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# *Seeing-in Is Not Seeing-Through*

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, I intend to focus on the transparency account of picture perception, according to which picture perception is, in many cases at least, a species of perception of transparency that displays a transparency effect even in absence of physical transparency. Basically, I want to show that this account is not correct. For not only it does not rightly capture the phenomenology of picture perception, but also, and more importantly, it does not provide sufficient conditions for that perception. Yet this criticism does not altogether intend to deny that, as to picture perception, the transparency account has some insights that must be kept in any good account of such a perception: namely, the fact that picture perception involves an element of aware illusoriness and the fact that it brings in a sort of transfiguration of the pictorial vehicle per se, the physical basis of a picture, into something that has a pictorial value.

## **I. Introduction**

In this paper, I intend to focus on the transparency account of picture perception, according to which picture perception is, in many cases at least, a species of perception of transparency that displays a transparency effect even in absence of physical transparency. Basically, I want to show that this account is not correct. For not only it does not rightly capture the phenomenology of picture perception, but also, and more importantly, it does not provide sufficient conditions for that perception. Yet this criticism does not altogether intend to deny that, as to picture perception, the transparency account has some insights that must be kept in any good account of such a perception: namely, the fact that picture perception involves an element of aware illusoriness and the fact that it brings in a sort of transfiguration of the pictorial vehicle per se, the physical basis of a picture, into something that has a pictorial value.

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## 2. Picture Perception Is a Perception of Transparency

The idea that a picture is like a window open to its *subject*, i.e., what the picture presents,<sup>1</sup> is an old-fashioned one, tracing back at least to Leonbattista Alberti's *De pictura*. The gist of this idea is that a picture is like a transparent medium that lets one see its subject through it. Yet how can it be more than a mere metaphor as far as so-called *opaque* pictures, paintings first of all, are concerned; namely, those pictures that, following Walton 1984, are linked to their subjects by a basically intentional relation? Even if by chance the subject of an opaque picture laid behind that picture, there would be no relation between it and that picture that would enable the former to be seen through the latter. Physically speaking, the *vehicle* of that picture, i.e., its physical basis, is no transparent medium. For some people, the idea can be rendered true by those pictures that (in another sense) are called *transparent* pictures, static and dynamic photographs first of all; namely, those pictures which, according to Walton 1984 again, are linked to their subjects by a basically causal relation. Yet even such pictures do not work as transparent media. Even when the subject of a transparent picture lies behind it so as to have a direct causal responsibility in its production, in its being physically opaque that picture is not a transparent medium that allows that subject to be seen through it. Just as opaque pictures, they visually occlude what lies behind them, a fortiori their subjects.

Yet some other people believe that, both in the case of transparent and in the case of opaque pictures, picture perception may be taken to be a species of perception of transparency. In general, as the Italian psychologist Fabio Metelli has originally shown, physical transparency is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition of phenomenal transparency. On the one hand, physically transparent things, e.g. air, may not be perceived transparently: objects located in outer space are not e.g. seen through air.

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<sup>1</sup> I say "presents" rather than "depicts" in order to take into account also accidental or fortuitous images (Cutting-Massironi 1998), that is, items that have a figurative value even though they have not been construed by anyone in order to represent something. Those images indeed present something without also depicting it. Famous examples of images of this kind are faces seen in rocks, battles seen in marble veins, animals seen in clouds. Cf. Wollheim 19802, 1987. To be sure, however, Newall 2015, p. 133 does not want to take them into consideration.

On the other hand, also physically opaque things may prompt a perception of transparency.<sup>2</sup> For instance, in the paradigmatic case Metelli provides [FIGURE 1], the following triangular body is physically opaque, yet one sees (the relevant portion of) a spiral through it, as if that body were a transparent layer (or even (in this case) the other way around, that is, the spiral plays the role of the physically opaque body through which one however sees a triangular body).<sup>3</sup>

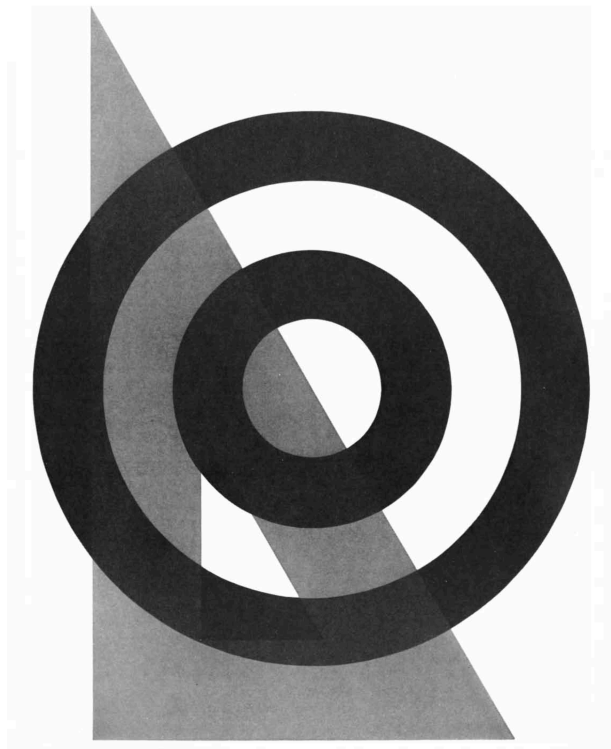


FIGURE 1. Fabio Matelli, *Triangle and Concentric Circles*,  
*Scientific American*, vol. 230, 1974.

Now, the above people say, this transparency effect holds true of pictures as well, at least in many cases. Although they are physically opaque, they

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Metelli 1974, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Metelli 1974, p. 90. For the reasons why in this case phenomenal transparency may go both ways, see Casati 2009, Sayim and Cavanagh 2011.

may be surely phenomenally captured via a perception of transparency, in which one sees their subject as lying behind them, thereby making their vehicle a sort of transparent layer (Kulvicki 2009, Newall 2011, 2015). Now granted, that perception of transparency is a kind of seeing-as perception, hence it is not veridical. In entertaining that perception, one does not see *that* its subject lies behind the picture, one merely sees the subject *as* so lying even if it does not so lie. Yet moreover, that seeing-as remains *modal*. One does not see the subject of a picture as lying behind it amodally, as if the picture were something that occludes the subject. Instead, one sees the subject as *through* the picture. Finally, the nonveridicality of such a perception is well known to its bearer, insofar as she is also aware of the physical opacity of the picture. Now, this aware illusoriness also accompanies perception of transparency in general. For instance, in the aforementioned Metelli paradigmatic case, it is not the case that the spiral modally seen behind the triangular body lies so behind, as the perceiver well knows. Thus, one may well say that, in many cases at least, picture perception – the perception of a picture as presenting another item, its subject – is a species of perception of transparency.

A consequence of Kulvicki's account seems to be that the seeing-as perception in question is not only nonveridical, it also has a sort of impossibility: a *nomological* impossibility. For, although it is a *modal* perception of transparency, that perception is accompanied by the *perceptual* awareness that the picture's vehicle is physically opaque.<sup>4</sup> Yet in no nomologically possible world, one modally sees a subject through its physically opaque picture perceived as such.<sup>5</sup>

In itself, I would say, this nomological impossibility is not per se particularly disquieting. There are other cases in which one entertains an impossible seeing-as perception, for instance when we see a regular triangular

<sup>4</sup> "Seeing-in is a perceptual state in which an opaque object is experienced as being in front of another opaque object even though neither object is obscured by the other" (Kulvicki 2009, p. 394).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Newall 2015, pp. 136-7. Kulvicki himself seems to acknowledge this problem when he says "one cannot see through opaque objects, so the far object in such circumstances cannot be causally responsible for one's experience of it in the proper manner" (Kulvicki 2009, p. 392).

body as a Penrose triangle.<sup>6</sup> Yet Newall interestingly thinks that this undoubtedly problematic aspect of Kulvicki's account can be amended if one dispenses with the idea that this perception of transparency is *accompanied* by a perception of the pictorial vehicle's opacity. In Newall's account, this latter perception does not go along with the perception of transparency that constitutes picture perception, but it is rather a perception of that vehicle in isolation that *alternates* with that perception.<sup>7</sup> Thus, when one entertains the latter perception, one is aware of the vehicle's opacity, yet this awareness is not perceptual. This result can be obtained by taking the inclusion of picture perception within perception of transparency *substantively*. For according to Newall, picture perception is qualified by the same sort of laws that according to Metelli qualify perception of transparency in general. In particular, this holds true of the so-called *law of scission*, which Metelli describes as follows: "with the perception of transparency the stimulus color splits into two different colors, which are called the scission colors. One of the scission colors goes to the transparent layer and the other to the surface of the figure below" (Metelli 1974, p. 93). Take a transparent layer and juxtapose it on another object, let me call it the *background* object. This juxtaposition determines a certain *stimulus* color: this color is what is immediately grasped in the perception of transparency. Moreover, the stimulus color is split into two further colors, the *scission* colors, one that is ascribed to the layer itself, while the other is ascribed to the background object. Consider for instance the following figure [FIGURE 2]. In seeing it, one has a perception of transparency insofar as, first, one sees a certain hue of dark gray where the circular body overlaps a crescent-shaped body, and second, that hue is split into a lighter gray of the overlapping body and in the black of the overlapped body (incidentally, since also in this case there is foreground-background reversibility, the circular body that is lighter gray may be the overlapped body and the crescent-shaped body that is black may be the overlapping body).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Pylyshyn 2003, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Newall 2015, p. 143. In its being remindful of Gombrich 1960 position on picture perception, the fact the account appeals to this alternation justifies Hopkins 2012 labeling it "Transparency Gombricheanism".



FIGURE 2. Fabio Matelli, *Crescent and Circle*,  
Scientific American, vol. 230, 1974.

Now, comments Newall, this also happens with many pictures: when we perceive them, we experience a scission in the visible properties of its vehicle that are still ascribed to that vehicle and those that are ascribed to its subject. E.g. if you have a sepia photograph, it is seen as having a blend of yellowish tones that are splitted in tonal properties that are ascribed to its subject and in yellow hues that are still ascribed to the photographic vehicle itself. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same happens with glossy photographs.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Newall 2015, pp. 145-6. Another possibly more convincing case may be found in Taylor 2015, the case of an aged depiction that has wired to yellow, yet we still see a nonyellow subject in it. I will discuss such a case later. For Newall, pictures that are not so seen are, on the one hand, *trompe l'oeil* and naturalistic pictures, in which all the visible properties of the picture are ascribed to the picture's subject, and on the other hand, those pictures whose visible properties remain all ascribed to the picture's vehicle (cf. Newall 2015, pp. 143-4). To be sure, for Newall also picture perceptions that are affected by *imbrication*, the phenomenon in which features of the picture's vehicle are attributed to the picture's subject, cannot be accounted for in terms of perception of transparency (cf. Newall 2015, pp. 148, 154). Yet he claims that his account also explains how such a phenomenon, which is very close to what is normally called *inflected* seeing-in, may occur (cf. Newall 2015, pp. 151-4).



For Newall, this account of picture perception has the merit that it may show up to what extent sense picture perception is *twofold*, as Wollheim 1980, 1987, 1998 originally maintained. As is well known, for Wollheim picture perception amounts to a *sui generis* kind of perception that he labeled *seeing-in*. Now, the qualifying feature of seeing-in is precisely its being the outcome of two pictorial *folds*, what Wollheim respectively labeled the *configurational fold* (CF), in which one perceives the picture's vehicle, and the *recognitional fold* (RF), in which one perceives the picture's subject. These folds are supposed to be inseparable; neither the perception of the vehicle in the CF nor the perception of the subject in the RF is the same as their respective perception in isolation.<sup>9</sup> One may moreover say that the RF depends on the CF.<sup>10</sup> These precisifications notwithstanding, many people have found this characterization of picture perception extremely elusive. Basically, it is not clear how those folds interact, both from the point of view of their phenomenal character (are they both *perceptual* states?) and from the point of view of their content (how can an integrated mental state come out of folds whose contents seem to mobilize many features that contradict each other, starting from the vehicle's being flat and the subject's being not such?).<sup>11</sup> Now, says Newall, if (in many cases at least) picture perception amounts to a species of perception of transparency, one may account for its twofoldness in a different way. For one may say that its twofoldness is explained by its being a perception of transparency: in it, one perceives the picture's subject through perceiving the picture's vehicle, as in any perception of transparency.<sup>12</sup> In a nutshell, seeing-in is, at least in many cases, a form of seeing-through.

### **3. The Transparency Account of Picture Perception Does Not Work Phenomenologically**

Though fascinating, this account of picture perception is surely problematic. For one, Hopkins 2012 has maintained that it does not work, basically because it is unable to account for the fact that, unlike perception

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Wollheim 1987, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hopkins 2008, p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> For a review of these problems cf. e.g. Hopkins 2010, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Newall 2015, p. 138.

of transparency, in picture perception, while the picture's vehicle may be given under many different perspectives, the picture's subject is given just under one such perspective. This is what Wollheim originally described as a phenomenon of perceptual constancy.<sup>13</sup>

In 2015, Newall has tried to cope with this objection, by questioning whether this sort of perceptual constancy really occurs in picture perception.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, I wonder whether Newall provides sufficient evidence on this concern.<sup>15</sup> Yet my aim here is not to evaluate whether Newall satisfactorily replies to Hopkins' objection. For even if this were the case, it still seems to me that the transparency account does not capture the phenomenology of picture perception correctly.

To begin with, picture perception is not the, even knowingly illusory, modal perception of something, i.e., the picture's subject, as lying behind something else, i.e., the picture's vehicle – in Hopkins' terms, the perception that (i) represents *P* (the picture's vehicle) as at distance  $d_1$  from one's point of view, and (ii) represents *O* (the picture's subject) as at distance  $d_2$  from one's point of view, where  $d_1 \neq d_2$ .<sup>16</sup> To begin with, the picture's subject amounts to a three-dimensional scene whose elements are differently located as to their depth in space, so that the bearer of the relevant picture perception sees them as having such different locations. As Wollheim originally grasped: "I discern something standing out in front of, or (in certain cases) receding behind, something else" (1987:46). This remark of Wollheim is often misunderstood, as if he were saying that one sees *the picture's vehicle* as (normally) standing out in front of *the picture's subject*.<sup>17</sup> Yet for him, the terms of that spatial relation are not the vehicle and the subject, but rather elements within the picture's subject as a whole three-dimensional scene, what according to him is grasped in the RF of picture perception, as the following quotation by him clearly shows. In describ-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Wollheim 1980, pp. 215–6.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Newall 2015, p. 135.

<sup>15</sup> In Voltolini 2014, I have precisely tried to show that the impression of being followed by the pictorial subject's eyes Newall appeals to in order to face Hopkins' objection is instead to be accounted for precisely in terms of such a perceptual constancy.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hopkins 2012, p. 656.

<sup>17</sup> For this alternative interpretation cf. e.g. Hyman 2006, p. 133, who however admits that also the present interpretation is viable. We will however immediately see that for Wollheim himself the present interpretation is the only correct one.

ing his own perception of Edouard Manet's *Emilie Ambre*, he reprises the aforementioned sentence by so expanding it: "my perception is twofold in that I simultaneously am visually aware of the marked surface and experience something in front of, or behind, something else – *in this case, a woman in a hat standing in front of a clump of trees*" (Wollheim 2003a, p. 3, my italics). If this is the case, moreover, the spatial relation to the picture's vehicle of the elements of the scene constituting the picture's subject is so multifarious that it cannot be perceived as if the vehicle were a transparent layer. While some elements of the picture's subject are (knowingly illusorily, as we will immediately see) seen as lying behind the picture's vehicle, some other such elements are (again, knowingly illusorily) seen as located *precisely where* the picture's vehicle is, if not even *in front* of them! Indeed, the phenomenological situation at stake as to the perception of that scene does not directly involve the picture's vehicle. Instead, on the basis of the fact that we knowingly veridically see the picture's vehicle, in merely starting in our perception of that scene from the same area in which we knowingly veridically see the vehicle, we also and *eo ipso* knowingly illusorily see the picture's subject, as expanding normally behind, yet sometimes (also) in front of, that very area.

The first option – progressive recession and colocation – is given for example in the following picture presenting an Italian village [FIGURE 3].



FIGURE 3. Anonymous, *Window with Sea View*.

In this case, as to the whole scene we knowingly illusorily see in our picture perception, we (knowingly illusorily) see the open window as being a bit further behind the location where the picture's vehicle is and is knowingly veridically seen to be, the flowers as being a bit more further behind, and the houses belonging to this Italian village as being even further behind; yet the curtains are seen as being precisely where the picture's vehicle is and is knowingly veridically seen to be. The second option (admittedly rarer than the first one) – progressive regression, colocation and progressive protrusion – is given for example in this famous picture by Pere Borrell del Caso, *Escaping Criticism* [FIGURE 4].



FIGURE 4. Pere Borrell del Caso, *Escaping Criticism*, 1874, Banco de España, Madrid.

In this case, as to the whole scene we knowingly illusorily see in our picture perception, we (knowingly illusorily) see the left leg of the boy the picture presents as behind the location where the canvas is and is knowingly veridically seen to be, whereas his torso is (knowingly illusorily) seen in that very location, while his head, his left hand and his right foot are (knowingly illusorily) seen as in front of it, in order to convey the overall impression that the boy is getting out of the picture. Both cases, in particularly the second one, show that the phenomenology of picture perception is not that of a perception of transparency. For even if one admits that there is a relation between the location where the picture's vehicle is knowingly veridically seen to be and the location where the picture's subject is knowingly illusorily seen to be, this is not a relation perceived in picture perception, as the transparency account instead predicts.

To be sure, Newall is well aware of cases belonging to the second option.<sup>18</sup> However, he holds that they provide no counterexample to his account, for they simply reverse the transparency order. For in them it is the picture's vehicle(s surface) that is seen through (the relevant part of) the picture's subject: "in these cases, rather than seeing the subject matter through the seemingly transparent picture surface, we see the surface through the seemingly transparent subject matter" (Newall 2015, p. 151). Yet, as I have tried to show, in knowingly illusorily perceiving certain spatial relations, even in such cases the picture's vehicle is out of focus. Those spatial relations instead qualify the three-dimensional scene that constitutes the picture's subject. A part of the scene constituting the picture's subject is knowingly illusorily seen before some other of its parts, both those which are ascribed a location that coincides with that in which the picture's vehicle is knowingly veridically seen to be and those which are ascribed a location behind. If we come back to *Escaping Criticism*, what is (knowingly illusorily) seen behind (amodally, by the way) the boy's left hand is a frame *that belongs to the picture's subject, qua* the sort of window from which the boy tries to get out, not the frame of the picture's vehicle (we may well take that vehicle as frameless)!

Yet differences in phenomenology between picture perception and perception of transparency do not end here, as we will now see. As a con-

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Newall 2015, pp. 134, 150-1.

sequence of its abiding by the law of scission, perception of transparency is such that in it one immediately perceives a blend, the stimulus color, which depends on the colors that the transparent layer and the background object respectively possess. Actually, these are the very scission colors; as Metelli says, “when a pair of scission colors are mixed, they re-create the stimulus color” (1974, p. 93). Indeed, if such colors change, then the transparency effect changes as well. On the one hand, for example, the darker is the color of the background object, the darker grey is the stimulus color; the lighter is the former, the lighter gray is the latter.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, for example, the transparency effect is increased when the difference between the dark and light gray in the colors of the central regions belonging to the transparent layer is increased as well.<sup>20</sup>

Yet picture perception hardly exhibits such a dependence. Let us accept for argument’s sake that the colors the picture’s vehicle is ascribed allegedly in virtue of the scission operation determine the colors the vehicle has before such an operation.<sup>21</sup> Yet the colors the picture’s subject is ascribed allegedly in virtue of the scission operation do not determine the colors that one sees in the picture’s vehicle before that operation. This is the moral one can draw from Wollheim’s reflections on Henry Matisse’s *The Green Stripe*: “When Matisse painted a stroke of green down his wife’s face, he was not representing a woman who had a green line down her face” (Wollheim 2003b, p. 143). Indeed in that painting, Madame Matisse is not seen as a sort of alien having such a stripe on her face, but is seen as having the different colors of her face’s elements (say, the fleshy color of her front, the black colors of her conjoining eyebrows, the fleshy color again of her nose). Yet the corresponding region of its vehicle is seen overall green. One may strengthen this example by pointing to other similar and perhaps more evident cases. As Wittgenstein remarked, in visually facing a black and white photo of a boy, we do not see a black-and-white exotic individual, but rather a normal fleshy-colored human being.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Metelli 1974, pp. 95, 98.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Metelli 1974, pp. 96, 98.

<sup>21</sup> This is however not to be taken for granted. For seeing the picture’s vehicle within a picture perception may alter the colors that it is seen to have when it is seen in isolation in such a way that there is no dependence of the former colors on the latter ones.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein 1977, III § 117.

To be sure, one might disagree on that in seeing the Matisse painting, an alien who has a green line down her face is not somehow visually present, just as one may reply that in seeing a black and white picture of persons, one is not seeing them as having fleshy colors, but rather as having different hues of gray.<sup>23</sup> In actual fact, however, Newall would hardly endorse that disagreement: “I take it that a sepia-toned photograph, despite its colouration, will usually *not* occasion the experience of yellowish subject matter” (Newall 2015, p. 145). Quite reasonably, I would say, from his point of view. For if that were the case, on behalf of the transparency account one would be forced to say that, when a picture’s vehicle changes its colors because, say, of some physical process, we see its subject as changing its colors as well. Yet this is hardly the case. If by getting older a black and white photo of the Eifel Tower turns into a sepia one, we do not see its subject as changing its colors as well.

A third case phenomenologically problematic for the transparency account obtains when an ordinary perception of transparency somehow interacts with a picture perception. This situation occurs when a transparent layer is also a picture of a subject different from its background object, as in this case of glasses that present human silhouettes different from the portions of the table that are respectively seen through the glasses themselves [FIGURE 5].



FIGURE 5. Anonymous, *Two Glasses*,  
<http://itsokayweresisters.wordpress.com>.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Nanay 2016, pp. 48-9, 56-7, 63.

For Newall, this is only a case of a *threefold* rather than a twofold perception, in which one first sees (a), the picture's vehicle (a glass), then *in the vehicle* she sees (b), the picture's subject (a human silhouette), and finally, through the vehicle itself, *in that subject* she sees (c), a further background object (a certain portion of the table seen through that glass).<sup>24</sup>

Yet in this situation, this double seeing-in account again fails to grasp the phenomenology of the case. Granted, it perfectly fits another case that as a matter of fact Newall himself recalls and that, *pace* Newall himself,<sup>25</sup> may legitimately be considered a case of threefold seeing-in: namely, a case of *nested* seeing-in. In such a case, one indeed sees a second-order picture's subject in a nested picture that belongs to the first-order subject seen, along with other things, in the nesting picture's overall vehicle. For instance in Edgar Degas' *Sulking*, we see a woman and a man standing in front of a picture in which one can see additional items (namely, many racing horses).

Yet in our case, the further background object (c) is (knowingly veridically) seen to lie behind the picture's transparent vehicle (a); it would be still so seen even if that vehicle were not the physical basis of a picture of something else, but just a transparent object like any other (i.e., if it were something that bears no marks having a pictorial reading). Thus on the one hand, the picture's subject (b) is seen (knowingly illusorily) as constituting a three-dimensional scene starting exactly from where (a) lies, hence as lying partly where the picture's vehicle (a) is and partly where the background object (c) is, while on the other hand, (c) is not seen in that picture's subject (b), it is merely seen through (a); in this respect, the marks that feature (b) just count as a bunch of opaque dots scattered on (a) that weaken (a)'s transparency effect, just as in a dirty window pane. In a nutshell, phenomenologically speaking, the fact that an object counts as a transparent layer for a background object and the fact that that very object counts as a picture that presents another subject point towards different directions.

Let me take stock. Although the list of problematic cases may not have been already exhausted, I think that the above three cases – differences in the perception of spatial depth-involving relations affecting the

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Newall 2015, p. 149.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Newall 2015, p. 150.



picture's subject that do not pass through the perception of the picture's vehicle; independence of the perception of the pictorial elements from the perception of the picture's vehicle taken in isolation; independence of the perception of the background object from the perception of a picture's subject additionally seen in a transparent yet pictorial layer – abundantly show that the phenomenology of picture perception is not an instance of a perception of transparency of the sort Metelli appealed to, as Newall instead believes. In a slogan, if picture perception is (at least a form of) seeing-in as Wollheim repeatedly said, seeing-in is no seeing-through.

#### **4. Perception of Transparency Does Not Provide Sufficient Conditions for Picture Perception**

Yet there is a fourth case that shows not only that the transparency account does not capture the phenomenology of picture perception correctly, but also that perception of transparency does not provide sufficient conditions for picture perception. Let us go back to the Metelli paradigmatic case that is encharged to show that physical transparency is not a necessary condition for perception of transparency. In that case, as we saw before, we modally see a spiral as lying behind a triangular body, even if that perception is not veridical for the spiral does not so lie. Yet in this case what we really see as a whole is a *picture* that presents a scene involving physical transparency as its subject.<sup>26</sup> In that picture, in virtue of (knowingly veridically) seeing its vehicle, we grasp its subject, a certain three-dimensional scene, in which we further modally (yet knowingly illusorily) see a certain element of that scene, the spiral, as lying behind another element of the scene, the triangular body. In other terms, the transparency effect that occurs in such a case perceptually concerns just the elements in picture perception that constitute the picture's subject, but not the picture perception as a whole that also comprises one's seeing the picture's vehicle. In Wollheim's terms, the transparency effect at stake here occurs in the recognitional fold (RF) of picture perception but not in its configurational fold (CF), which along with the RF determines picture perception as a

<sup>26</sup> Casati 2009, p. 330 describes such cases as cases of *pictorial* transparency. See also Sayim and Cavanagh 2011, p. 681.

whole. As a consequence, once again, perception of transparency does not capture the phenomenology of picture perception as a whole. For one's entertaining a perception of transparency in the Metelli paradigmatic case is included in an overall picture perception that comprises not only the transparency effect, but also one's seeing the vehicle itself of the picture that prompts such an effect. To better see this point, just consider how it would make a phenomenological difference to be firstly deluded by the Metelli paradigmatic case as if it worked as a *trompe l'oeil*, and to secondly realize that it is a picture. We would still grasp its transparency effect, but we would also see the vehicle that originally escaped our perceptual awareness. Firstly, we would have a *delusion* of physical transparency, as when we seem to see as transparent an object that is not such. Yet secondly, once we realized that we were facing a picture, we would have perception of transparency without physical transparency precisely because that perception would be embedded in a picture perception. Thus as a further result, all this shows that perception of transparency does not suffice for picture perception, for it is at most an element that figures within it.

Of course, one might wonder whether, over and above the cases Metelli pointed out, there are other cases of perceptual transparency without physical transparency that are not perception of pictures as a whole. For instance, Newall holds that shadows are also perceived as transparent.<sup>27</sup> In actual fact, it is very controversial whether shadows elicit a perception of transparency.<sup>28</sup> Even if this were the case, however, we must recall that, as we know from Plato onwards, in most cases at least shadows are again a case of pictures (transparent pictures, in Walton's account).<sup>29</sup> Or one may have a mere perception of transparency in cases of texture transparency, as in the following example by Cavanagh and Takeo Watanabe [FIGURE 6] that Newall himself reports, when dotted lines in one direction are over-

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Newall 2015, p. 137. Newall refers for this thesis to Cavanagh 2005. The thesis surely traces back to Arnheim 1974, pp. 309-10.

<sup>28</sup> For a very convincing denial of the thesis, cf. Casati 2009.

<sup>29</sup> It is however hard to allow a pictorial form of transparency for shadows. For what is seen in a shadow is a three-dimensional scene whose main element *protrudes* from its background, as is shown by the fact that once one draws the boundary of a shadow that elicits this emergence, the shadow is no longer seen as such (cf. Casati 2009). And we have seen that pictures whose subject is characterized by such a protrusion hardly elicit a perception of transparency.

lapped by dotted lines in another direction.<sup>30</sup>

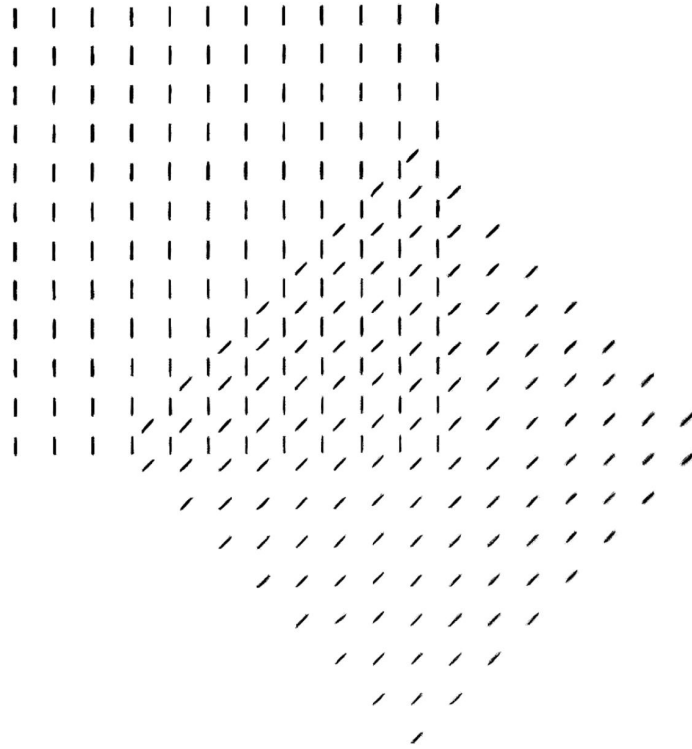


FIGURE 6. Takeo Watanabe and Patrick Cavanagh,  
*Two Square Textures*, *Perception*, vol. 25, 1996.

Yet once again, this is a case of an overall perception of an admittedly abstract picture that yet displays seeing-in. The transparency effect indeed occurs in the RF of that perception as featuring a spatial depth-involving relation among the elements constituting that picture's subject.<sup>31</sup> All in all, therefore, as far as I can see, there is no case of a mere perception of transparency to which picture perception may be equated that is not again embedded in a picture perception.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Newall 2015, p. 140. Newall's reference is to Watanabe and Cavanagh 1996.

<sup>31</sup> In 1987, p. 62, Wollheim allows for seeing-in experiences of abstract pictures. Newall himself 2015, p. 137 agrees with him on this point. See also Gaiger 2008, pp. 61-2.

## 5. A Provisional Moral

So far, I hope to have shown that interpreting picture perception as a species of perception of transparency does not work. Does this show that we have to altogether reject the transparency account of picture perception? Not quite. In the course of this scrutiny, we have seen that there are at least two elements in this account that any good account of picture perception must take into consideration.

First, there definitely is a nonveridicality element in picture perception. The transparency account holds that this nonveridicality amounts to the fact that we modally see the picture's subject as lying behind the picture's vehicle, but this has turned out not to be correct. Instead, what seems to be correct is that we see the picture's subject as lying in a space that begins where also the vehicle is located while however stretching in both directions – normally just in a receding direction, but sometimes also in a protruding direction. As we however knowingly veridically also see the vehicle to be located in a certain area of that space, not only that way of seeing the subject as so located is nonveridical, but we also know that this is the case. If we frame the perception of the picture's subject in Wollheimian terms, we can say that the RF of picture perception consists in the knowingly illusory perception of the picture's vehicle as the picture's subject,<sup>32</sup> as if the latter were located in the same space as the former, by merely partly (seemingly) sharing the same locations in that space.

Second, in virtue of the law of scission, one may describe the transparency effect as the *transfiguration* of the stimulus color into the scission colors of the transparent layer and of the background object respectively, since the former color is a blend of the latter ones. Now, we have seen that, *pace* Newall, no such effect occurs in picture perception. Yet what sounds correct of the transparency account is that, once grasped in a picture perception, the picture's vehicle does undergo a transfiguration insofar as it is no longer perceived as it is perceived when it is grasped in isolation, as a mere physical object among others having no pictorial value. Indeed, in picture perception the picture's vehicle must be perceived in such a way that allows the picture's subject to perceptually *emerge* precisely in terms

<sup>32</sup> As Levinson 1998, p. 229 originally suggested. I have exploited and expanded this suggestion in my Voltolini 2015, chap. 6.

of the above knowingly illusory perception. As a result, in such a perception also the picture's subject undergoes a transfiguration: once grasped in a pictorial perception, the picture's subject is no longer perceived as it is when it is perceived face-to-face.

This last reflection brings me to the following, final, remarks. First of all, Wollheim himself presumably had this sort of transfiguration in mind when he said, as we have seen before, that the CF and the RF of the distinctive seeing-in experience picture perception amounts to are inseparable. Moreover, that transfiguration shows that both Gombrich and Wollheim were right when they respectively said that vehicle perception and picture perception are alternate and that vehicle perception and subject perception are inseparable. For, as Newall himself agrees on, in defending that alternation, Gombrich had in mind the perception of the vehicle in isolation; whereas, in stressing that inseparability, Wollheim had in mind the perception of a *transfigured* vehicle. The former perception is definitely incompatible with picture perception: either one perceives the vehicle in isolation or one has a picture perception. Yet the latter perception is just a component of picture perception along with the perception of the picture's subject. Thus, in this respect at least, Gombricheanism and Wollheimianism as to picture perception can be taken to be compatible.<sup>33</sup> This was somehow acknowledged by Wollheim himself when he said "seeing  $y$  [the picture's subject] in  $x$  may rest upon seeing  $x$  as  $y$  [a pictorial representation], but not for the same values of the variable  $y$ " (Wollheim 1980, p. 226).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Voltolini 2015, chap. 4.

<sup>34</sup> This paper has been presented at the workshop *The Perception of Transparency and the Transparency of Perception*, Department of Languages, University of Turin, March 12-13 2016, Turin, and at the *ESA 2016 Conference*, Facultad de Filosofía, University of Barcelona, June 8-10 2016, Barcelona. I thank all the participants for their useful questions. I also thank both Roberto Casati and Michael Newall himself for their precious comments to a previous version of this paper.

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