of the photographic image onto another light-sensitive medium—to be the product of such a process (a daguerreotype) is to be a photograph to which no other photograph can be relevantly similar. Other photographic processes, though capable at least in principle of producing multiple relevantly similar photographs, are designed to produce multiple *unique* photographs. For example, while instant cameras are designed to produce unique

photographs, the photographic processes they employ are capable at least in principle of producing multiple relevantly similar photographs (that is, typically involving film negatives that, while quite difficult to isolate and effectively extract, with or without destroying the photographic print, could nevertheless in principle be used to produce multiple relevantly similar photographs). To be the product of such a photographic process (a Polaroid) is to be a photograph to which (*ceteris paribus*) no other photograph is relevantly similar—though there could in principle be such photographs. Repeatability in photography seems to require photographic processes that are able, if not also designed, to yield multiple relevantly similar photographic prints. So, if the consequence of extending basic print ontology to photography is that to be a photograph *just is* to be a photographic print, then it follows that capturing repeatability for photography, just as for printmaking, does not require positing some further object (that is, some abstractum), but instead requires nothing more than relevant similarity.<sup>7</sup>

### III. AN INCONSISTENT SET AND THE PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY OPTION

Consider the following set of claims:

*Repeatable work model of photographic art:* photographic artworks are multiply instantiable art-abstracta, whose instances are concreta.

*Inheritance principle for photographic art:* photographic art inherits basic photographic ontology: being a photographic artwork entails being a photograph, so photographic artworks belong to the same ontic kind as photographs.

*Inheritance principle for photography:* photography inherits basic print ontology: being a photograph entails being a print, so photographs belong to the same ontic kind as prints.

*Basic print ontology:* a print is the individual and distinct concrete product of a printmaking process to which other individual and distinct concrete products of that printmaking process may be relevantly similar.

Each of the above claims, when considered alone, appears *prima facie* plausible; however, when taken together, they form an inconsistent set from which only contradiction and absurdity can emerge.

To help illustrate this, assume that there could be some object that is a photographic artwork (that is, a photograph that satisfies the conditions for being art, whatever those may be). From the above, it then follows that there could be some object that is (1) both an abstract object and a concrete object, (2) both a print and not a print, (3) both a photograph and not a photograph, and (4) both a photographic artwork and not a photographic artwork. Obviously, there could be no such object. So, from the assumption that there could be photographic artworks, it follows that there could not be photographic artworks. Clearly the above set of claims is an inconsistent set, and so any view endorsing all of its member claims is *ipso facto* incoherent.

Given the above, our principal focus ought to be on determining which of the member claims we must abandon so as to resolve the inconsistency. My own position is that any minimally adequate analysis of the notion of *photographic art* must be consistent with the relatively uncontroversial content contained in basic print ontology and the inheritance principle for both photography and photographic art. That is, I take the truth of basic print ontology along with that of both inheritance principles to be *prima facie* evident, so the only sensible thing to do is to reject the repeatable work model for photographic art. However, what matters for present purposes is that any competing view endorsing the repeatable work model for photographic art must find a plausible way to deny basic print ontology, the inheritance principle for photography, or the inheritance principle for photographic art.

In denying basic print ontology, one might accept both inheritance principles but claim that what provides the correct account of basic print ontology is not my relevant similarity model, but rather the standard repeatable work model, thereby rejecting the nominalist construal of photographic ontology all the way up. On this move, the principal problem lies not with construing photographic artworks as abstracta according to the standard repeatable work model, but instead with the nominalist construal of the ontology of printmaking according to my relevant similarity model. So, by denying the latter, we preserve the former in a manner that is consistent with both inheritance principles.

The trouble with this is that the standard repeatable work model for both photography and

photographic art implicitly entails basic print ontology as I have described it. The work required of photographic prints (that is, qua instances full, proper, or authentic) in the repeatable work model of photographs and photographic artworks can only be done if the ontological model for photographic prints supports a nominalist construal. So, if the standard repeatable work model for photographic art makes sense only insofar as it implies that photographic prints are concrete objects, then rejecting the nominalist construal of basic print ontology means rejecting the standard repeatable work model for photographic art (only to replace it with some model best described as wholly *sui generis*). For the standard repeatable work ontology to be even *prima facie* plausible for photographic art, basic print ontology must be nominalist. Insofar as preserving the repeatable work model for photographic art is concerned, denying basic print ontology is no better than unconditionally endorsing basic print ontology. Of course, this all assumes that it is possible to deny basic print ontology without a direct and wholesale indictment of the standard practices and conventions governing the world of printmaking.

Should one wisely agree that any account of printmaking ontology must remain nominalist, one could nevertheless deny the inheritance principle for photography. That is, one might simply reject the claim that photography is a subspecies of printmaking so as to deny that photographs are prints. This would allow one to claim that there is no ontological inheritance from printmaking to photography, and that preserves the repeatable work model for photographic art by halting the nominalist move upward toward photographic art at the printmaking level.

Denying the inheritance principle for photography also threatens to indict the entirety of photographic practice and convention—the cost of preserving the repeatable work model for photography is radical revisionism. Anyone denying the inheritance principle for photography must somehow find a coherent way to predicate photographic conventions and practices on something other than photography's printmaking genealogy. They must also construct a rather daunting sort of error theory that explains how the vast majority of the relevant folk (that is, artists, photographers, printmakers, buyers, brokers, insurers, collectors, museum curators, gallery owners, and so on) have all been the unwitting victims of a massive refer-

ence failure of such unprecedented scale and altogether devastating impact, not only for substantial parts of the worlds of art and printmaking, but also for the world of photography as a whole.

In order to minimize conflict with the photography and printmaking worlds, one might instead choose to deny the inheritance principle for photographic art. That is, one could argue that art-ontological concerns need not piggyback upon those of more mundane or ordinary things, and we need not suppose that photographic art must have the bulk, let alone the entirety, of its ontological inheritance determined at the level of the ordinary photograph. On this view, our expectations ought to be that the most plausible ontology of photographic artworks may not, all things considered, simply carry over from ordinary photographic ontology. So, even though we might perhaps pretheoretically regard the inheritance principle for photographic art as true, we certainly should not continue to hold it in such high esteem. If, after endorsing basic print ontology and the inheritance principle for photography, a tension remains, then our art-theoretic concerns demand that we sacrifice the inheritance principle for photographic art so as to preserve the repeatable work model for photographic art. Sometimes doing our best to preserve our art-ontological commitments requires that at certain joints the artworld sharply break with the world of non-art.

As a consequence, absent endorsing a wholesale eliminativist position with respect to photographic art, denying the inheritance principle for photographic art seems to require revising the notion of *photographic artwork*. That is, in order to coherently deny the inheritance principle for photographic art, one must revise the notion of photographic art, such that an object's being a photographic artwork no longer entails that object's being a photograph (that is, that for an object to be a photographic artwork that object need no longer be a photograph at all, let alone a photograph that satisfies the conditions for being an artwork, whatever those may be). To help illustrate this, consider the following analysis of the notion of photographic art: for an object to be a photographic artwork is for that object (1) to satisfy the conditions for being an artwork (whatever those may be), (2) to be a multiply instantiable abstract object, and (3) to bear certain salient relations to photographs (for example, requiring its instances to be photographs themselves or, more

weakly, requiring its instances to at least share certain salient features in common with photographs, though such instances need not themselves be photographs).

On such a view, the ontology of photographic art must be largely, if not exclusively, informed, shaped, determined, and constrained by artistic considerations rather than photographic ones. Given the largely, if not exclusively, mundane and ordinary non-art considerations motivating the ontology of photographs, the ontology of photographic art cannot simply be a matter of an ontological inheritance from mundane, ordinary non-art photographs precisely because photographic artworks are ontically distinct from mundane, ordinary non-art works of photography. Just as we need not suppose that Gerrit Rietveld's *Red and Blue Chair* (1917) is an object of the same ontic sort as a mundane, ordinary non-art chair, we likewise need not regard Andres Serrano's photographic artwork *Heaven and Hell* (1984) as the same ontic sort as the mundane, ordinary non-art photographs of Uncle Joe's skiing holiday.<sup>8</sup> Just as many take De Stijl or Bauhaus design and manufacture to be substantively distinct from their ordinary craft kin, perhaps we also ought to expect their respective products to reflect that distinction *ontically*. So, if the inheritance principle for photographic art must be false for the repeatable work model for photographic art to be plausibly preserved, then we ought to deny the inheritance principle for photographic art.

The problem should be obvious. Any claim entailing the denial of the inheritance principle for photographic art can be coherent, intuitive, plausible, and substantive only insofar it entails a notion of photographic art that is itself coherent, intuitive, plausible, and substantive (at least *ceteris paribus* more so than the prima facie evident notion of photographic art entailed by the inheritance principle for photographic art). Moreover, denying the inheritance principle for photographic art, though consistent with there being photographs that instance photographic artworks, nevertheless entails that objects in the extension of *photograph* cannot be in the extension of *photographic artwork* (and vice versa)—if photographs are concreta and photographic artworks are abstracta, then there can be no photograph that is itself a photographic artwork. A rather strange result of this is that being a photograph and being photographic art must be mutually exclusive

properties even though what it is to be a photographic artwork has to do with what it is to be a photograph (presumably being a photographic artwork does not entail being a photograph but rather being photograph-like). That means explaining how photographs and photographic artworks are similar enough to ground a coherent, intuitive, plausible, and substantive notion of photographic art and yet are different enough to be ontically distinct (and rather acutely so at that). Without such an explanation, invoking some sort of art-ontological privilege in defense of the repeatable work model for photographic art is virulently ad hoc.

Notice that even if one were able to find a coherent way to preserve the repeatable work model for photographic art while withholding as to the rest, this would still require neutrality with respect to the ontology of photography and printmaking. Any account of photographic art can be informative and productive only given a well-specified account of photography and printmaking capable of settling the relevant issues for photographic art and its various relata. This requires a well-specified ontology for photography and printmaking, according to which the salient features of concrete (causal, physical) works of photography can be shared with abstract (noncausal, nonphysical) works of art to any degree, let alone to the degree minimally sufficient for responsibly and meaningfully referring to photographic artworks as photographic in the first place.

Preserving the repeatable work model for photographic art appears to require some level of purchase in at least one of following three wildly implausible, if not evidently false, claims: (1) there are no (can be no) photographic artworks, (2) prints are not (cannot be) concrete objects, or (3) photographs are not (cannot be) prints. So, barring a compelling argument as to why we ought to think photographic artworks (photographic art) and photographs (photography) are sufficiently dissimilar to ground the radical distinction in ontic kind, adopting the standard repeatable work model for the ontology of photographic artworks appears to be nothing short of an abject failure. Just consider the implausibility of the very same move applied to the art products of other printmaking processes such as lithography. For instance, being a lithographic artwork (for example, Bruce Nauman's *No* (1981), Claes Oldenburg's *Shuttlecock on a High Wire* (1995),

and Kiki Smith's *Litter* (1999)) entails being a lithograph that satisfies the conditions for being art. To claim either that lithographic artworks are not lithographs or that even though lithographs may be artworks, no such lithograph may be a lithographic artwork just seems patently absurd—so too for photography, photograph, and photographic artwork.

The only plausible model for the ontology of photographic art is the only plausible model for the ontology of photography and is the only plausible model for the ontology of printmaking. That model is the nominalist relevant similarity model, according to which photographic artworks, photographs, and prints are concrete objects to which other concrete objects may be relevantly similar. Ultimately, the reason that the standard repeatable work model cannot but fail is that the putative repeatability of photographic art is, upon closer inspection, nothing but the relevant similarity relation between prints.<sup>9</sup>

#### IV. RELEVANT SIMILARITY AND MAKING SENSE OF "PHOTOGRAPH"

One of the primary motivations for adopting the standard repeatable work model is that construing putatively repeatable works as abstracta better jibes with how we talk about such works—unless they are so construed, we could not plausibly hope to fully and coherently capture the substantive semantic, linguistic, conventional, and practical distinctions at play. For example, when you and I both claim to have heard Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, read *Moby Dick*, or seen Mapplethorpe's *Tulips*, we are not claiming to share a relation to the same physical object. Rather, we are both claiming to have accessed the same work in virtue of having stood in some relation or other to one of that work's proper instances. Most importantly, the instance in your case need not be the very same instance in my case; that is, we are not claiming to have heard the very same performance (Tuesday's), to have visually scanned the very same book (the library's), or to have looked at the very same photographic print (the Whitney's). The standard view then is that any nominalist account, which does without abstracta, fails to capture the putative repeatability of certain sorts of works without radical semantic revision accompanied by a rather hefty error theory. In what follows, I suggest a few ways in

which my relevant similarity model can address such issues, trusting these few to be sufficiently indicative of a more general program from which any such semantic worry could be satisfactorily diffused.

Presumably, most speakers (at least of English) employ the word 'photograph' in a variety of ways, some more precise than others. That said, while I do think that the nonprofessional laity use 'photograph' to pick out the photographic film in some cases, the photographic print in other cases, and the photographic image in yet other cases, I also think that any perceived semantic imprecision or reference confusion can be dispelled rather quickly by applying certain basic clarifications.<sup>10</sup> For example, consider the following utterances:

(A1) I have several photographs of Gina, all of which are different.

(A2) I have several photographs of Gina, all of which are the same.

I take 'having a photograph' standardly equivalent to 'having a photographic print,' and as such, the less precise 'I have several photographs of Gina' typically ought to lie somewhere between the following more precise readings of (A1) and (A2):

(A1\*) I have several photographic prints, each of which features a photographic image of Gina distinct from that featured by any other of those photographic prints.

(A2\*) I have several photographic prints, each of which features the same photographic image of Gina indistinct from that featured by any other of those photographic prints.

By contrast, consider the following utterances:

(B1) I took several photographs of George, all of which are different.

(B2) I took several photographs of George, all of which are the same.

I assume here that 'taking a photograph' standardly indicates performing a certain relevant action (for example, tripping a camera's shutter release) initiating a certain relevant process (for example, photochemical, photoelectrical) over a certain relevant base (for example, film, plate, file), onto which some (latent or visible) image

is thereby produced (or encoded) and from which further certain relevant products may subsequently be developed or processed (for example, negatives, prints, slides, and so on). Given this, (B1) and (B2) (in an appropriately broad and narrow fashion, respectively) can be more precisely read as the following:

(B1\*) I performed either several relevant actions (varying angle, light, focus, and so on) or the same relevant action several times over either the same subject (for example, George standing still) or a varying subject (for example, George doing cartwheels) such that each of the several resultant photographic films featured a photographic image of George distinct from that featured by any other.

(B2\*) I performed the same relevant action several times over the same subject such that each of the several resultant photographic films featured a photographic image of George indistinct from that featured by any other.

With the above albeit brief and rudimentary analysis, we can diffuse potential problems with what at first blush may appear to be some challenging sorts of cases. For example, consider the following utterances:

(C1) I discovered that the glass negatives, for which I paid twenty dollars at a yard sale last week, are in fact early Ansel Adams photographs worth in excess of a million dollars.

(C2) On Tuesday, I dropped off my vacation photographs at the drugstore, so I should pick them up on Friday.

Presumably, the speaker in (C1) is neither asserting some nuanced view about negatives as a sub-species of photograph nor expressing delight that the otherwise worthless glass negatives somehow magically transformed themselves into fantastically expensive photographs. Instead, I take the more precise reading to be:

(C1\*) I discovered that the glass negatives, for which I paid twenty dollars at a yard sale last week, are in fact the result of Ansel Adams having, early in his career, performed certain relevant actions (that is, having “taken some photographs,” of which those glass negatives are the results).

Similarly, I assume that the speaker in (C2) does not take herself to be simply swapping

photographs for photographs (for example, “On Tuesday, I dropped off my blazer at the dry cleaners, so I should pick it up on Friday”). Rather, the more precise reading clearly ought to be seen as:

(C2\*) On Tuesday, I dropped off the photographic film featuring photographic images from my vacation (that is, the photographic results of having at that time performed certain relevant actions), so I should pick up the photographic prints (that is, the photographs printed from that photographic film) on Friday.

What matters most for my purposes here is that none of the above cases requires construing as abstracta any of the *prima facie* plausible candidates for what ‘photograph’ purports to pick out. Of course, one might still reply that we simply must appeal to abstracta in order to capture a coherent and substantive notion of repeatability. The true test of my view then is to show how it can capture the putative repeatability of photographic works in a manner consistent with, if not supportive of, the various conventions and practices surrounding photographs and photographic artworks, all without recourse to identifying those works with multiply instantiable abstract objects.

Recall that my view accounts for the putative repeatability of photographs in terms of the relevant similarity relation between photographic prints. That is, the principal motivation for thinking of photographic works as standardly repeatable works is best captured by the notion of relevant similarity—photographic works are standardly repeatable works because photographic processes standardly yield multiple relevantly similar photographs. For example, consider the following utterances:

(D1) I have that same photograph on my wall at home.

(D2) I have that same photograph but in matte finish and 5" × 8" size.

(E1) I have ten photos in my wallet, and they are all the same.

(E2) I have ten photos in my wallet, and they are all different.

(F1) I have three photographic artworks by Diane Arbus, and they are all the same.

(F2) I have three photographic artworks by Richard Prince, and they are all different.



By employing the relevant similarity relation, we get the following:

(D1\*) That photograph is relevantly similar to the photograph I have on my wall at home.

(D2\*) I have a photograph relevantly similar to that photograph except for its finish and size.

(E1\*) I have ten photographs in my wallet, and they are all relevantly similar to one another.

(E2\*) I have ten photographs in my wallet, and none are relevantly similar to any of the others.<sup>11</sup>

(F1\*) I have three individual and distinct photographic artworks by Diane Arbus (for example, *Child Crying, New Jersey* (1967) 18/75, *Child Crying, New Jersey* (1967) 39/75, and *Child Crying, New Jersey* (1967) 22/75), each of which is an individual and distinct photographic artwork and each of which is relevantly similar to one another (at least when considered locally—considered globally, they are quite likely relevantly similar to many more photographic artworks, such as others in the edition).

(F2\*) I have three individual and distinct photographic artworks by Richard Prince (for example, *Upstate* (1995) 3/5, *The Girl Next Door* (1999) 9/26, and *Cowboys and Girlfriends* (1992) 2/3 AP), none of which is relevantly similar to the others (though each may be relevantly similar to photographic artworks other than those two, for example, *Upstate* (1995) 2/5, *The Girl Next Door* (1999) 25/26, *Cowboys and Girlfriends* (1992) 4/26, and so forth).<sup>12</sup>

Again, not only does making sense of the way in which we talk about photographs and photographic artworks at no point require identifying any of the relevant objects with abstracta, but in addition a coherent understanding of the conventions and practices surrounding photographic artworks seems in fact to be hard to achieve as long as they are taken to be abstracta. The lesson is that forcing the standard ontological model for repeatable artworks onto photographic art may successfully capture photographic art qua *repeatable* but only by failing to capture photographic art qua *photograph*.

## V. CONCLUSION

Standard repeatable work ontology fails to provide an acceptable model for the ontology of pho-

tographic artworks precisely because standard repeatable work ontology fails to be an acceptable model for basic print ontology. Any minimally adequate ontology of photographic artworks must be built from the bottom up, and in doing so, entail the following:

A print is an individual and distinct concrete object to which other individual and distinct concrete objects (that is, other prints) may be relevantly similar.

Photographs are individual and distinct prints to which other individual and distinct prints (that is, other photographs) may be relevantly similar.

Ceteris paribus, for any pair of relevantly similar prints, one is a photograph if and only if the other is a photograph.

Photographic artworks are individual and distinct concrete photographs to which other individual and distinct photographs (that is, photographic artworks) may be relevantly similar.

Ceteris paribus, for any pair of relevantly similar photographs, one is a photographic artwork if and only if the other is a photographic artwork.

Photographic artworks, photographs, and prints are all in a sense standardly repeatable works because photographic artworks, photographs, and prints are all standardly works to which other photographic artworks, photographs, and prints may be relevantly similar (that is, printmaking processes standardly yield multiple relevantly similar prints). As a result, the standard ontological model for repeatable works cannot help but fail when imported into photographic art because the operative notion of repeatability in that standard model (that is, multiple instantiability) is not the operative notion of repeatability in basic print ontology (that is, relevant similarity). If photographic art has an essentially printmaking genealogy whose ontological inheritance is relevant similarity, then any account of photographic art that leaves out its print lineage simply fails to be an account of *photographic art*.<sup>13</sup>

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1. I thank Marcus Rossberg, Roy T. Cook, P.D. Magnus, Dominic McIver Lopes, and Diarmuid Costello for their helpful suggestions and criticisms.

2. For those unfamiliar with the various philosophical issues surrounding both art ontology and photography, see Stephen Davies, "Ontology of Art," and Nigel Warburton, "Photography," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 155–180 and 614–626.

3. For an excellent discussion of the issues, see David Davies, "Multiple Instances and Multiple 'Instances,'" *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 50 (2010): 411–426.

4. For those explicitly endorsing the standard repeatability of photographic artworks, see Jerrold Levinson, "The Work of Visual Art," in his *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (Cornell University Press, 1996); and Guy Rohrbaugh, "Artworks as Historical Individuals," *European Journal of Philosophy* 11 (2003): 177–205. Levinson presumably adopts the more traditional indicated-type model of repeatable works that he elsewhere defends in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Cornell University Press, 1990); Rohrbaugh, however, advocates what he calls a "historical-individual" model. Note that while Rohrbaugh takes his historical-individual model to be an alternative to the standard repeatable work (type-token) model, his account, at least for my purposes here, is nevertheless one according to which photographs are objects sufficiently similar to abstracta of the standard sort posited by that standard model. On Rohrbaugh's view, photographs are neither pure abstracta nor concreta but instead "real" objects that admit multiple embodiments (for example, photographic prints) and exist in both space and time, but only in a manner wholly dependent upon the spatial and temporal properties of their embodiments, from which they are themselves distinct. The objections I give against the repeatable work model of photographic ontology hold mutatis mutandis against the historical-individual model.

5. Against the backdrop of standard repeatable work ontology for photographic artworks, consider acts of vandalism directed at Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987), a photographic artwork of which there are ten editioned photographic prints (two of which have already been vandalized beyond repair, one as recently as April 2011). For instance, in 1997, John Haywood entered the National Gallery of Art in Melbourne, where he removed a *Piss Christ* print from the gallery wall and proceeded to kick it several times before being apprehended by security. If Haywood sincerely believed that *Piss Christ* was the sort of thing that could be kicked, then he suffered from a deep metaphysical confusion and so could not help but be a metaphysically harmless sort of vandal whose best efforts could amount to nothing more than registering protest by destructive (and needlessly criminal) proxy.

6. I take the phrase 'constitutive appreciable properties' as a broad, theory-neutral stand-in for roughly those relevant descriptive physical (internal) features of the print (for example, color, shape, size) as well as those relevant descriptive nonphysical (relational) features (for example, aesthetic, semantic, representational features) supervening on (in part determined by) those relevant descriptive physical (internal) features of the print. For more on relevant similarity between prints, see my article "Unlimited

Additions to Limited Editions," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 7 (2009).

7. While this view is consistent with photographic slides and digital prints being photographs, it appears to preclude both slide projections and digital screen images from themselves being photographs. That is, though projections and digital images on a screen clearly involve photographic images, neither are prints and so neither can be photographs (especially if construed as events rather than physical objects). So, for example, when a friend sets up her slide projector or computer in order to show me her vacation photographs, I take it that I am shown no actual photographs (that is, photographic prints), but instead am shown a series of projected or displayed photographic images, specifically those relevantly similar to those featured in my friend's vacation photographs. To be sure, those hesitant to endorse the above have other recourses to which they may appeal, such as bifurcating photography along support, template, or process lines (for example, print versus projection, film versus digital file, photochemical versus photoelectrical), adopting a pluralistic ontology (for example, prints as concreta and projections as either events or concreta ontically distinct from prints), or simply abstracting up to a level of concrete particulars under which both concrete objects and events can be subsumed. Whether such moves can be plausibly and productively made is a question best answered elsewhere. Thanks to Dominic McIver Lopes for suggesting this.

8. One could also just straightforwardly claim that *Red and Blue Chair* is not itself a chair but just has a chair as a proper part, and so analogously claim that photographic artworks are not photographs. That is, though photographic artworks may have photographs as proper parts, photographic artworks are not themselves photographs.

9. One might alternatively claim that the candidates for photographic artworks are either *editions* or *portfolios*. However, current art practice finds that galleries routinely break up portfolios in order to sell the constituent photographs, thereby presenting a problem for modeling portfolios as anything other than spatially dislocated objects. So too it is for positing editions as photographic artworks. Editions in other printmaking media are almost never seen as being artworks themselves, and even when the edition is itself taken to be an artwork, its print constituents nevertheless remain individual, distinct artworks.

10. In the examples that follow, I assume that further facts about the various conversational rules, conventions, contexts, and cues in play would serve to clear up any ambiguities.

11. Presumably, at no point were the photographs in fact relevantly similar to one another (for example, before a trip through the washing machine).

12. Note that my view allows for relevant similarity to apply differently to photographs *simpliciter* than to photographic art (for example, with respect to certain agential relations such as the sanctioning or editioning of prints). For more on such distinctions, see my "Unlimited Additions to Limited Editions."

13. On my account, John Haywood's assumed attempt to vandalize Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987) was *not* an art-ontologically harmless sort of activity resulting from a deep metaphysical confusion. Rather, Haywood's attempt

to destroy that particular photographic print on display at the National Gallery was in fact (at least *de re* if not *de dicto*) an attempt to destroy an individual, distinct photographic artwork (for example, *Piss Christ* (1989) 1/6). Of course, the severity of such destruction for the art-world (as well as for Haywood's evaluation of his own

destructive efforts) may be mitigated to the extent that there still remain either photographic artworks relevantly similar to the one targeted for destruction (for example, *Piss Christ* (1989) 2/6) or at least the photographic film from which any such relevantly similar photographic artwork must be produced.