Depiction and imagination

JIRI BENOVSKY

Abstract:

Depiction and imagination are intimately linked. In this article, I discuss the role imagination (as well as inference and knowledge/belief) plays in depiction, with a focus on photographic depiction. I partly embrace a broadly Waltonian view, but not always, and not always for Walton's own reasons. In Walton's view, imagination plays a crucial role in depiction. I consider the objection to his view that not all cases of depiction involve imagination – for instance, documentary photographs. From this discussion, two points will emerge: first, we will see that it is an unnecessary mistake to insist too heavily on the fact that photographs are produced in a mechanical way (as opposed to, say, paintings), and second, we will see that the notion of "imagining-seeing", as it is articulated by Walton, is perhaps too strong and does not entirely do justice to the external character of the role imagination plays here. Focusing mainly on photographs, I then illustrate the view I want to advocate by a series of different cases, where the nature of the role that imagination, knowledge/belief, and inference play in depiction will become apparent.

§1. Depiction and imagination are intimately linked. In this article, I discuss the role imagination (as well as inference and knowledge/belief) plays in depiction, with a focus on photographic depiction. I partly embrace a broadly Waltonian view, but not always, and not always for Walton's own reasons. I start by emphasizing an important general feature of the relation of depiction, namely the fact that it is a ternary relation which always involves "something external". I then turn my attention to Walton's view, where this third relatum of the relation of depiction is largely analysed in terms of the role imagination plays in depiction. I consider the objection to his view that not all cases of depiction involve imagination – for instance, documentary photographs. From this discussion, two points will emerge: first, we will see that it is an unnecessary mistake to insist too heavily on the fact that photographs are produced in a mechanical way (as opposed to, say, paintings), and second, we will see that the notion of "imagining-seeing", as it is articulated by Walton, is perhaps too strong and does not entirely do justice to the external character of the role imagination plays here. Focusing mainly on photographs, I then illustrate the view I want to advocate by a series of different cases, where the nature of the role that imagination, knowledge/belief, and inference play in depiction will become apparent.

§2. *Prima facie*, depiction seems to be a relation between a picture and what the picture depicts; Dalí's *Temptation Of Saint Anthony*, for instance, depicts four elephants, a horse, and Saint Anthony. But depiction is a ternary relation, not a binary one between a picture and its depictum. Thus, instead of

    (i)   P depicts E

we have

    (ii)   P depicts E for S

where "P" stands for "Picture" (such as a painting, or a photograph), "E" stands for "Entity" (a macroscopic object, or perhaps a state of affairs, or anything that can plausibly be depicted), and "S" stands for "Subject" (that is, the conscious being who looks at P). One could also speak here about pictorial representation, instead of depiction. Unless one wants to treat these terms as synonyms, I take it that the notion of representation is a larger one than the notion of depiction, and I will discuss this issue in the concluding section of this article;

for the time being, I will stick to depiction (as we shall see, the frontier between depiction and a larger notion of representation is a fuzzy and delicate one). This ternary nature of depiction is apparent in most accounts of depiction. In Wollheim's view, for instance, the general schema above becomes "S sees E in P"[1]. Under a resemblance account of depiction, one could naïvely think that depiction is an intrinsic property of pictures and that pictures depict because they resemble their depicta – in short, P depicts E, because P resembles E. Nobody really defends such a naïve view, and for a good reason: in this binary way of conceiving of the resemblance account, something important is left out, namely the fact that resemblance is a context-dependent matter[2], as noted for instance by Robert Hopkins: "The notion of resemblance can yield a characterization of our experience of depiction if we suppose that a depiction of something *is seen as* resembling it. The central problem this immediately poses is to say *in what respect* we see pictures as resembling what they depict." Hopkins (1995, p.439-440, my italics)).

One way or another, there is always something "external" in depiction. Depiction is not an intrinsic property of pictures, it is not a relation between a picture and its depicta, it is not a mind-independent affair, and it always essentially involves a subject as a third relatum. The

---

[1] Wollheim's notion of depiction is crucially linked to his notion of twofoldness. As he puts it "What is distinctive of seeing-in, and thus of my theory of representation, is the phenomenology of the experiences in which it manifests itself. Looking at a suitably marked surface, we are visually aware at once of the marked surface and of something in front of or behind something else. I call this feature of the phenomenology 'twofoldness'. […] I understand it in terms of a single experience with two aspects, which I call configurational and recognitional." (Wollheim (1998, p.221)) Central in his view is the idea that to understand depiction we need to look at the experience a subject has of a picture. In his view, this experience is to be understood in terms of a union of a perception of the surface of a picture and of what we see in it – the depicted object(s) – thus giving rise to a new form of perception, namely, seeing-in.

[2] This is true in general, and not only when it comes to depiction. Take for instance the resemblance relations between

(A)   a red round object

(B)   a red square object

(C)   a blue square object

Does A resemble B more than C? Which pair of objects in the list is the most resembling one? Well, it depends on the context, that is, in what respect one wants to consider the resemblance relations. B resembles more A than C with respect to its colour, while it resembles C more than A with respect to its shape. In general, when it comes to resemblance, there is always a context, provided by the evaluator, on which the resemblance relation depends. In the case of depiction, the context is provided by S (in "P depicts E for S"), but it can also be suggested to S by the creator of P, or by the context in which P is being shown.

various accounts of depiction available then differ in the analysis they provide of the role S plays.

Kendall Walton insists on the *imaginative* faculties of S. According to his view, pictures depict by being props in games of make-believe. He illustrates this idea by comparison with games children play: in the game, an object, say, a shampoo bottle, can represent another object, say, a pirate ship, when being used in a game in the bathtub. In the fictional world of the game, the bottle represents a ship, not so much because it resembles a ship[3], but because it was decided, in a controlled and imaginary way, that it does represent it. Speaking of depiction in the case of pictures, Walton adopts a notion similar to Wollheim's notion of seeing-in, and he also argues that it gives rise to a single new type of experience made of two elements: perception and imagination, mixed together in a phenomenologically complex whole[4]. An important thing to note here is that Walton considers this to be a perceptual affair. Imagination, in his view, permeates the perception of the picture, and this is how we *see* Dali's painting (the marked surface) *and* at the same time we *see in* the painting four elephants, a horse, and Saint Anthony. Thus, the two actions – to perceive and to imagine – become part of a single experience of 'imagining-seeing'. Paintings, thus, play the role of props that prescribe specific imaginings[5], and so, specific imagining-seeings, and give rise to fictional truths, not in the sense of a new type of truth, but in the simple sense that it is fictional that, in such-and-such a game of make-believe, it is part of the game that we see four elephants with long spindly legs[6].

Noël Carroll (1995, p.97-98), Jerrold Levinson (1998, p.277), as well as others, raised an objection to Walton's view on the ground that it appeals to imagination too much, and too often. The general concern is that Walton claims that, in all cases of depiction, we play games of make-believe, by appealing to our imagination, thus effectively making every such case part of a fiction. This seems then to imply that there are no non-fictional visual representations. Carroll objects by raising the counter-example of documentary photographs, such as, for instance, aerial photographs used in cartography: there is nothing fictional here, no games of make-believe, and no imagination needed for such pictures to depict what they do.

---

[3] Although, as Walton (1990, p.303) rightly remarks, some objects are better props than others. An empty shampoo bottle floats and has a vaguely adequate shape, for instance, and so is a better prop in a game about a pirate ship than, say, a paper envelope. The object's intrinsic properties, and some type of resemblance between it and what it is a prop for, are then not to be ignored.

[4] See Walton (1990, p.295).

[5] See Walton (1990, p.21-23 and p.38).

[6] See Walton (1990, p.41-42).

Earlier, in Walton (1984, p.252), Walton has claimed that "there is a sharp break, a difference of kind, between painting and photography", and perhaps this could be the key to answer the objection. Indeed, contrary to paintings, in Walton's view, photographs are

(MEC)   produced in a mechanic way
and
(TRANS) transparent

What Walton means here is that photographs are produced in a purely mechanical way and that because of this they are like aids to vision – prosthetic devices, akin to surveillance cameras, televisions, mirrors, or telescopes – that help us to *see*, literally, through them. As he sums it up: "Putting things together, we get this: part of what it is to see something is to have visual experiences which are caused by it in a purely mechanical manner. Objects cause their photographs and the visual experiences of viewers mechanically; so we see the objects through the photographs. By contrast, objects cause paintings not mechanically but in a more 'human' way, a way involving the artist; so we don't see through paintings" (Walton (1984, p.261))[7]. Thus, in Walton's view, (TRANS) *because* (MEC). In order to secure (TRANS), Walton then goes quite far when he articulates (MEC): he claims that photographs are produced in a *purely* mechanical manner, apparently setting aside, in this place, the role the photographer plays in the creation of photographs. I shall come back to this below; let us first see if this could be used to answer the objection above. What Walton claims is that photographs are transparent (this accounts for the difference between photographs and paintings, and so this could help to face Carroll's counter-example), but that they *also* are depictions that give rise to imagining seeing (this allows him to keep his general theory of depiction; see Walton (1997, p.68)). When looking at a photograph of a long deceased member of a family, we can thus both literally *see* her (this is (TRANS)), *and* at the same time *imagine seeing* her (directly, without a prosthetic device, namely, the photograph).

---

[7] See also Walton (1984, p.251): "Painting and drawing are techniques for producing pictures. So is photography. But the special nature of photography will remain obscure unless we think of it in another way as well-as a contribution to the enterprise of seeing. The invention of the camera gave us not just a new method of making pictures and not just pictures of a new kind: it gave us a new way of seeing. [...] Mirrors are aids to vision, allowing us to see things in circumstances in which we would not otherwise be able to; with their help we can see around corners. Telescopes and microscopes extend our visual powers in other ways, enabling us to see things that are too far away or too small to be seen with the naked eye. Photography is an aid to vision also, and an especially versatile one. With the assistance of the camera, we can see not only around corners and what is distant or small; we can also see into the past. [...] Photographs are transparent. We see the world through them." See also Walton (1984, p.252): "My claim is that we see, quite literally, our dead relatives themselves when we look at photographs of them."

Photography is thus special in the sense that it involves these two aspects, while paintings are not transparent (since they are not produced in a mechanical way).

Unfortunately, such a Walton-inspired reply to the objection would not work. The objection was not concerned with whether photographs and paintings are pictures of the same kind or not, and the objector can happily agree that they aren't. Rather, the objection raised the worry that in all cases of depiction, imagination is in Walton's view essentially involved, which makes it impossible there to be non-fictional visual representations – and this is where documentary photographs can be used as a counter-examples, not because they are photographs, but because they are documentary, and, according to the objector, because their depictive capacities do not depend on any type of imagination or game of make-believe. Walton's view then actually seems to embrace the spirit of the objection, since Walton explicitly claims, and insists on, that photographs, including documentary photographs, *are* depictions and *do* serve as props in games of make-believe, exactly as paintings do – it's just that, in addition to their depictive capacities, they are transparent. Thus, instead of a sharp break and a difference of kind, what we have here is a situation where paintings and photographs are both essentially depictions and depict in the same manner, it's just that photographs have a further capacity (transparency) that paintings do not possess.

§3. In my view, Walton got many things right. He is right to insist on the role imagination plays in depiction, and he is right to say that photographs are transparent while paintings are not. In what follows I will defend a broadly Waltonian view, but not really for Walton's own reasons, and I will depart from some of his claims, which in my view are not correct and not needed.

Before I spend some time on the relationship between depiction and imagination, let me more quickly address the issue of (TRANS) and (MEC). I agree that photographs are transparent, but not that they are produced in a purely mechanical way. This latter claim is too strong, as we shall see shortly, *and* it is not necessary to establish the fact that they are transparent. We can accept that since photographs are produced in a *partly* mechanical way, they can play the role of "aids to vision" or "prosthetic devices" that allow us to see, literally, the objects they are photographs of. One way to see the relevant difference between photographs and paintings is to acknowledge that a photograph is always a photograph of *something existing* (however blurred or distorted can it appear to be), while this is not so in the case of paintings. *This* metaphysical claim is what transparency is about, and this is due to the *partly* mechanical way photographs are produced. Nothing stronger is needed.

The process of production of photographs is, granted, partly mechanical, but it also *necessarily* involves a photographer's decisions (as we shall see, this will be important when it comes to understand the role of imagination in photographic depiction, so the point here is not only a point about transparency). Taking a photograph is like playing a musical instrument. When a pianist plays the piano, the resulting music is partly mechanically produced by the instrument, but crucially and essentially it is the product of how the pianist used this instrument – no musician, no music. In the case of photography, things are similar. At various stages of the process of production of photographs, the photographer *has* to intervene and *has* to take decisions. For instance, it is simply *impossible* to take a photograph without a decision about aperture and shutter speed – the two most basic settings on any photographic camera. This decision will have a profound effect on what the resulting photograph will look like, as for instance Photo1 and Photo2 in §5 below illustrate. Consider a claim such as Scruton's: "[…] with an ideal photograph, it is *neither necessary nor even possible* that the photographer's intention should enter as a serious factor in determining how the picture is seen. […] The causal process of which the photographer is a victim puts almost every detail *outside of his control*" Scruton (1981, p.588, p.593; my italics). Scruton's claim is about *ideal* photographs. It is not entirely clear how "ideal" is helpful here, but what is clear is that such a claim about any *normal* photograph is unnecessarily strong and strictly speaking false[8]. It is right to insist on the partly causal and mechanical nature of the process of production of photographs, but very strong claims like Scruton's do not do justice to the *necessity* of the involvement of a conscious being in this process. No aperture setting, no photograph. No shutter speed setting, no photograph. (Similarly for other stages of the process of production of photographs where decisions have to be taken about, for instance, focal length or exposure.) Granted, one can use an automated photographic camera, where one does not take such decisions oneself before every shot, but that does not mean that the decision was not taken, it only means that it was taken by somebody else (say, the engineers who programmed the automated camera). Documentary photographs such as aerial photographs used in cartography – an example Carroll had in mind – are good examples of this: in such cases these decisions *are* automated, but since they are very important, the decisions about aperture, shutter speed, exposure, and focal length are very carefully taken and the programming carefully done, before the shooting.

---

[8] For a detailed critical discussion of Scruton's view, see Phillips (2009).

To sum up, the process of production of a photograph involves (in all normal cases) one mechanical part and two parts where the photographer's decisions are crucial. First, the photographer plays a crucial role in creating the conditions in which a mechanical process can then take place. The photographer decides when and where the photographs shall be taken, and she takes decisions about settings such as aperture or shutter speed. Then, a purely mechanical causal chain takes place, in which – granted – the photographer plays no significant role (apart from the fact that, often but not necessarily, she is holding the camera). But this is not yet the end of the process of creation of a photograph. After this stage, there merely exists an exposed film or a RAW file, but not yet a photograph. For a photograph to come into existence, the film must be developed, or the RAW file must be converted into an image file, etc. At this stage, again, the photographer's decisions matter, and are necessary ingredients of the whole process. Only after this third stage has taken place, a photograph exists. (Thus, if a camera falls on the floor and accidentally 'takes a picture', this is not enough for a photograph to come into existence – the film (or file) needs to be developed in order to create a photograph, so at least this part of the process will not be accidental and will involve decisions.)

In short, without the first and the third steps, where the photographer's involvement is essential, no photograph would come into being (in normal cases). Furthermore, these two steps are *what makes photography interesting*. The purely mechanical part of the process is of interest only to engineers and hardware geeks, but the first and third stages are what matters to artists, or even amateur photographers (remember the comparison with the pianist). The decisions involved in the first and third stages are not only necessary – again, there is no way to take a photograph without setting up an aperture, a shutter speed, or a focal length – but they also are expressive tools that the artist photographer can use to achieve such and such an effect on the resulting picture. This is how the photographer can, similarly to the musician, play her instrument. And relevantly, this is how she can trigger the spectator's imaginative capacities. So, let us turn now our attention to how exactly imagination plays a role in photographic depiction.

§4. In Walton's view, imagining-seeing is a single perceptual act, where the seeing part and the imagining part are united together in a single phenomenological whole: "One does not first perceive Hobbema's picture and then, in a separate act, imagine that perception to be of a mill. The phenomenal character of the perception is inseparable from the imagining which takes it as an object. [...] Imaginings also, like thoughts of other kinds, enter into visual

experiences. And the imaginings called for when one looks at a picture inform the experience of looking at it. The seeing and the imagining are inseparably bound together, integrated into a single complex phenomenological whole." Walton (1990, p.295)[9]

I believe that Walton is on the right track here, but parts of what he says are unnecessarily strong – namely that "the seeing and the imagining are *inseparably* bound together". The first thing to remember from Wollheim, which is something Walton himself agrees on, is that we have the capacity of going back and forth between the experience of a picture as a picture, and the experience of seeing in the picture what we see in it. But if this is true, and it is, it then means that we are capable, at least partly, to switch on and off the imaginative capacities that allow us to see in the picture in addition to merely see it. Most often, imagining and seeing are indeed found in our experience bound together, but not inseparably. It is possible, both phenomenologically and conceptually, to isolate the element of imagination. According to Walton himself, imagination plays the role it plays in games of make-believe where pictures are used as props in a controlled way where the props often prescribe specific, controlled, imaginings. If this is so, then the idea that imagination is separable, phenomenologically and conceptually, actually turns out to be quite naturally integrated into Walton's view.

Remember that depiction is a ternary relation. S, the third relatum, appeals abundantly to her imagination in order to imagine-seeing something in the pictures that she sees. We can isolate the element of imagination, and try to better understand it, while acknowledging that it is often bound with perception. In what follows, I want to isolate imagination, as well as inference and knowledge/belief, from 'mere perception', and discuss, on the basis of some examples, the role it plays in depiction, focusing on photographic depiction.

§5. One could think that photographs fail to depict colour when they are black and white, that they misrepresent shape when they are distorted, that they fail to depict what lies in the background when the depth of field is shallow, or that they fail to depict features beyond the frame. In what follows, we will see some examples that will enable us to see that, given the essential role the photographer's intentions play in the creation of photographs, given the tools photographers have at their disposal, and given the central role of imagination, knowledge/belief, and inference in the viewing of a photograph, photographs can depict much more than what one might initially think. Indeed, as we shall see, photographs are essentially narrative imagination-triggering media. As I already mentioned several times above, when

---

[9] This echoes Kant's claim that "imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception" (Kant (1781, A120)).

speaking about imagination, one should also have in mind other faculties of the spectator of a photograph such as her inferential capacities, as well as her knowledge or beliefs. This is how photographs can get narrative powers. To see this, let us start by having a close look at these two photographs of a woman in a street:

Photo 1, A woman in the street I

Photo 2, A woman in the street II

These are two photographs of the same reality, but they tell an entirely different story. Of course, the 'reality' is not *exactly* the same, since they were taken roughly one minute one after the other, and the people in the background moved, the tram moved, and the woman moved a bit as well (although she was posing, since these photographs are staged). But these factors are irrelevant to the idea I want to convey here. In short, the idea is that the reality a photograph is a photograph of is one thing, and the story it tells is another – very different – one. Photo1 tells a story about the woman: she is the centre of interest, her sad/worried look is among the core elements of the content of the photograph, and the fact that the other people shown in this photograph are blurred, while she is not, makes her both special and somewhat lonely and detached from the other people around her. Photo2, taken just a short time after Photo1, of the same street and the same woman at the same place, and with the same framing, tells an entirely different story: the woman is unrecognizable, her expression is impossible to see, in fact one is barely able to tell that there is a person there. The other people and the tram play the crucial role, their movements are depicted[10] by showing their trajectories, and the story this photograph tells is perhaps one of a busy, crowded city, its continuous movement, where people do not stand out but are rather somewhat anonymously part of a crowd. (Of course, *your* imagination might provide a different story, you might also perhaps want to focus on the one standing man who is not moving, etc.)

To understand how these stories are told, and how imagination is triggered here, we can now introduce the notion of *attention management*, which is easy to grasp by raising the question: "Where will the spectator of the photograph look first when she sees it?" In the case of Photo1, there is no doubt that the spectator of the image will first look at the woman, while in the case of Photo2 it will most certainly not be her but rather in quick succession all the other people and the tram. This is at least part of the reason why the woman will be perceived as the most important element in Photo1, while in Photo2 it is the behaviour/movement of all the elements in the picture that will be perceived as being its main content.

As Carroll (2008, chap.5) shows, when it comes to *cinematographic* narration, the motion picture maker uses attention management techniques to guide and control the spectator's attention, by exploiting her natural perceptual capacities and tendencies, in order to 'force' her to perceive the reality that a movie depicts in a way the director wants her to see it. As Carroll rightly says, the motion picture maker has several tools at her disposal to achieve this aim: typically, she decides the *order* in which one sees things, she decides for how long one sees

---

[10] On depiction of movement in this way, see Benovsky (2012).

this-and-this element of the movie, she decides at what relative size (scale) one sees the various elements, etc. When it comes to photographs, the basic idea is roughly the same, while the techniques are of course different. In the case of Photo1, the photographer guides and controls the attention of the spectator of the image very easily and precisely: again, there is no doubt that anyone who looks at this photograph will first notice the woman as being its central element, and only then examine the remaining elements of the reality being shown in the photograph, immediately understanding that the photographer wanted to show them as being secondary. Here, the photographer exploits our natural perceptual tendency to first visually focus on what is sharp and only then pay attention to what is blurred (probably simply because what is sharp is bearing more information than what is blurred – in evolutionary terms, one might think that paying attention to what is sharp provides more information and thus more tools useful to survival than what is blurred/dark/etc.). The picture maker – as well as the motion picture maker – can here actually *force* the attention of the spectator of the image to focus on the woman: it would in fact be impossible, for any normal spectator in normal conditions, *not* to notice the woman and take her to be the central element of the picture (our natural perceptual tendencies are not easy to overcome!). The photographic techniques used here are the most standard ones: indeed, the only difference between how these two photographs were made is that Photo1 has been taken using a wide aperture and a short shutter speed, while Photo2 was taken using a small aperture and long shutter speed (framing, exposition, and all other settings were the same). As is clearly apparent here, making a decision about what aperture and what shutter speed one uses when taking a photograph results then in an entirely different picture – and, an entirely different story – *and*, an entirely different content.

Indeed, by using attention management techniques, to tell us what is important and what is secondary, the photographer can tell a story and trigger the imagination of the spectator of a photograph in different ways. In the example of Photo1, we have seen a typical case of a photograph with a shallow depth of field (due to the wide aperture used) to illustrate how attention management works, but of course there are many other tools the photographer has at her disposal. The choice of a long exposure time, for instance, in the case of Photo2, makes salient the movement of the moving elements in the picture, forcing thus the attention of the spectator of the image to attend to their movements in a way she would not, were the photograph taken with a short exposure time. The choice of exposure of the main subject relatively to its environment or to the other elements in the picture – making the main subject lighter or darker than the secondary elements – can also play a similar role, as can of course

the choice of size/scale/magnification of the main subject relative to its surroundings. These (and other) photographic techniques can thus make some of the depicted elements more salient or more perceptually important than others, and the photographer can in this way guide the attention of the spectator of the image to them (or their behaviour – say, movement), thus being able to tell a story, using here the imaginative faculties of the spectator. Indeed, imagination plays a crucial role in the viewing of photographs like Photo1 and Photo2. We saw above how the photographer can control and guide the attention of the spectator of her photograph, and quite obviously, while doing so, she also appeals to the spectator's imaginative faculties. S, the third element of the ternary relation of depiction, is thus to be understood as a being whose imagination is triggered by the photograph – and the photographer's intentions.

Long exposure photographs, like Photo2, are a good example of how this works, not only when it comes to imagination. In the making of Photo2, a long exposure time was used in order to show the trajectories of some of the people and the tram. These trajectories are shown on the photograph, but a bit of imagination, inference, as well as knowledge and previous experience with long exposure photographs, are needed to get the idea of people moving. Typical examples of long exposure photographs, perhaps even more telling, include photographs of a moving car at night: what can be seen on the resulting photograph is only a line of light, due to the car's headlights, but not the car itself at all. The photograph clearly shows a trace, a light line, a trajectory of light. But to understand such a photograph as being a photograph of, say, a car going dangerously fast in the night on a mountain road, one needs of course to appeal to imagination, but also to inference and knowledge: previous knowledge (or inferred knowledge) of this type of pictures and this kind of effect of long exposure time seems required, and someone with poor imagination and no such knowledge might entirely misunderstand the story such a photograph tells. The photographer's job is to guide the attention of her spectators to what she wants to show them, and then to appeal to their imaginative and inferential faculties in such a way that the photograph will be understood.

Multiple exposure techniques also illustrate well how this works. For instance, this multiple exposure photograph depicts five non-contiguous temporal parts of the skier, which creates an appeal to the spectator's imagination to "fill the gaps" and imagine the movement of the skier, with all its intermediate parts (and, perhaps, the future parts as well):

Photo 3, Multiple-exposure photograph.

Such techniques can also be used to create photographs with almost a cinematographic effect where a more-or-less complex story can be almost explicitly told, leaving it then to imagination to fill in the details of the story, such as on this photograph:

Photo 4, Multiple-exposure photograph.

Of course, both Photo3 and Photo4 have been retouched and the multiple-exposure technique used here is one realized in post-production. But this does not make these pictures to be non-photographic – they are photographs as much as Photo1 and Photo2. Indeed, *all* photographs have to be in *some* ways retouched, whether in the camera in a transparent manner where the camera was programmed to do some retouching (colours, white balance, contrast, sharpening, ...) in a way inconspicuous to the user, or outside the camera's body in the darkroom when developing negatives, or in Photoshop when developing RAW files. Whether such techniques are built-in the camera's body (where they can be both automated and/or manually controlled), or whether they are done (again, automatically or manually) outside the body, they are necessary steps in the creation of any photograph: a photograph only ever exists at the very end of this process of production, which necessarily includes such techniques. Furthermore, deciding *which* post-production techniques count as being part of a normal process of creation of photographs and which are 'too much' is a matter of degree, a vague matter best resolved by accepting that most post-production techniques are indeed perfectly 'normal'[11].

§6. Imagination, knowledge, and inference also play an important role in the depiction of colour by black and white photographs. Let us consider this example:

---

[11] More on this in Benovsky (2014, especially §4).

Photo 5, Representation of colour by a black and white photograph.

Suppose one asks: "What colour is the phone booth? What colour is the bus?" The answer is not difficult to give, and it is more than likely that almost everyone will say that they are red. An easy answer, but a process involving not only imagination, but also knowledge, belief, and inference (thus, the notion of imagination involved here can both be propositional imagination, i.e. imagination-that, and perceptual imagination, i.e. imagination penetrating the very perception of, say, the phone booth which can almost look red to the spectator of this black and white image). The spectator of the photograph has to appeal to some pieces of knowledge and make a simple inference. She has to recognize that the place is London (perhaps by noticing the Elizabeth Tower), she has to know that buses and phone booths in London are red, and she has to infer from that the colour of the phone booth and the bus. The photographer can (and often does) count on and exploit such knowledge the typical spectator of such photographs will have (of course, she might not, if she's never seen a London's bus). Here is a place where depiction works better in the case of photography than in the case of painting. Indeed, spectators of photographs know that these are pictures of a special kind – as we have seen above, they are always pictures *of something existing*. Granted, photographs do

16

not typically depict reality *as it is* (they only depict things from one side, they can involve distortions, blurred background, etc.), but they always at least partly depict something *that was there*, even if they perhaps misdepict it – this is the basis for (TRANS). This then triggers imagination of the spectators of photographs in a particular way: it suggests the viewer to bring into her mind what the reality is probably like, comparing the photograph to her own knowledge of the world. This *can* also be the case in the case of a painting, and it often is, but not always and not in the same way as in the case of photographs. In the case of photographs viewers have, so to say, a piece of knowledge (i.e. "There was something there, in the world, at the time this photograph was taken.") which they do not have – at least not in principle – in the case of paintings, and this piece of knowledge makes them interact with photographs in a special way, namely by mentally comparing the picture with what they know the world looks like. Again, imagination, knowledge, and inference work together, and can be appealed to, triggered, and exploited by the photographer.

§7. As a final case, let us now see how photographs can depict things located beyond the frame. Of course, a photograph of a mirror or of a television set, for instance, can show us something which lies beyond the frame, but since the mirror or the television set are part of what is included in the frame, this is not really a case of depiction of something that genuinely lies beyond. An illustrative example of genuine depiction of something that lies beyond the frame is this photograph of a juggler:

Photo 6, The juggler.

The photograph depicts three clubs, manipulated by the juggler, and a very tiny part of what can only be a fourth club – this interpretation of what the little white square-shaped region on the top of the photograph is, is also confirmed by the juggler's look, directed towards it. The photograph thus depicts a little white square-shaped bit of a club, but it easily also depicts the whole club – and, perhaps, more clubs as well. (In fact, there were five.) This is depiction of an object *via* depiction of one of its parts, and it is commonplace in many, if not almost all, photographs. Again, the spectator's imaginative and inferential capacities "fill" the missing parts. Perhaps less common, and less obvious, but still a clear case of depiction of what lies beyond the frame would be a case where the framing of the photograph would cut out even the little part of the club – so, no part of it would be depicted at all, but the juggler's look would probably be enough to trigger the imagination of the spectators of the photograph in such a way that they would understand that there are more than three clubs.

The piece of knowledge, special to photography, that "there was something in the world when the picture was taken" plays again a crucial role here in the triggering of our imagination when we look at this photograph: because it makes us think not only about the

picture but also about the world there was when the picture was taken, it makes our imagination run. The role imagination plays here is similar to the role it plays in ordinary perception of non-visible parts of objects we ordinarily see – an idea found in Husserl (1907), and recently expressed in Nanay (2010, p.239 and p.240): "When we see an object, we also represent those parts of it that are not visible. […] We represent the occluded parts of perceived objects by means of mental imagery. […] The exercise of mental imagery is necessary for amodal perception: for the representation of those parts of the perceived objects that are not visible."

§8. One can multiply examples such as those I have discussed above at will (including, for instance, cases of hardly depicted objects in a very blurred background, where context can help to understand ("guess") what they are). These cases are not exceptional and there is nothing special about them: they exhibit typical, standard, and normal cases of photographs produced by normal photographic means. They show us that narrative powers lie at the core of the nature of photography and photographic depiction, and that imagination (as well as knowledge, belief, and inference) is essential in the viewing of photographs. What is clearly apparent here is that (MEC) is unnecessarily strong. The photographers' intentions play a *central* and *necessary* role in the making of photographs and in what they depict. Think again of Photo1 and Photo2 of the woman in the street. The photographer chooses either to use a wide aperture and short exposure time, or a small aperture and long exposure time, and the result is profoundly different – what the resulting photographs depict is entirely different. Not only these decisions the photographer takes are part of any normal process of creating a photograph, but as we have seen they are steps the photographer *has* to take in order to be able to take any photograph (deciding to use an automated system also is an important decision). Unless someone takes a decision about aperture and shutter speed, there simply is no photograph at all in the first place. And, more often than not, photographers – especially artists – carefully take such decisions themselves, work on the narrative powers of their photographs in many ways, and exploit not only natural perceptual tendencies of the spectators of their photographs, as we have seen above, but also, and crucially, they appeal to their imagination, knowledge, and inferential capacities. To continue the comparison with music, we can see here that thinking of photography – especially art photography – as a purely mechanical affair, where human intervention plays little or no part is a bit like saying that music produced by a piano is purely mechanically produced. Yes, of course, a key was hit, and a hammer then hit a string, and this produced a sound in a purely mechanical way,

and yes, the pianist plays no part in this mechanical process, but *what's interesting* in the music, even when produced by such a mechanical instrument, essentially involves the pianist's beliefs, intentions, and interpretation. Likewise, the photographer – especially the artist – "plays the camera" in a very similar way: the camera is her – mechanical – instrument that she can use in order to produce images according to her intentions and the way she wants to show us the world.

§9. In the preceding sections, I set aside on purpose a possible distinction between depiction and representation. Of course, as mentioned in §2, one can use "depiction" and "pictorial representation" as synonyms, and in this case, there is no distinction to be made. But it is useful to make one, as for instance Peacocke and Hopkins both show:

"We can draw a distinction between what a picture depicts and what it represents. There is a Saul Steinberg cartoon depicting persons wearing numerical labels. The viewer is intended to appreciate that these persons represent the streets and avenues of Manhattan: one person, labelled "Bway," is roughly dressed and knocks some of the more staid individuals sideways as he rushes diagonally to City Hall. This cartoon depicts people dressed in various ways, and the people in turn represent particular streets in Manhattan; but the cartoon does not depict streets and avenues." Peacocke (1987, p.383)

"How do pictures represent? No doubt they do so in many ways. If a painting shows a seated woman, if she symbolizes Despair, and if the work expresses melancholy, we should not assume that the representational relations here are all the same. Nonetheless, perhaps one form of representation is especially pictorial. Perhaps, in other words, there is a form of representation that is distinctively exhibited by pictures and that it is distinctive of pictures to exhibit. It seems more likely that our painting exhibits this distinctive form in representing a seated woman than in representing Despair." Hopkins (1995, p.425)

If one has in mind a resemblance-style account of depiction, it is then more than natural to make a distinction about what a picture strictly speaking depicts and what it represents, where it can clearly represent much more than what it depicts. For Hopkins, for instance, the distinction makes perfect sense, and in his view depiction is a genuinely pictorial affair, while representation is a larger notion that pictures can share with other representative means (like linguistic descriptions, for instance).

But if one embraces an account according to which depiction is to be understood in terms of imagination, the frontier between depiction and representation gets much less clear-cut – and perhaps it even fades away. Take Hopkins' example from the quote above. Under a Walton-style account of depiction, the question about what it depicts – the seated woman,

Despair, or melancholy – is a question about how much (and how) imagination is used. Imagination can get us much further than resemblance, and if imagination is the crux of depiction, then pictures can depict much more here than under a resemblance account of depiction. In the preceding sections, I argued for and illustrated the claim that depiction is rooted in imagination, and in some of these cases I have gone quite far in the claims about what the photographs used in my examples depict. Thus, in my view, there is a vague distinction to be made between depiction and representation, but it is only a matter of degree, not of a kind. We can talk about representation to signify that *a lot* of imagination was used in experiencing a picture, and talk about depiction when we want to stick to a 'first level experience' – for instance, to say that Photo1 depicts a woman in the street, or to say that Photo6 depicts *three* clubs. Our imagination, however, is able to take us further than this, and we can have a much richer experience of these photographs, which will make them depict more and more things the further we go. I have nothing against the idea of using the term "representation", instead of "depiction", after a – vague – limit has been reached, if we keep in mind that both of these terms refer to a notion of the same kind, that is, a notion of depiction or representation based on how we experience pictures by using our imagination, knowledge, beliefs, and inferential capacities[12].

References :

BENOVSKY, J. 2012. Photographic Representation and Depiction of Temporal Extension. *Inquiry* Vol.55, No.2, 194–213

BENOVSKY, J. 2014, The limits of photography. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol.22, Issue 5, pp.716-733.

CARROLL, N. 1995. Critical study: Mimesis as make-believe. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 45:178, p.93-99.

CARROLL, N. 2008. *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*. Malden, Blackwell Publishing.

HOPKINS, R. 1995. Explaining Depiction. The Philosophical Review, Vol.104, No.3, pp.425-455.

HOPKINS, R. 2012. Factive pictorial experience : What's special about photographs? *Noûs* 46 (4):709-731.

HUSSERL, E. 1907. *Ding Und Raum: Vorlesungen 1907*. 1991 Edition, Felix Meiner Verlag Gmbh.

KANT, I. 1781. *Critique of Pure Reason*. P. Guyer and A. Wood (trans.), Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

LEVINSON, J. 1998. Wollheim on Pictorial Representation. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 56, No. 3, pp. 227-233

NANAY, B. 2010. Perception and Imagination: Amodal Perception as Mental Imagery. *Philosophical Studies* 150(2):239-254.

PEACOCKE, C. 1987. Depiction. *Philosophical Review* 96 (3):383-410.

PHILLIPS, D. 2009. Photography and Causation: Responding to Scruton's Scepticism. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49:4, pp.327-340.

SCRUTON, R. 1981. Photography and Representation. *Critical Inquiry* 7:3.

WALTON, K. 1984. On the Nature of Photographic Realism. *Critical Inquiry* 11:2, p.246-277.

WALTON. K. 1990. *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Harvard University Press.

WALTON. K. 1997. On Pictures and photographs: objections answered. Allen and Smith (eds.), *Film Theory and Philosophy*. Clarendon Press: Oxford.

WOLLHEIM, R. 1987. *Painting as an Art*. Andrew M. Mellon Lectures in Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University

Press.

WOLLHEIM, R. 1998. On Pictorial Representation, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art
Criticism, Vol. 56, No. 3, pp.217-226.