

THE UNITY OF PICTORIAL EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Seeing-in is the experience of seeing something in a picture. This experience is single and unified. It is not like the disjoint experience of perceiving one thing while simultaneously visualizing another. This is so despite the fact that, like the latter experience, seeing-in is *twofold*. It involves being visually aware of two distinct objects at the same time – an array of ink-marks, on the one hand, and the depicted scene, on the other. Plausibly, it also involves being aware of them in two distinct ways: while we perceive the ink-marks before us, the manner of our visual awareness of the depicted object is not perceptual. In this paper, I offer a novel way of reconciling these two features of seeing-in. I argue that the modes of visual awareness operative in seeing-in have to be understood on the model of converse relations, like *lighter* and *heavier*, in the sense that the same state arises from the obtaining of each.

When we see something in a picture, say a horse in an array of ink-marks, we have what Richard Wollheim described as a ‘twofold experience’. Wollheim called this experience ‘seeing-in’, and described it as twofold because he thought that, when it occurs, there are two distinct objects of which we are visually aware: we experience an array of ink-marks, and at the same time we experience a horse (Wollheim 1987). Of course, there is only one thing before us – an array of ink-marks – and so only one thing that is *perceived*, where to perceive something is to stand in some kind of spatiotemporal relation to it. Wollheim did not mean to contradict this obvious fact in maintaining that seeing-in is twofold. Rather, his distinctive thought was that the picture’s content – in this case, a horse – was a simultaneous object of a *non-perceptual* kind of visual awareness. According to him, it was this feature of pictorial experiences that distinguishes our understanding of pictorial representations from their linguistic counterparts. Roughly, to understand a picture is to have, under favourable circumstances, a (non-perceptual) visual experience of what it depicts.¹

¹ Wollheim maintained that seeing-in is not limited to the pictorial case, and that it can occur without the presence of representational intent. For instance, it is possible to see a cityscape in clouds, or Jesus’ face in a piece of burnt toast.

When Wollheim introduced the idea of twofoldness, he emphasized that our awareness of the picture's ink-marks, and our awareness of the picture's content, have to be understood as two distinguishable but inseparable aspects that 'lock together' in a *single* experience, and not as two distinct experiences (Wollheim 1987, 46; 2003, 145-6). In other words, seeing-in is not like the experience of perceiving one thing while at the same time visualizing another, which properly speaking, is the simultaneous occurrence of two disjoint experiences. On the contrary, to see a horse in an array of ink-marks is to undergo a single, unified experience, in which horse and ink-marks are intimately entwined. Similar remarks have been made more recently by others. For instance, Robert Hopkins speaks of our experience of the horse-picture as somehow 'relating' the horse to the marks before us, so that 'together they present a single view of the world before [us]' (Hopkins 2012, 651), while John Kulvicki remarks on the fact that 'awareness of configuration and awareness of content seem tied together in a rather intimate, mutually inflected manner' (Kulvicki 2009, 388).

Philosophers have wondered how seeing-in can be both twofold and a single experience. This is not because the combination is generally mysterious. For instance, there is nothing puzzling about the fact that my perception of a horse in a field constitutes a single experience, at the same time as it involves the simultaneous visual awareness of two distinct objects. Rather, philosophers' sense of puzzlement has been due to facts that are specific to the pictorial case. In particular, unlike my perception of a horse in a field, the very same thing appears to present us with both a horse and an array of ink-marks. What is more, we experience the horse and the ink-marks in ways that are *prima facie* unlike: while we perceive the ink-marks, our experience of the horse is not obviously perceptual. Certainly, we do not perceive a horse (there is no horse before us to be perceived), and

In this paper, I restrict attention to the experience of seeing-in itself, and to pictorial examples of seeing-in in particular. I remain neutral on the question of the experience's role in an account of depiction.

it does not seem that we enjoy a non-veridical perception *as of* a horse either. Looking at the picture does not leave us with the visual impression of perceiving a horse.²

One response has been to deny twofoldness. This was Ernst Gombrich's line, who thought that it is no more possible to see a picture's content, at the same time as the picture's surface, than it is possible to simultaneously see Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit as a duck and a rabbit (Gombrich 1960). On his view, experiencing a picture involves the constant vacillation between experiences of its content, and experiences of its surface. Bence Nanay takes a similar line when he suggests that the subject's sense of experiential unity is secured by the fact that the picture's surface is 'unattended' by her. That is, according to Nanay, the subject does not ordinarily attend to the picture's surface, and so does not typically have a 'conscious perceptual experience' of it (Nanay 2018, 165). This is essentially to deny the ubiquity of twofoldness. Nanay does admit of some 'special cases' in which 'we attend to the surface and the depicted scene simultaneously' (Nanay 2018, 168), but he thinks that these are restricted to moments of aesthetic appreciation. He does not say what experiential unity comes to in such cases.

I think we can do better. In this paper I offer a way of making sense of twofoldness in the face of experiential unity. I begin in §1 with a proposal for understanding twofoldness. I then turn in §2 to existing efforts to underwrite the experience's unity. Finding fault with these, I outline an alternative approach in §3. Specifically, I suggest that seeing-in involves two distinct visual relations that have to be understood on the model of converse relations, like *lighter* and *heavier*, in the sense that the same fact arises from the obtaining of each. I end in §4 with some of the upshots of the paper's positive proposal.

² Some people have denied this: see the discussion of neo-Gombrichianism below.

1. TWOFOLDNESS

1.1 VISUAL EXPERIENCES

Wollheim thought that when we see o in p , o and p are both objects of visual experience.³ Let me start, then, by saying something about the notion of a visual experience in general. When we have a visual experience of an object (a horse, say) we experience it in a way that involves knowledge of how horses look. There are many species of visual experience: we can perceive horses face-to-face, we can visualize them, we can perceptually recall particular horses, and so on. In what follows, I will use the expression ‘visual experience’ (and the verb ‘to see’) to refer to the genus, and reserve the term ‘perception’ to refer to a particular species thereof. To perceive something, in this specific sense, is undergo a visual experience that involves standing in some kind of spatiotemporal relation to it, which (all well) puts one in a position to know a good deal about its visual appearance. This is a rough and ready characterization, but it will suffice for our purposes.

Many visual experiences involve instantiating what we might call a *visual relation*, or what Wollheim called a ‘mode of seeing’ (Wollheim 2003, 137). This idea is nicely captured in the following passage from Sartre’s extended discussion of visual imagining:

whether I perceive or imagine [the straw-bottomed chair on which I sit], the object of my perception and that of my image are identical: it is that straw-bottomed chair on which I sit. It is simply that consciousness is *related* to the same chair in two different ways...the relation of consciousness to the object...is a certain way in which the object appears to consciousness, or, if one prefers, a certain way in which consciousness presents to itself an

³ Here and throughout, individual lowercase and italicized letters – ‘ a ’, ‘ b ’, ‘ o ’, ‘ p ’, and so on – will be used as schematic variables. The one exception to this rule is their occurrence as subscripts. See §1.2 below, especially fn. 12.

object. To tell the truth, the expression 'mental image' [as that to which a visual imagining is putatively related] gives rise to confusion. It would be better to say 'consciousness of [the chair]-as-imaged' or 'imaging consciousness of [the chair]'. (Sartre 2010/1940, 7)

We can compare Sartre's proposal here to the idea that propositional attitudes like belief and desire are relations between subjects and (propositional) objects. For instance, to perceive o is to stand in one kind of visual relation to o , and to visualize o is stand in another kind of visual relation to it. Now, it is a good question what distinguishes one kind of visual relation from another. I cannot take on that question here, except to note that different visual relations have different phenomenal characters, so that for any two visual relations r_1 and r_2 , r_1 and r_2 are only distinct if standing in r_1 to o differs phenomenologically from standing in r_2 to o .⁴ Let me also note that only some kinds of visual relations, like perception, support existential generalization; others, like visualization, do not. We can visualize things that do not exist.

Although some visual experiences involve standing in a visual relation to objects or scenes, not all of them do. Others involve it merely *seeming* to the subject that she stands in a visual relation to an object or scene. For instance, when you have an apparent perception as of o , you do not stand in a visual relation to o ; rather, it merely seems to you that this is so. Specifically, it seems to you that you stand in a perceptual relation to o . In other words, 'seeming-to-perceive' is not its own kind of visual relation. Thus, to undergo a visual experience is *either* to stand in a visual relation to an object or scene, *or* for it to merely seem to one that this is so. It is worth noting that this conception of the genus allows for different ways of grouping token visual experiences.

⁴ It should be emphasized that this is only a necessary condition on distinctness; it is not sufficient. It does not follow from the fact that perceiving o in daylight differs phenomenologically from perceiving o in the dark that 'perceiving in daylight' and 'perceiving in the dark' are distinct relations.

Depending on our purposes, we might divide experiences into the veridical and the illusory, or alternatively, into those that are phenomenally alike. While the second principle would group my perception of o with your apparent perception of it, the first principle would divide them.

1.2 TWOFOLDNESS

With these brief remarks in place, we can return to seeing-in. When we see something o in a picture's surface p , we have a visual experience of p .⁵ Specifically, we perceive it: we stand in a perceptual relation to p . I take this much to be uncontroversial. Wollheim's more contentious idea was that, in seeing o in p , we undergo a visual experience of o as well:

TWOFOLDNESS

When we see o in p , there are two objects of which we are visually aware: we visually experience o , and we visually experience p .

In this claim, o ranges over particular objects and scenes, like my sister or Brighton Beach, as well as indefinite entities, like a group of horses. So for instance, Wollheim's thought was that to see my sister's portrait is to undergo a visual experience of the woman herself. Although more controversial, this idea is not unnatural. Of course, we do not perceive her (she is not before us to be perceived), but it is natural to think that we nonetheless undergo some kind of visual experience of her, that seeing my sister in a painting involves experiencing her in a way that involves knowledge of how she looks. This may be due to a prior recognitional capacity (e.g., I can see her

⁵ I assume throughout that the following are true: (a) o is seen in p , (b) nothing is seen in o , and (c) p is not seen in anything. That is, I assume that o isn't a depicted picture, and that p isn't the content of another picture. Instances of 'nested' pictorial experiences, in which a picture is seen in a picture, raise many interesting questions that cannot be addressed here.

in the picture because I know how she looks), or to the fact that the picture affords knowledge that was previously lacking (e.g., you can learn the look of my sister from her portrait). Wollheim described a generalization of this idea as his ‘ground-level observation’:

It is surely a ground-level observation about the difference between pictorial and linguistic representation that, though, if we are to understand a linguistic representation of x , it suffices for us to have a thought of x , we must, if we are to understand a pictorial representation of x , have an experience of x . (Wollheim 2003, 137)

It might be said that TWOFOLDNESS can only be true, if at all, of a subset of cases of seeing-in. After all (the thought goes), it sometimes happens that when we see o in p , we visually experience o without visually experiencing p . This is what happens with convincing *trompe l’oeils*. In such cases, we are unaware of the picture’s surface, and it seems to us as though we perceive o as before us. For the purposes of this paper, these cases can be cast aside. The unity of our experience of successful *trompe l’oeil* is easily accounted for; at least, since the effect of a *trompe l’oeil* is to give rise to an apparent perception, the task is no harder than that of accounting for the unity of perceptions in general.⁶ It is only when the experience of a picture’s content is coupled with a conscious experience of its surface, as happens with twofold seeing-in, that we are confronted with a genuine challenge, which is to explain how this coupling amounts to a single experiential episode.

⁶ Roughly, it is because the various entities that the picture depicts are experienced as the inhabitants of a single space that our experiences of *trompe l’oeil* constitute single experiences.

2. THE UNITY OF PICTORIAL EXPERIENCE

Many people have remarked on the fact that, when we see o in p , our visual experiences of o and p are in some sense ‘unified’. There are various things one might mean by this. For instance, the experiences may be said to be ‘unified’ in the sense of occurring in the same spatiotemporal range – me now, say. Wollheim thought that our experiences of o and p were much more intimately related than that. According to him, our experiences of o and p are ‘unified’ in the sense of being the two distinguishable but inseparable aspects of a *single* experience (Wollheim 1987, 46). Seeing-in is not like the disjoint experience of perceiving a scene while undergoing a simultaneous visualization of an absent object. On the contrary, when we look at a picture, we experience an intimate relation between its medium and its content. A number of authors have offered accounts of seeing-in that attempt to do justice to this fact. I will briefly canvass some of the existing alternatives here.

2.1 NEO-GOMBRICHIANISM AND TRANSPARENCY THEORIES

According to one influential idea – I’ll call it *neo-Gombrichianism* – to see o in p is to perceive p , while simultaneously seeming to perceive o .⁷ On this view, one of the subject’s experiences is veridical, and the other is illusory: specifically, while the subject actually stands in a perceptual visual relation to p , it merely appears to her that she stands in a perceptual relation to o . Of course, proponents of this view acknowledge that the subject doesn’t *believe* o to be before her, but they

⁷ Gombrich thought that seeing o in p involves alternating between a perception of p and an apparent perception of o (Gombrich 1960). While neo-Gombrichians agree with Gombrich about the nature of the visual experiences involved, they dispute his contention that they cannot be had simultaneously. See (Lopes 2005; Kulvicki 2009; Newall 2015).

contend that this is because it is pictorial experience as a whole that informs belief. With respect to how her experience of *o* presents things as being, it is as if *o* is before her to be perceived.

One species of neo-Gombrichianism is particularly well-placed to give an account of the unity of pictorial experience. So-called ‘transparency theorists’ develop the neo-Gombrichian proposal by holding that seeing *o* in *p* involves the apparent perception of *o* as lying *behind p*, which is genuinely perceived (Kulvicki 2009; Newall 2015). On this view, the phenomenon’s status as a single experience is grounded in the fact that *o* and *p* are experienced as simultaneously located in a single, unified space (Hopkins 2012). The unity of pictorial experiences is no more mysterious than the unity of my perception of a horse in a field.

Unfortunately, this proposal inherits what I take to be a damning objection to the general neo-Gombrichian framework. We can agree with the neo-Gombrichian that our experience of *p* is a perception: when we see *o* in *p*, we stand in a perceptual relation to *p*. That much is, as I say, uncontroversial. The idea that our visual experience of *o* is an apparent perception, and so illusory, is much more contentious. After all, it does not seem to be the case that our experiences of pictures involve a component that is inherently misleading. (The neo-Gombrichian can insist that pictorial experiences do not, as a rule, *mislead* us; but it is essentially characteristic of her view that such experiences involve a *misleading* component.) Our experiences of pictures are quite pedestrian, and on the face of it, do not appear to call for the kind of correction at the level of belief that neo-Gombrichians would have us posit. In most cases, we do not have to override the impression of our senses in order to hold firm to our impression that *o* is not before us, but that it is a *picture* of *o* that we are looking at. Transparency theorists add insult to injury in treating *p* as an object that is apparently seen-through. If the view is that *p* is perceived as transparent, it construes the experience of seeing *o* in *p* as misrepresenting *p*, as well as *o*. Alternatively, if the view is that *p* is

experienced as the opaque surface it is, seeing-in is rendered contradictory. Objects can lie behind opaque surfaces, but it is not clear that we can experience a surface as opaque, while simultaneously experiencing something as behind it.

Of course, on some occasions we are genuinely misled by a picture. This is what happens when we encounter a convincing *trompe l'oeil*. In this case, if we are properly fooled, it genuinely seems to us that we are standing in a perceptual relation to its content. It may be that this fact has encouraged the neo-Gombrichian view that twofold seeing-in involves the apparent perception of a picture's content. Consider the following line of thought:

Suppose A is looking at a successful *trompe l'oeil* of *o*, and that B is undergoing a twofold experience of seeing-in, in which she sees *o* in *p*. B's experience differs from A's in including an experience of ink-marks. Indeed, it is natural to think that B's experience differs from A in simply *adding* a perception of *p* to the experience of *o* that A enjoys. Since the latter involves seeming to perceive *o*, this yields the neo-Gombrichian contention that the twofold experience of seeing *o* in *p* consists in perceiving *p*, while simultaneously seeming to perceive *o*.

It is a good question what makes the 'additive' thought here seem so tempting. Certainly, the twofold experience of seeing *o* in *p* has something in common with the experience of a convincing *trompe l'oeil*: in both cases, *o* is visually present to the subject. However, to acknowledge that is not yet to specify the *kind* of visual experience of *o* that each involves. Indeed, it is sensible to think that B's experience of the ink-marks has an effect on the form of visual experience that her experience of *o* takes on. In any case, it is a substantive (i.e., noncompulsory) move to go from the

claim that A and B both experience o to the claim that their o -experiences are the same in kind. More than noncompulsory, this move has the undesirable effect of infecting ordinary twofold experiences of seeing-in with the misleading character of successful *trompe l'oeil*. While the latter is genuinely deceptive (that is its defining feature), it requires some serious mental gymnastics to accept the idea that looking at a painted postcard of a seaside scene (say) involves the visual impression that we are actually perceiving a seaside scene.

These considerations suggest an adequacy constraint on accounts of seeing-in, which will be important as we proceed:

AN ANTI-GOMBRICHIAN ASSUMPTION

When we see o in p , we genuinely stand in a visual relation to o , and we genuinely stand in a visual relation (in this case, a perceptual one) to p .

In maintaining that seeing-in involves genuinely standing in a visual relation to o , I do not assume that o exists. The important point captured by the ANTI-GOMBRICHIAN ASSUMPTION is that twofold seeing-in involves *non-illusory* experiences of both o and p . This assumption is consistent with our bearing an intensional visual relation to o that does not support existential generalization as a matter of course.

2.2 MICHAEL MORRIS' 'REAL LIKENESSES'

In his recent book *Real Likenesses*, Michael Morris presents a compelling critique of the illusionism inherent to neo-Gombrichianism (Morris 2020). What is more, his own view is clearly motivated by the desire to identify a single experience in which medium and content come

together. According to Morris, when we see my sister's portrait, we undergo a visual experience of a woman made of paint. Specifically, we perceive her: 'we perceive the [woman] in the...portrait with just the same simple perception as we see the paint' (ibid., 43). Morris calls this entity a 'real likeness' of my sister, and suggests that it stands in some kind of resemblance relation to her. Importantly, real likenesses are not the same as paintings, but comprise their contents instead. Thus, to see the portrait of my sister is to see a real likeness of her *in* the painting. In this way, medium and content are brought together: the content of the painting is visibly composed of the painting's medium.

Whatever the merits of this view, it cannot speak to our need, which is to explain how seeing my sister's portrait involves both an awareness of my sister (the woman herself), and an awareness of the ink-marks, while nonetheless comprising a single experience. This is because, on Morris' view, we do not undergo a visual experience of my sister when we attend to the portrait of her. It is a real likeness of my sister, and not my sister, that we see in the painting. This is to deny TWOFOLDNESS. (Morris is explicit about this: 'the whole idea of twofoldness' he says, 'is a mistake' (ibid., 46).) Put another way, medium and content can only be said to 'come together' on Morris' view because of his radical re-conception of what content is. As he sees things, my sister is the not the content of her portrait; real likenesses take up that role instead.⁸

2.3 EXPERIENCED RESEMBLANCE VIEWS

Turning now to experienced resemblance views, it has been suggested that to see *o* in *p* is to perceive *p* as resembling *o* in a certain respect (we needn't worry what this respect might be; see (Budd 1993; Hopkins 1995, 1998, 2003; Peacocke 1987) for various options). In general, there are

⁸ Of course, Morris can still describe the painting as 'a portrait of my sister'. This title will be awarded on the basis not of the painting's content, but in recognition of the relation that its content bears to my sister.

two kinds of cases in which we might perceive one thing as resembling another. In the first kind of case, both objects are present to us, and we are struck by the resemblance between the two. In the second kind of case, only one object is present to us, and it puts us in mind of another, absent object.⁹ It is the second kind of experienced resemblance that proponents of the position have in mind. On their view, to see an object in a picture is to perceive the picture's surface as resembling the object (in a certain respect) in much the way that we might perceive someone as resembling their mother.

Hopkins has argued that this view treats seeing-in as a 'unitary' experience, that does not divide into discrete components with 'psychological reality' (Hopkins 2010, 170). As he says, 'there is no sense in which [the] two dimensions [of pictorial experience] reside in distinct experiences, or anything like them' (ibid., 168). Rather, 'seeing-in is a single experience with a complex content. That content is complex in that it has a particular structure: this resembles that in such-and-such a respect' (loc. cit.).

Although these remarks promise to speak to our concern, it is not immediately clear how to understand Hopkins' proposal. For instance, my experience of perceiving that A is next to B is a single experience with a complex content; we might represent it thus: '*Perception*[A is next to B]'. The quoted passages above may be taken to suggest that seeing-in should be treated analogously: '*Visual experience of type T*[A resembles B in such-and-such a respect]'. However, while this suggestion is tempting, it cannot be right. Experiences of experienced resemblance do not exhibit the structure of my perception that A is next to B. This comes out in the fact that my perception involves the perception of both A and B. (As we might put it, the 'perception' operator is distributive.) By contrast, there is no single species of visual experience *T* such that experiencing

⁹ I owe this distinction to (Wollheim 2003, 138).

A as resembling B involves *T*-ing A and *T*-ing B. (The ‘*T*’ operator – whatever it is – is not distributive.) After all, when A is experienced as resembling B in the relevant sense, A is perceived and B is not. In fact, it is not clear that B is visually experienced at all. When we perceive someone as resembling their mother, do we undergo a visual experience of their mother? Wollheim’s view was that we do not, and he rejected experienced resemblance views on precisely these grounds (Wollheim 2003). Wollheim objected that, since the resembled object is not visually experienced, proponents of experienced resemblance fall foul of TWOFOLDNESS. It will not be the case on their view that seeing *o* in *p* involves visually experiencing *o*.¹⁰ If that is right, experienced resemblance theories do not have the resources to meet our challenge, which is to explain how seeing-in can be both unified and twofold.

We will return to experienced resemblance views below (§4.2). If the case can be made for thinking that, *pace* Wollheim’s suggestion, experiences of experienced resemblance do involve visually experiencing the resembled object, there may be interesting connections to draw between my view and theirs. This is something we will be in a position to appreciate once my positive proposal is on the table.

3. POSITIVE PROPOSAL

If I am right, none of the foregoing accounts manage to successfully capture the unity of seeing-in, while treating it as genuinely twofold. Before suggesting how we might do better, let me briefly summarize the features of seeing-in that have emerged from our discussion. They will not all be

¹⁰ Interestingly, Hopkins appears to concede Wollheim’s point when he suggests that talk of ‘experience of *o*’ should be taken ‘rather loosely, as meaning that seeing-in involves a distinct experience of [*p*] that needs characterizing in part by reference to [*o*]’ (Hopkins 2003, 157). There is no suggestion in this remark that Hopkins accepts TWOFOLDNESS.

uncontroversial, but together they constitute what I take to be a natural, if noncompulsory conception of the phenomenon.

1. When we see o in p , we visually experience o , and we visually experience p . This is TWOFOLDNESS.
2. These experiences are veridical; pictorial experiences are not misleading. We genuinely stand in a visual relation to o , and we genuinely stand in a visual relation to p . This is the ANTI-GOMBRICHIAN ASSUMPTION. Let's call the first of these relations ' r_o ', and the second ' r_p '. A few words about the use of this terminology. ' r_o ' and ' r_p ' are convenient shorthands for ordinary ways of speaking. ' r_o ' refers to the kind of visual relation that (I am assuming) we stand in to an entity when we see it in something, and ' r_p ' refers to the kind of visual relation that (all can agree) we stand in to a marked surface, when we see something in it. These relations are very general: r_o is the kind of relation we stand in to an object or scene, *any* object or scene, when we see it in a marked surface, *any* marked surface; and r_p is the kind of relation we stand in to a marked surface, *any* marked surface, when we see something, *anything*, in it.¹¹ Thus, to see something a in a picture is to stand in r_o to a , and to see something in a picture q is to stand in r_p to q .¹² Let's also say that to stand in r_o to something is to undergo an ' r_o -experience' of it, and that to stand in r_p to something is to undergo an ' r_p -experience' of it.

¹¹ I use 'marked surface' broadly here, so as to include cloudy skies and pieces of burnt toast (see fn. 1), as well as configurations of ink-marks.

¹² To avoid any possible confusion: I am *not* here proposing a metalinguistic convention, according to which ' o ' ranges over the totality of objects visible in pictures, such that for any such object, r_o is the relation that we bear to it when we see it in a picture; in its occurrence as a subscript, ' o ' is not schematic (cf. fn. 3). Rather, ' r_o ' stands for the *kind* of visual relation that we stand in to an object, any object, when we see it in a picture. Likewise for ' r_p '.

3. r_p is a species of perception, and r_o is not. When we see something in a painting, we do not perceive it. *A fortiori*, r_o and r_p are not the same species of visual relation. Since we can see things in pictures that do not exist, r_o is an intensional relation that does not support existential generalization as a matter of course.
4. Seeing-in is a unified phenomenon: it constitutes a single experience.

There has been a good deal of uncertainty about how to understand Wollheim's remark that seeing-in is both twofold and unified. For instance, Kendall Walton writes: 'Seeing-in is an experience characterized by what [Wollheim] calls "twofoldness": one sees the marked picture surface, and one sees the subject of the picture. These are not two independent experiences, but two aspects of a single one. It is hard to know what this means, and Wollheim offers little explanation' (Walton 2002, 33). Similarly, John Hyman has complained that, since Wollheim 'does not explain how he believes experiences should be counted, it is difficult to assess [his claim]' that 'being visually aware of the surface and discerning something [in it] are two aspects of a single experience' (Hyman 2006, fn. 6).

Before responding to these complaints, it will help to have a concrete example in hand. Let's consider Jane, who is looking at a scene **O** in an array of ink-marks **P**, at a particular time **T**. (These bold-faced, capitalized letters are the names of particular entities; they are not schematic. That said, since Jane, **O**, **P** and **T** are arbitrary, what goes for them goes for pictorial experiences in general.)

We know from the above that Jane's experience consists in her r_o -experience of **O** at **T**, and her simultaneous r_p -experience of **P** at **T**. These experiences can be thought of as facts –

specifically, the fact that she stands in r_o to \mathbf{O} at \mathbf{T} , and the fact that she stands in r_p to \mathbf{P} at \mathbf{T} . I'll represent these experiences as '[Jane- r_o - \mathbf{O}] \mathbf{T} ' and '[Jane- r_p - \mathbf{P}] \mathbf{T} ', respectively. I propose to understand Wollheim as making the observation that these experiences are *one and the same*. That is, while seeing-in is in various ways complex, it does not have distinct experiences as proper parts. Jane's r_o -experience of \mathbf{O} at \mathbf{T} and her r_p -experience of \mathbf{P} at \mathbf{T} are not two separate experiences, which somehow combine to yield the experience of seeing-in. On the contrary, what our notation gives the impression of being distinct facts are in fact the same. This, I suggest, is what Wollheim meant in saying that Jane's experiences of \mathbf{O} and \mathbf{P} at \mathbf{T} are the two 'distinguishable but inseparable aspects' of a single experience.

Now, it is a good question how [Jane- r_o - \mathbf{O}] \mathbf{T} can be the same fact as [Jane- r_p - \mathbf{P}] \mathbf{T} , when r_o and r_p are distinct relations. I'll return to this question below. For now though, it is worth noting that this identity is encouraged by some general facts about language use. Before elaborating on this, it will help to take a brief detour through some familiar metaphysical literature on converse relations.

3.1 LIGHTER AND HEAVIER

Lighter is not the same relation as *heavier*. The ordered pair <Pluto, Jupiter> occurs in the extension of the former but not the latter. In general, a 's being lighter than something is not the same thing as a 's being heavier than it. On the contrary, *lighter* and *heavier* are converse: if the ordered pair < a , b > is in the extension of one, < b , a > is in the extension of the other, and < a , b > is not. Less technically: if a is lighter than b , b is heavier (and not lighter) than a , and vice versa.

This much is uncontroversial. It is also generally accepted that the existence of [Pluto-*lighter*-Jupiter] necessitates the existence of [Jupiter-*heavier*-Pluto]. What is more, there are good

reasons for thinking that these facts are one and the same.¹³ For instance, if [Pluto–*lighter*–Jupiter] and [Jupiter–*heavier*–Pluto] are distinct facts, why should the existence of one necessitate the existence of the other? What sort of metaphysical law would explain that? What is more, if the facts are not the same, why does knowing Pluto is lighter than Jupiter *ipso facto* put us in a position to know that Jupiter is heavier than Pluto, and vice versa? In an excellent paper on Dummett’s Frege, Peter Sullivan makes the case for the facts’ identity by appealing to the following observation:

To introduce into Frege’s language a symbol allowing us to say that something x is heavier than something y is automatically to introduce a symbol allowing us to say of y that x is heavier than it, i.e., that y is lighter than x . (Sullivan 2010, 99)

Sullivan’s remark here does not entail the (obviously false) claim that the presence of the word ‘heavier’ in English necessitates the presence of the word ‘lighter’. It is rather that having the resources in English (whatever they are) to say that a is heavier than b is *ipso facto* to have the resources in English to say that b is lighter than a . This is because, English being what it is, the passive version of a sentence is automatically provided for by its active form.¹⁴ Thus, we can move by a straightforward grammatical transformation from ‘ a hates b ’ to ‘ b is hated by a ’, from ‘ a longs for b ’ to ‘ b is longed for by a ’, from ‘ a is heavier than b ’ to ‘ b is such that a is heavier than it’, and so on. This grammatical transformation results in sentences that are only formally distinct from their inputs: their semantic contents are invariant under it. Since the sentence ‘ b is lighter

¹³ The literature on converse relations has seen some debate over this claim. See (Sullivan 2010) and (Trueman 2021) for compelling arguments in favour of it.

¹⁴ Cf. (Dummett 1973), Ch. 2, on the ‘redundancy’ that English provides for.

than *a*' is an abbreviation of the cumbersome '*b* is such that *a* is heavier than it', the same is true of the pair '*a* is heavier than *b*' and '*b* is lighter than *a*': the differences between them are merely formal. It is because the appearances of the words 'heavier' and 'lighter' have nothing in common (in contrast to 'hates' and 'is hated by', say) that this point can be hard to keep sight of.

It follows from Sullivan's observation that to say (believe, know, etc.) that Jupiter is heavier than Pluto just is to say (believe, know, etc.) that Pluto is lighter than Jupiter – where the relevant notion of 'say' here is a sentence-independent one, on a par with 'express'. Moreover, it follows from that fact that [Pluto–*lighter*–Jupiter] and [Jupiter–*heavier*–Pluto] are one and the same. That is, while it is a matter of some debate whether ' $f_1 = f_2$ ' entails ' $\text{Say}(f_1) = \text{Say}(f_2)$ ' (or ' $\text{Believe}(f_1) = \text{Believe}(f_2)$ ', etc.), it is presumably uncontroversial that ' $\text{Say}(f_1) = \text{Say}(f_2)$ ' (or ' $\text{Believe}(f_1) = \text{Believe}(f_2)$ ', etc.) entails ' $f_1 = f_2$ '. Thus, if to say that Pluto is lighter than Jupiter just is to say that Jupiter is heavier than Pluto, there can be no distance between Pluto's being lighter than Jupiter and Jupiter's being heavier than Pluto.

In this way, Sullivan's observation compels us to accept that [Pluto–*lighter*–Jupiter] and [Jupiter–*heavier*–Pluto] are the same fact. However, accepting this identity is not without its difficulty. Specifically, it can be hard to square the ontological claim that [Pluto–*lighter*–Jupiter] and [Jupiter–*heavier*–Pluto] are identical with the indubitable fact that *lighter* and *heavier* are distinct relations. Thankfully, there isn't a straightforward contradiction here – the identity requires not that *lighter* and *heavier* be the same relation, but that a fact's *including* one is its *including* the other, so that the very same fact arises from the obtaining of each. Nonetheless, it takes work to render this idea intelligible.¹⁵ In particular, as long as facts are regarded as complexes, built up like

¹⁵ It is because of the perceived difficulty of holding together the thought that *lighter* and *heavier* are distinct relations, with the thought that [Pluto–*lighter*–Jupiter] and [Jupiter–*heavier*–Pluto] are identical, that some authors have been moved to reject the first of these. For instance, (Williamson 1985) denies that relations are distinct from their

Lego models from constituent parts, it is difficult to see how [Jupiter–*heavier*–Pluto] and [Pluto–*lighter*–Jupiter] can be identical. After all, their constituents are not the same. Rob Trueman and Peter Sullivan have (independently) taken up the task of dislodging this conception of facts as complexes, by appealing to some well-known Fregean theses about relations.¹⁶

Their crucial move is to deny that relations are special kinds of objects, which occur in facts in the same way that things like Pluto and Jupiter do. This means that, strictly speaking, relations cannot be referred to by names, like ‘*lighter*’ and ‘*heavier*’, so that questions like ‘In the supposed single fact, are Pluto and Jupiter related by the *lighter* or *heavier* relation?’ must be regarded as so much loose talk. In contrast to objects, relations can only be mentioned by using relational expressions to speak of one thing’s standing in relation to another. So, the only well-formed question that one can ask in this case is whether the relevant fact is to the effect that Pluto is lighter than Jupiter, or to the effect that Jupiter is lighter than Pluto. *This* question already has its answer, which is that the fact is both, simultaneously. To echo Sullivan once more: ‘we do not have to choose whether our single [fact] involves *heavier* or *lighter* as a constituent: for it is to include one *is* for it to include the other’ (loc. cit.).

3.2 r_o AND r_p

I suggest that a similar series of claims are true of the facts [Jane– r_o –**O**]_T and [Jane– r_p –**P**]_T, which in this case are experiences. To see how this goes, we can begin by noting the truth of the following claim:

converses, while (Fine 2000) argues that relations do not have converses at all. See (Trueman 2010) for a discussion of both.

¹⁶ See (Sullivan 2010) and (Trueman 2021).

(A) To introduce a symbol into our language allowing us to say that s r_o -experiences something is automatically to introduce a symbol allowing us to say that s r_p -experiences something, and vice versa.

As before, the claim here is not that the introduction of the expression ' r_o -experience' into a language necessitates the introduction of the expression ' r_p -experience'. Rather, it is that having the resources in the language to say that s r_o -experiences something is *ipso facto* to have the resources to say that s r_p -experiences something. This is clear when we recall what ' r_o ' and ' r_p ' are shorthand for. Consider the following series of transformations:

- ' s r_o -experiences something'
- 'there is something such that s sees it in something' (*defn. of ' r_o '*)
- ' s sees something in something' (*grammatical trans.*)
- 'there is something such that s sees something in it' (*grammatical trans.*)
- ' s r_p -experiences something' (*defn. of ' r_p '*)

Again, these transformations have no effect on the contents of the transformed sentences. Their semantic contents are invariant under them. This means that to say (believe, know, etc.) that s r_o -experiences something just is to say (believe, know, etc.) that she r_p -experiences something. As a result, to undergo an r_o -experience of something just is to undergo an r_p -experience of something. To put the point another way, the property of being an r_o -experience and the property of being an r_p -experience are identical – indeed, they are analytically equivalent: every r_o -experience is identical to an r_p -experience, and vice versa, and to know that one is undergoing an r_o -experience

is to know that one is undergoing an r_p -experience. We might put this by saying that to be an r_o -experience *just is* to be an r_p -experience. In particular then, [Jane- r_o -**O**]_T is identical to an r_p -experience of hers, and [Jane- r_p -**P**]_T is identical to an r_o -experience of hers. The obvious thing to say here is that [Jane- r_o -**O**]_T is identical to [Jane- r_p -**P**]_T.

It is worth reflecting on some of the differences between this case and the last. While Sullivan's observation about the introduction of symbols for *heavier* and *lighter* entails the identity of [Jupiter-*heavier*-Pluto] and [Pluto-*lighter*-Jupiter], there is no similar entailment from (A) to the identity of [Jane- r_o -**O**]_T and [Jane- r_p -**P**]_T. (A) tells us that [Jane- r_o -**O**]_T is identical to an r_p -experience of hers, and that [Jane- r_p -**P**]_T is identical to an r_o -experience of hers, but not that [Jane- r_o -**O**]_T is identical to [Jane- r_p -**P**]_T. What is more, there is no principle analogous to (A) from which the latter identity can be derived. It is not the case that to introduce a symbol into our language allowing us to say that s r_o -experiences **O** is automatically to introduce a symbol allowing us to say that s r_p -experiences **P**. This is not just because '**O**' and '**P**' are ordinarily independently intelligible. It also follows from the fact that, while the properties ' r_o -experiences something' and ' r_p -experiences something' are co-extensive, the properties ' r_o -experiences **O**' and ' r_p -experiences **P**' are not. It is possible to r_o -experience **O** without r_p -experiencing **P** (i.e., by seeing **O** in something other than **P**), and it is possible to r_p -experience **P** without r_o -experiencing **O** (i.e., by seeing something other than **O** in **P**). Thus, ' s r_o -experiences **O**' and ' s r_p -experiences **P**' cannot be merely formal variations on one another.

These complexities mean that, in contrast to the previous case, the relevant identity statement does not follow from simple facts about language use. Of course, if Jane is only looking at one picture at **T**, there is no r_p -experience *other* than [Jane- r_p -**P**]_T for [Jane- r_o -**O**]_T to be identical to, and no r_o -experience other than [Jane- r_o -**O**]_T for [Jane- r_p -**P**]_T to be identical to.

However, if Jane is undergoing two pictorial experiences at the same time – if she sees **O** in **P** at the same time as she sees **O*** in **P*** – (A) will not dictate which r_o -experience is identical to which r_p -experience, and vice versa. All it establishes is that Jane’s r_o -experience is identical to *an* r_p -experience, and that her r_p -experience is identical to *an* r_o -experience. It will be a matter of brute fact that her r_o -experience of **O** is identical to her r_p -experience of **P**, and that her r_o -experience of **O*** is identical to her r_p -experience of **P***. At this point, explanations come to an end. This situation ought not to strike us as unsatisfactory. After all, as Cian Dorr notes, identity statements are ‘excellent stopping places for explanation; they do not cry out for explanation in their own right’ (Dorr 2016, 41). (Consider the oddness of asking for someone to underwrite the identity of Hesperus and Phosphorus.)

As was the case before, this situation leaves us with the task of explaining how [Jane- r_o -**O**]_T and [Jane- r_p -**P**]_T can be identical when r_o and r_p are distinct relations. In this case, the sense of mystery is perhaps best dissolved by dropping the artificial notation we have adopted, and reverting to ordinary ways of speaking instead. For it is easy to see how referring to Jane’s experiences of **O** and **P** by means of the symbols ‘[Jane- r_o -**O**]_T’ and ‘[Jane- r_p -**P**]_T’, respectively, encourages a conception of them as complexes, of which Jane is the sole common constituent. In resisting this impression, it may help to note that all the forgoing comes to is this. Jane’s experiences of **O** and **P** are identical because to see an object or scene in the way that we do when we see it in a picture *just is* to perceive a set of ink-marks in a peculiar way. Equivalently, to perceive a set of ink-marks in the way we do when we see something in them *just is* to undergo a particular kind of visual experience of an object or scene.

3.3 UPSHOT

Let me briefly sum up before drawing out some of the implications of this proposal. I have endeavoured to show how seeing-in can be a single experiential episode, at the same time as it involves standing in distinct visual relations, r_o and r_p , to different objects. The key to appreciating this possibility is to recognize that to stand in the r_o relation to something a just is to stand in the r_p relation to something else b . In other words, to see something in the way we do when we see it in a picture just is to perceive an array of ink-marks in the way we do when we see something in them. This means that r_o and r_p share an important feature with the relations *lighter* and *heavier*, which is that the same fact arises from the obtaining of each. This feature is entirely consistent with the relations' distinctness. The fact that standing in the r_o relation to something a is the same as standing in the r_p relation to something else b does not entail that r_o and r_p are the same relation. (r_o and r_p are the same relation only if standing in the r_o relation to something a is the same as standing in the r_p relation to that *same object a*.)

The fact that [Jane- r_o -**O**]_T appears to be a distinct fact from [Jane- r_p -**P**]_T is an artifice of our ' r_o '/' r_p ' notation. The same impression is given when we speak as philosophers of art have tended to do, which is to speak of Jane's experience of **O** at **T** and – in a separate breath, as it were – of Jane's experience of **P** at **T**. By contrast, when we speak of Jane as seeing **O** in **P** at **T**, there is no suggestion that Jane is undergoing more than one visual experience. I believe that Wollheim had something like this in mind when he warned that 'we get not so much into error as into confusion' when we abstract the twin aspects of seeing-in from the complex whole of which they are characteristic (Wollheim 1987, 46).

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, I have limited myself to highlighting the ‘converse’ natures of r_o and r_p . Besides that, I have refrained from saying much about the species of visual relation that r_o and r_p respectively are. Let me end with a word or two more on this question.

4.1 ON THE RELATION r_p

We know that r_p is a way of perceptually relating to objects. It is an interesting upshot of the account above that r_p is a species of perceptual relation that is *distinct* from the perceptual relation we bear to objects, like tables and chairs, or unintelligible arrays of ink-marks, in which there is nothing to see. Thus, Jane’s perception of **P** is distinct in kind from her perception of the objects in the room around her that she sees nothing in. This is a consequence of the claim, derived from (A) above, that r_p -experiences are invariably r_o -experiences. After all, it is obviously not the case that whenever an object fails to sustain an experience of seeing-in, our perception of it is necessarily identical to an r_o -experience. Whatever non-perceptual visual relation r_o turns out to be, our everyday perceptions of chairs etc. do not invariably involve the operation of a non-perceptual species of visual relation.

This result means that perception, as a way of visually relating to objects, has to be thought of as a species of visual experience that is specifiable further into more determinate kinds. In particular, the transition from seeing a surface as so many unintelligible ink-marks, in which nothing is seen, to seeing the surface as a picture *of* something, involves a shift in the way in which

one is perceptually related to the ink-marks. In coming to see the ink-marks as peculiarly organized, perception takes a quite specific turn¹⁷ from one species of it to another (**Fig. 1**).¹⁸

It is hard to say if this line will be controversial. Most people agree that seeing something in a picture causes it to ‘look different’ in some sense. For instance, Dominic Lopes states that ‘the design of Picasso’s *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* acquires a new appearance once you see Kahnweiler in it. Otherwise disparate regions of the picture’s surface come to look organized into a whole that looks responsible for depicting Kahnweiler’ (Lopes 2005, 40). Similarly, Hopkins has said that ‘when we see [o in a surface p] we experience [p] differently from when we see nothing therein’ (Wollheim and Hopkins 2003, 156). What these remarks do not make clear is whether Lopes and Hopkins would be happy to accept my characterization of the acquisition of the ink-marks’ new appearance. On my view, the shift in phenomenal character from seeing p as so many ink-marks, to seeing something in it, is due to a change in the kind of visual relation that we stand in to them.

¹⁷ I borrow this nice phrase from Michael Thompson. See e.g., (Thompson 2008, 15).

¹⁸ The same is not true of the transition from seeing one thing in a surface, to seeing another thing in it. For instance, the experience of seeing an old woman in **Fig. 2**, and the experience of seeing a young lady in it, involve standing in the same visual relation to it, namely r_p . (Recall that r_p is the relation we stand in to a picture’s surface, *any* picture’s surface, when we see something, *anything*, in it; see §1.2.) The phenomenological differences between the two experiences instead have to do the fact that, as one switches between the two interpretations, different features of the surface gain prominence, or recede in importance, in accordance with the object seen-in.

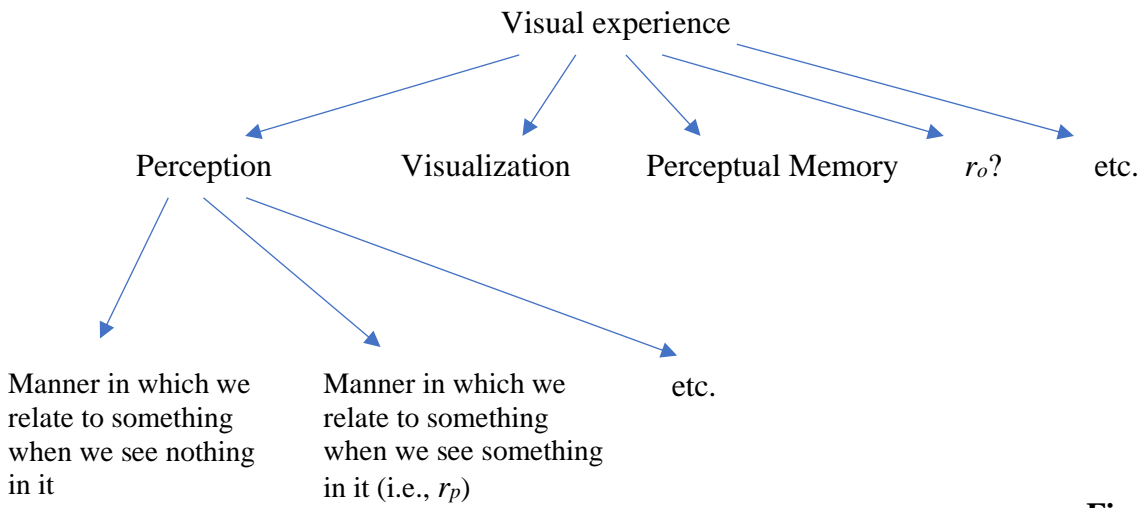


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

4.2 ON THE RELATION r_o

Turning to r_o , Wollheim's own view was that r_o was a *sui generis* species of visual experience, which cannot be had outside the pictorial context,¹⁹ and of which there is nothing informative to say beyond the fact that it is the manner in which we visually relate to objects when we see them in things (**Fig. 1**). The above remarks may help to deflate the import of this position. After all, many people have found the idea of a *sui generis* visual relation, 'peculiarly associated with representation', too mysterious to accept. Such people may be helped by being told that to see an object in the special way that Wollheim identified is just to perceive a set of ink-marks in a particular way.

That said, the preceding account does not entail Wollheim's anti-reductionist view that seeing-in cannot be reduced to independently intelligible experience-kinds. In other words, it does not preclude identifying a more general phenomenon of which seeing-in is but one distinct form. We can illustrate this possibility by returning once more to experienced resemblance views of seeing-in. It was suggested above that such views fail to respect Wollheim's 'ground-level observation' that seeing-in is twofold. According to experienced resemblance accounts, seeing o in p is a matter of perceiving p to resemble o in a certain respect. Unless experiences of experienced resemblance involve visually experiencing the resembled object, such views will fail to treat o as the object of a visual experience, contrary to TWOFOLDNESS.

Let us put this worry to one side, and assume that perceiving p to resemble o does involve undergoing a visual experience of o . It certainly involves standing in *some* relation to o , and we can assume for now that that relation is visual. What I want to suggest is that, granting this assumption, proponents of experienced resemblance views may be regarded as saying something

¹⁹ Again, I am using 'pictorial context' broadly here, and throughout, so as to include cloudy skies and pieces of burnt toast, as well as configurations of ink-marks.

substantive about the relations r_o and r_p that is entirely consistent with the remarks made here. That is, we can regard them as identifying r_o as the visual relation that we stand in to an object when we see something as resembling it, and as identifying r_p as the visual relation that we stand in to an object when we see it as resembling something. As far as I can see, there is no reason to think that the general remarks made in this paper about r_o and r_p are at odds with this specific analysis of the two relations. For instance, the latter is a species of perception, and the former is an intensional, non-perceptual form of visual awareness (or so we're assuming). What is more, it is natural to think that the visual relations involved in experiences of experienced resemblance enjoy the key feature attributed to r_o and r_p in this paper, which is that the same fact arises from the obtaining of each. This analysis of r_p is also consistent with the thesis that r_p is a distinctive species of perception (§4.1). Proponents of the analysis will simply have to hold that to perceive a as resembling b is to undergo a perception of a that is distinct in kind from our perceptions of things that are not perceived to resemble anything.

I am not suggesting that experienced resemblance theorists have explicitly conceptualized their view this way. Rather, my intention has simply been to demonstrate the possibility of developing a substantive theory of seeing-in that proceeds in accordance with the theses defended here. In this paper, I have limited myself to saying just enough about r_o and r_p to explain how seeing-in can be both twofold and a single experience. As far as these claims go, more needs to be said to vindicate Wollheim's anti-reductionism about seeing-in. Thus, anyone with reductionist ambitions is at liberty to continue the story on offer here by giving non-trivial characterizations of r_o and r_p . Given certain assumptions, experienced resemblance theories provide us with one example of how this might go.

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