I SEE NOT ONLY A MADONNA, BUT ALSO A HOLE, IN THE PICTURE

BY

ALBERTO VOLTOLINI

Abstract: According to an intuitive claim, in saying that one sees a picture’s subject, i.e., what a picture presents, in the picture’s vehicle, i.e., the picture’s physical basis, by ‘in’ one does not mean the spatial relation of being in, as holding between such items in the real space. For the picture’s subject is knowingly not in the real space where one veridically sees the picture’s vehicle. Some theories of pictorial experience have actually agreed with this intuition by claiming that the picture’s subject lies in a pictorial space of its own, disconnected from the real space that includes the picture’s vehicle. Yet, not only linguistic evidence suggests that when used as above, ‘in’ means precisely that very relation, but an appropriate theory of pictorial experience can justify the above claim.

1. The problem

The Church of St. George in Montemerano (Tuscany, Italy) houses a curious late Gothic painting, *The Virgin of the Cat Flap*, that is so named for (as the tradition says) one of the church’s curates opened a hole in it in order to let cats pass through. Clearly enough, the hole is a real, not a depicted, one (unlike, say, *Holy Holey Wholey Vessels*, a 2015 painting by Suzan Sommers, which presents as its subject some holey female bodies). This makes people intuitively think that in saying that we see a hole in that picture, we do not mean the same as in saying that we see a Madonna in it. As regards that picture, we see a hole in its vehicle, i.e., its physical basis, as much as in it we see cracks, cuts, and other physical factors qualifying the vehicle per se. In other terms, we see a hole as something that is out there, as standing in the spatial relation of being in with the other item we overall
see; namely, the very vehicle itself. Just as in the case of cracks, cuts, and other physical factors. Yet, we see a Madonna in the picture just as we see in it a wooden base on which the Virgin stands up and a curtain behind the Virgin herself; namely, as what constitutes the picture’s subject, i.e., the scene that the picture presents, yet it is not out there.

Some important theories of pictorial experience have agreed with this intuition. Indeed, along with Wollheim (1980, 1987, 1998), one may say that pictorial experience is a *sui generis* experience of twofold *seeing in* in which, by virtue of *seeing* that picture’s vehicle in the *configurational fold* of that experience, in that very vehicle, we somehow *discern* a Madonna and the above other things, in the *recognitional fold* of that experience. This seemingly stresses that no spatial relation of *being in* actually holds between the picture’s vehicle and all such things constituting the picture’s subject, the scene where all such things figure as its constituents. Indeed, Wollheim (1987, pp. 46, 62, 1998, p. 266) himself claims that the picture’s subject is seen in a pictorial space that is completely disconnected from the real space. Thus, whatever belongs to the picture’s subject is seen *in* the picture, not in the sense we appeal to when we say that a physical element is seen *in* the picture’s vehicle, i.e., as an element that stands in the *being in* relation with the vehicle.

Yet these intuitions notwithstanding, note that we may well say the following:

1. I see a Madonna in the picture, as well as a hole.

By means of the implicit anaphoric link that affects the preposition ‘in’ occurring twice in (1), both explicitly (after ‘Madonna’) and implicitly (after ‘a hole’), (1) seemingly shows that ‘in’ occurs twice in order to mean precisely the same spatial relation of *being in*, as being instantiated twice in the same circumstance.
Note that this use of ‘in’ in (1) is not isolated at all. Suppose that the Tuscan fresco were very damaged, in such a way that a fissure divided the parts of the picture that respectively present the Madonna’s head and the Madonna’s torso. One may then say:

2 In the picture, I see both a Madonna’s head and, under the fissure, her torso.

Or even suppose both that the subject of that fresco also contained a cat as crouched under the Madonna and that a real cat emerged from the flap. Then one may say:

3 I see two cats in the picture.

In this paper, I want first of all to show that these uses are not weird at all. Appearances notwithstanding, in all the three above sentences, ‘in’ must be taken as meaning the very same spatial relation of being in, as occurring either between elements in the picture’s vehicle or between the picture’s vehicle itself and elements of the picture’s subject. Moreover, this commonality of meaning is not accidental at all. For there is a way of accounting for the nature of pictorial experience that justifies why, so meant, the above uses are correct. According to this way, pictorial experience still is a twofold seeing in à la Wollheim, whose folds however are, respectively, a veridical perception of the picture’s vehicle (the configurational fold) and an illusory, but not delusory, perception of the picture’s subject (the recognitional fold). In veridically perceiving the vehicle, one also knowingly nonveridically perceives the subject, as lying in a region of the real space that departs from where the vehicle is located. First, since the recognitional fold is nonveridical, the subject’s elements are only seen as standing in that region. Second, one knows that such a fold is nonveridical, precisely because in the configurational fold, one veridically sees that the picture’s vehicle stands at a certain boundary of that region.

The architecture of this paper is as follows. In Section 2, I will try to show how, from a linguistic point of view, the main possible replies against the idea that ‘in’ is used literally throughout (1), as well as (2) and (3), can be countered. In Section 3, I will provide an account of pictorial perception that shows why such a use is legitimate.

2. The failure of the replies against the linguistic evidence

To begin with, a defender of the specific use of ‘in’ as regards pictorial experience may reply as follows against the alleged linguistic evidence in favor of
the literality of ‘in’ in the above sentences, particularly in (1). Anaphoric links do not require identity of meaning in the expressions used, as the following examples show:

4 I drank a bottle and then I smashed it.
5 Norman Mailer likes to read himself.

In (4), the pronoun ‘it’ designates a container rather than its content, unlike the term it is anaphorically linked, ‘a bottle’. In (5), ‘himself’ does not designate Norman Mailer but his works, even if it is anaphorically linked to the name ‘Norman Mailer’, which obviously designates the writer. Hence, that defender may say that in its second implicit token in (1), ‘in’ does mean the spatial relation of being in holding between the items, the picture’s vehicle and the hole, that constitute the object of sight that a certain visual perception referred to by the verb ‘see’ is about. Yet in its first explicit token, ‘it’ must be directly attached to the verb ‘see’ as meaning a particular different experiential state of seeing in having the Madonna as its object, qua constituent of the picture’s subject.

However, I retort to that defender that, in general, anaphoras allow that different anaphorically linked tokens of the relevant expressions do not preserve the same meaning only if there is a pragmatic function connecting the different meanings involved by such tokens. Indeed, as regards the above examples, (4) mobilizes a content–container pragmatic function so that ‘a bottle’ designates the content of a container, while the pronoun ‘it’ anaphorically linked to it designates that very container, which is pragmatically connected – in this case, metonymically – to that content. Likewise, (5) mobilizes an author–work pragmatic function so that ‘Norman Mailer’ designates the famous writer, while ‘himself’, though anaphorically linked to it, designates his works again metonymically connected to the writer. Yet as regards (1), there is no evidence of a pragmatic function connecting the different meanings of the two tokens of ‘it’ (one explicit, the other implicit) that (1) allegedly mobilizes.

Granted, there is an exception to the above necessary condition for failure of cosignificance with anaphoras. In a few cases, meanings for anaphorically linked tokens of a term differ even when there is no relevant pragmatic function connecting them. Yet this happens with puns, as in the following zeugma:

6 After two unsuccessful marriages, I find myself keeping my guard up, along with my underpants.

This presents a ‘joking together’ (zeugma), since the implicit anaphoric link occurring in it ties the distinct tokens of the relevant term involved, ‘to keep up’, which, however, have utterly different meanings, i.e., meanings

© 2019 The Author
Pacific Philosophical Quarterly © 2019 University of Southern California and John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
that are connected by no pragmatic function. One indeed appreciates the wittiness of (6)’s utterer in anaphorically linking tokens of a term whose meaning is utterly different. But (1) is not punny at all. Curious if you like but not punny. The anaphoric link tying the two tokens of ‘it’ in (1) makes no shared joke arise, as instead should if the meanings of such tokens were utterly different. There is indeed no wittiness in uttering (1).\textsuperscript{4}

In order to better see the point, consider the difference between the following two sentences. The first exhibits what is taken to be the most famous zeugma in English.\textsuperscript{5}

\textbf{7} She came home in a flood of tears and a sedan chair.

Where the preposition ‘in’ is used twice with different meanings. The second is a sentence basically analogous to (1) that one may utter in reporting one’s pictorial experience when facing Alberto Burri’s 1953 abstract painting \textit{Sackcloth}, which results out of producing a certain collage on an already torn jute sack.

\textbf{8} I see a landscape in the picture as well as a hole.\textsuperscript{6}

One may appreciate the wittiness of uttering ‘in’ twice with different meanings in (7). Yet no such appreciation may occur as regards (8), for it presents no zeugma at all.

Let me stress that (8) is perfectly alike (1). For, unlike the aforementioned \textit{Holy Holey Wholey Vessels}, the hole one talks about in it does not contribute to determine the picture’s subject. Granted, a physical hole might be exploited as having a depictive value, as when natural cavities in a deranged building are flanked by the depiction of a nose and of a mouth in order for a face to be overall seen in that building. But in \textit{Sackcloth}, the hole that is already there has no such value. It is just a physical feature of the juta sack, among with other such physical features having no depictive value whatsoever (say, the sack’s weight).

At this point, the defender of the specific use of ‘in’ as regards pictorial experience may retort that the linguistic datum at stake has been improperly accommodated. For in (1), the relevant meaning shift affects not only the preposition ‘in’ but also the syntagm ‘the picture’. In (1)'s first part, ‘the picture’ is indeed used to mean the picture as an \textit{interpreted} item, i.e., the vehicle plus its depictive content (the \textit{icon}, to give it a name), not the mere vehicle itself. This is rather meant by the second implicit token of that syntagm.\textsuperscript{7} Hence, unlike the second implicit token of ‘in’, its first explicit token in (1) does not mean the spatial relation of \textit{being in}, but it has an utterly different meaning (whatever it is).

First of all, however, it is implausible that the first token of ‘the picture’ in (1) is used to mean the icon rather than the mere picture’s vehicle. Most
theoreticians indeed agree that what is seen in the picture is actually seen in its vehicle. Moreover, this move is unhelpful for that defender. For if in its tokens of (1), the whole locution ‘in the picture’ had utterly different meanings, i.e., pragmatically disconnected meanings, the anaphoric link between such tokens would remain totally unexplained since (1), as we saw before, is not punny at all.

At this point, the defender of the specific use of ‘in’ as regards pictorial experience may counterreply that even if the picture’s vehicle is mobilized twice in (1), both as regards the seen-in Madonna and as regards the hole seen in it, it is so mobilized in different ways. For as regards the Madonna, one mobilizes the vehicle’s design properties, i.e., the properties that are responsible for the fact that a certain subject is seen in it, while as regards the hole, one mobilizes the vehicle’s mere surface properties, i.e., its physical properties that play no depictive role. Thus, (1) is actually used to mean:

\[(1') I \text{ see a Madonna in the vehicle’s design properties and a hole in the vehicle’s mere surface properties.}\]

To begin with, I am unclear whether this reading accounts for the anaphora in (1), for again it is hard to see a pragmatic relationship between mere surface properties and design properties. Indeed, the two kinds of properties do not seem to covariate: paintings made by the same material can have different design properties and vice versa. However, let me grant that one may read (1) as (1’). Yet this simply corroborates the hypothesis that ‘in’ is not ambiguous in it. For both the design properties and the mere surface properties are properties of the vehicle: the former are (basically) the vehicle’s colors and shapes, while the latter are its typically material properties. So, meaning (1) as (1’) precisely strengthens the idea that both the Madonna (qua part of the picture’s subject) and the hole (qua part of the picture’s vehicle) are seen as standing in the vehicle.

At this point, the defender of the specific use of ‘in’ as regards pictorial experience may put forward a less radical alternative reading of (1). For she may rejoinder that (1) do mobilize a pragmatic function, yet this function does not connect allegedly different meanings of ‘in’, but only the different references that the tokens of ‘in’ in (1) possess, as qualifying its truth-conditional content. Indeed, first of all, the second implicit token of ‘in’ refers to a certain portion of the real space, while the first explicit token shifts its reference to a certain portion of the (altogether different) pictorial space, although it keeps the same meaning as the second one. As I said at the very beginning, this is the space that some theories of pictorial experience postulate as the sui generis locus where the events that are presented in the relevant pictorial experience are supposed to happen. So, there is indeed a difference between the real and the pictorial space. Yet this difference affects just the reference, but not the meaning, of ‘in’. In this respect, (1) is used to mean the same as
Moreover, that defender may go on saying, this referential shift is possible for this time there is a pragmatic connection linking such referents. Indeed, the pictorial space is dependent on the real space. Depending on how things are configured in the real space, things are correspondingly configured in the pictorial space. Indeed, once one alters how the spots lying in the real space where the picture’s vehicle is also located are spatially related, a different such relation also occurs as far as the things one grasps in the pictorial space are concerned. For example, if one changes a tiny part of a flesh-colored spot into a black long spot in a certain area of the vehicle of Leonardo’s La Gioconda, one passes from seeing in it an enigmatic feminine figure to seeing, in the resulting vehicle of Marcel Duchamp’s L.H.O.O.Q., an enigmatic moustached feminine figure. Hence, coming back to (1), even if the two involved tokens of ‘in’ have the same meaning, the first, explicit, token of ‘in’ refers to the spatial relation of being in occurring in the real space, while the second, implicit, token of ‘in’ refers to the same spatial relation yet occurring in the pictorial space. As the paraphrasis of (1) into (1″) shows, ‘in’ works there as an indexical expression that, the anaphorical link notwithstanding, contextually shifts its reference for pragmatic reasons while however preserving its linguistic meaning. In this respect, things in (1) stand just as in the following case:

9 Tomorrow I attend a performance of Richard III: In battle, think of me and drop your useless sword.

Although in (9) the different tokens of the indexicals ‘tomorrow’ and ‘I’ respectively have the same linguistic meaning, the first token of ‘tomorrow’ refers to a real day while its second, implicit, token refers to a fictional day; likewise, the first token of ‘I’ refers to a real agent while the second token of that indexical (‘me’) refers to a fictional agent. For the fictional temporal sequence and the fictional agent are pragmatically connected with the real temporal sequence and the real agent, respectively, since the former are respectively parasitic on the latter. Indeed, these fictional parameters inherit the dependence on real parameters that fiction in general has on reality, both epistemologically and ontologically, as Walton (1990) taught us. From the epistemological point of view, one could not make believe something if one could not believe that something. From an ontological point of view, something can be fictionally true – e.g., that there are three bears over there – only if something (else) is really true – that there are three stumps over there. Thus, a pragmatically relevant context shift makes it the case that in (9) ‘tomorrow’ (in its explicit and in its anaphorically linked implicit token, respectively) passes from referring to the day after the really present day to referring to the day after the fictionally present day, while ‘I’ (in its first and its second
anaphorically linked token, respectively) passes from referring to the real agent to referring to the fictionally relevant agent, i.e., the Ghost of Clarence.11

Yet to begin with, I may object as follows to this weaker variant of the defense of the specific use of ‘in’ as regards pictorial experience. In order to apply this solution to the case of ‘in’ in (1), one must assume that the picture’s vehicle is an element of the pictorial space with which, in that space, a constituent of the picture’s subject, i.e., the Virgin, stands in the relation of being in: just as the real hole (1) talks about stands in that relation with the real vehicle of The Virgin of the Cat Flap in the real space. But this assumption is rather implausible. Fans of pictorial space normally take it as being the figurative space just containing the elements constituting the picture’s subject.12 Quite plausibly, that space is given perspectively, i.e., as containing an internal perspective.13 Yet no pictorial vehicle figures as one of its elements.

Granted, the defender of this weaker variant may reply that (1’) must be meant differently, as involving no relationship between the picture’s vehicle and any element of the picture’s subject. For ‘in the picture there’ and ‘in the picture here’ must be, respectively, meant as saying the same as ‘in that region of the pictorial space’ and ‘in that region of the real space’.14

But even so meant, moreover, this weaker variant is implausible for another and more important reason. Let me start from remarking that, in a standard illusory perception, one may nonveridically see an element mistaken for something else as standing in the being in relation with another such element in the real space. For example, when one mistakes a rope for a snake, one may nonveridically sees the part of the rope that one mistakes for an illusory snake’s eye as being, in the real space, in another part of the rope that one mistakes for an illusory snake’s head. So, at time t, one may report one’s unknowingly illusory perception by saying

10 I see an eye in the snake’s head.

While at time t’, once recovered from that illusion, one may report one’s different veridical perception by saying

11 I see a ring in the rope’s top.

Now, nobody would question that ‘in’ is used in the same literal way both in (10) and in (11) as referring to the same portion of the real space. Yet moreover, the same exactly happens in another more sophisticated case of illusory perception; namely, when one mistakes a genuine trompe-l’oeil for what actually is the subject of the picture that experientially emerges in the pictorial experience one entertains after the realization of the mistake.
Consider in particular a case of a genuine trompe-l’oeil that mobilizes merely depicted holes. If at time $t$ one mistakes a pavement actually presenting a depicted hole for a pavement containing a real hole, one may utter,

12 I see a hole in the pavement,

by taking the pavement’s part that one mistakes for a hole as being, in the real space, in the remaining part of the pavement. Suppose that at time $t'$ one realizes that one is facing a trompe-l’oeil, thereby realizing that the hole in question is just constituting the experientially emerging picture’s subject: the picture, whose vehicle is the paved land, vividly presents a hole. In that condition, one may utter (12) again, by now taking the pavement just as that picture’s vehicle. Indeed, in its second utterance, (12) no longer reports an illusory perception but a pictorial experience. Yet in both utterances, ‘in’ goes on referring to the same portion of the real space.

Note that one does not even have to appeal to Burge-inspired considerations (as in the case of ‘arthritis’) in order to claim that one’s epistemic condition does not affect the reference of the word one uses in the relevant reports of one’s intentional states. For in the case of (10) and (11), it would be weird to say that one’s epistemic change – the fact that one passes from illusorily perceiving a snake to veridically perceiving a rope – yields a semantic change in the reference of the preposition ‘in’. Mutatis mutandis, the same holds in the case of the two utterances of (12). It would be likewise weird to hold that a mere epistemic change – the fact that one passes from an illusory perception of a trompe-l’oeil to a pictorial experience of that trompe-l’oeil – yields a semantic change, in that the token of ‘in’ in the second utterance of (12) passes to refer to a pictorial spatial relation instead of going on referring to a real spatial relation, as in the first utterance of (12). Thus, in the second utterance of (12), which reports a pictorial experience, no referential shift to a portion of an alleged pictorial space affects the preposition ‘in’. Mutatis mutandis, the same holds as regards the first explicit token of ‘in’ in (1), which (inter alia) makes the same kind of report: the report of a pictorial experience.

At this point, the defender of the specificity of the use of ‘in’ as regards pictorial experience may try a final move, which is in line with the one that I have considered at the very beginning of this section. If one claims that in (1) ‘in’ is not ambiguous in its two tokens, one is forced to say that ‘see’ is ambiguous in its two tokens, one explicit and the other implicit. For the whole locution ‘see in’ is ambiguous there in its two tokens (again, one explicit and the other implicit). The first token contributes to mean a nonfactive state of seeing: one sees that a Madonna is in the picture’s vehicle, yet she is not there. On the contrary, the second token contributes to mean a factive state of seeing: one sees that a hole is in the picture’s vehicle, and so it is. Yet if ‘see in’ is ambiguous as a whole, there is no way of showing that this ambiguity depends either on the ambiguity of its first component (‘to see’) or
of its second component (‘it’). Thus, the possibility that ‘in’ is ambiguous in (1) remains open.

Yet to begin with, one is not forced to assume that ‘see in’ is ambiguous in (1). For ‘to see’ may be not ambiguous in it if it merely means the same as ‘to have a visual experience’, while ‘it’ also keeps its own meaning throughout (1). This general nonfactive reading of ‘to see’ is an alternative reading that is mostly appreciated among nonphilosophers (see Bourget, 2019, p. 382). Indeed, we have seen this reading at work in (10) and (11), which respectively report an illusory, hence nonveridical, and a veridical perception. Moreover, it would be weird that ‘to see’ were ambiguous in (1). For as regards the similar reports of other intentional states, the relevant word means one and the same intentional state, independently of whether this is successful or not.

Consider

13 I desire a hole in the cheese as well as in the sun.

It may be that the first state of desire (13) talks about is a successful state of desire, while the second state it talks about is an unsuccessful such state. Yet, ‘to desire’ is not ambiguous in it. Thus, there is no reason to hold that ‘desiring in’ is ambiguous in it so as to force one to ask whether such an ambiguity depends on an ambiguity of ‘to desire’ or on an ambiguity of ‘in’. Indeed, ‘in’ is certainly not ambiguous in it. Mutatis mutandis, the same holds as regards ‘see in’ in (1).

3. The solution

Thus, what originally seemed to be just a debatable linguistic evidence has turned out to be a rather strong one. In (1), the very same spatial relation of being in is designated both by the explicit token and by the anaphorically linked implicit token of ‘in’, even if that relation is actually instantiated in the second case, where its relata are the picture’s vehicle and the hole, but not in the first case, where its relata are again the picture’s vehicle and the picture’s subject. Neither a meaning shift nor a pragmatically determined referential shift occurs in (1) as far as ‘in’ is concerned.

Now, the original appearances notwithstanding, one might think that this linguistic result is rather trivial. For undoubtedly ‘in’ means the very same spatial relation of being in in both tokens of (1), since ‘a Madonna’ does not refer there to a component of the picture’s subject. Instead, it shifts its reference to a component of the picture’s vehicle – a (partial) pictorial representation of a Madonna – in order to say that such a component is located in the very vehicle. There is plenty of evidence that often that shift occurs, as
when one says that there is a lion in the garden, meaning that there is a lion representation (a statue of a lion) in it.\textsuperscript{17}

Yet, although that referential shift certainly exists in general, various people – e.g., Lopes, 2010 – doubt that it occurs in sentences like (1). And indeed, the case of (12) shows that this is hardly the case. Beforehand, we saw that, as regards the two tokens of ‘in’ respectively involved in the utterances of (12) uttered while entertaining a mere illusory perception and a pictorial experience, respectively, that epistemic change hardly involves a semantic change. A fortiori, this is the case as regards the two tokens of ‘hole’ involved in such utterances. But this means that the second token does not shift its reference to a hole representation. \textit{Mutatis mutandis}, the same holds of ‘a Madonna’ in (1): it still refers to a component of the picture’s subject.

Thus first of all, this linguistic result is not trivial at all. Interestingly enough, it has the independent merit of showing that, as far as basically 2-D picture’s vehicles are concerned, the spatial relation of \textit{being in} in question does not shrink to a mere containment relation.\textsuperscript{18} First, note that when one says that one sees a real hole in a picture’s vehicle, one does not strictly speaking mean that the hole is contained in the vehicle but rather that, while the hole’s surface coincides with the vehicle’s surface, the hole itself is, so to speak, extended \textit{beyond} the vehicle’s own thickness. Suppose indeed again, as I did in the previous section, that the hole is filled by a passing cat. Then one may utter:

\textbf{14} I see a cat in the picture,

meaning that one sees a cat in the portion of the real space extending typically \textit{behind} the vehicle’s own thickness. I say ‘typically’, for sometimes what is seen in the vehicle may also be extended \textit{in front of} the vehicle’s own thickness. Indeed, one may utter (14) also when only the back part of the cat is still contained by the vehicle, the rest standing in front of it. Second, if the very same spatial relation is actually mobilized also when a picture’s subject is concerned, as with (1), this means that such a subject is seen as occupying a region of the real space that is typically extended behind the vehicle’s own surface. Indeed, in \textit{The Virgin of the Cat Flap}, the Virgin is seen as being immediately behind the picture’s vehicle, but the curtain is seen as far behind, while the wooden base is seen as extending from the vehicle’s surface up to the curtain. I again say ‘typically’, for sometimes the picture’s subject is instead seen as extending in front of the picture’s vehicle, as with merely protruding pictures, or even both ways, as with Pere Borrell del Caso’s \textit{Escaping Criticism}. In this case, we see the left leg of the boy the picture presents as being behind the location where the canvas is, whereas his torso is seen as standing in that very location, and yet his head, his left hand, and his right foot are seen as standing in front.
of it, in order to convey the overall impression that the boy is getting out of the picture. In this respect, suppose that, along with what I hypothesized in the previous section, the Montemerano fresco were modified as regards its subject by adding the depiction of a forward-moving cat as crouched under the Madonna. Then, in the above situation when one utters (14) in order to talk of a real cat, we could even have a report also involving the depicted cat, with `to see’ in its aforementioned nonfactive meaning to have a visual experience.

15 I see two passing cats in the picture.

Yet moreover, the above linguistic evidence would not be conclusive if there were no theory of pictorial experience that supplied it with an ultimate justification. Language use is often affected by vagueness of meaning. Thus, the fact that we have reports such as the above ones would remain a sort of linguistic curiosity, if we did not have a theory of pictorial experience that explains why we so express ourselves in such reports.

Fortunately enough, there is such a theory. Partially at least, the experience of seeing something in a picture’s vehicle is what the above case of realizing that something is a genuine trompe l’oeil reveals: a knowingly illusory perception of the picture’s vehicle as the picture’s subject. I say ‘partially’, for pictorial experience also includes the veridical perception of the picture’s vehicle. Indeed, according to this theory, pictorial experience is twofold, just as in Wollheim’s seeing in. In the first, configurational, fold, one veridically perceives the picture’s vehicle. In the second, recognitional, fold, one illusorily, hence nonveridically, perceives the picture’s subject. Moreover, this illusory perception is a knowingly illusory one. The experiencer perceptually knows that the picture’s subject is not there, precisely because she also perceptually knows that the picture’s vehicle is there. Thus in the recognitional fold, the picture’s subject is nonveridically seen as standing in the picture’s vehicle, just as in the aforementioned illusory perception reported by the first utterance of (12), in which one mistakes (a part of) a genuine trompe l’oeil for what actually is (a part of) the subject of the experientially emerging picture.19 Like that perception, the recognitional fold is illusory. Indeed, the picture’s subject is illusorily seen in the picture’s vehicle. These two items are taken as instantiating in the real space the being in relation; yet of course, since the perception is illusory, they are not actually instantiating that relation.20 Instead, what actually instantiate that relation are further real physical items the picture’s vehicle is actually spatially connected with, such as, e.g., real holes (as in The Virgin of the Cat Flap): the items that are perceptually and veridically grasped in the configurational fold of the pictorial experience. In this theoretical framework, speaking of a pictorial space, as Wollheim himself did as we saw before, is simply an improper way of talking of the real space: the pictorial space is just the real space as it would have
been if the recognitional fold had been not illusory. Yet, unlike the afore-
mentioned illusory perception, the recognitional fold is a *knowingly* illusory
perception. Indeed, one knows that the picture’s subject is not out there. For
one knows that what is out there is actually another thing; namely, the pic-
ture’s vehicle itself that one knowingly sees in the other yet veridical config-
urational fold of the pictorial experience.

Interestingly enough, in so explaining the linguistic data, this theory of
pictorial experience is better than a similar theory in the philosophical
market. According to this other theory (Kulvicki, 2009; Newall, 2015),
pictorial experience is a form of seeing through, where the background ob-
ject is seen (maybe nomologically impossibly) as *merely behind* (or even
merely in front of) the transparent layer. In Hopkins’s (2012, p. 656)
terms, seeing in taken as seeing through (problematically) amounts to (1)
representing $P$ (the picture’s vehicle) as at distance $\delta_1$ from one’s point
of view and (2) representing $O$ (the picture’s subject) as at distance $\delta_2$ from
one’s point of view, where $\delta_1 \neq \delta_2$.

This theory certainly bears a similarity with my own theory. For accord-
ing to it, pictorial experience illusorily locates the picture’s subject in the
same real space as the picture’s vehicle. Yet unlike my theory, this theory
does not capture the proper spatial relation that in that experience holds be-
tween the picture’s vehicle and the picture’s subject. In the recognitional fold
of pictorial experience, the picture’s subject is (knowingly) illusorily seen as
extending from the area in which the picture’s vehicle is veridically seen in the
configurational fold of that experience, as standing either backwards (as in
standard pictures) or forwards (as in merely protruding pictures) or even
both (as in the *Escaping Criticism* case). This shows why, unlike that the-
ory, my theory can properly explain the linguistic evidence that sentences
like (1) present.

## 4. Conclusion

To sum up, appearances notwithstanding, we must take as correct a given
linguistic evidence purportedly showing that we literally use the preposition
‘in’ as still meaning the spatial relation of *being in* also when saying that we
see the picture’s subject in the picture’s vehicle. Such a correctness does not
only depend on the fact that from the linguistic point of view, it is very hard
to dispense with that evidence. It also and more importantly depends on the
fact that the relation that is grasped in the pictorial experience as holding be-
tween the picture’s subject and the picture’s vehicle is exactly that spatial re-
lation. Or so my theory claims.

Department of Philosophy and Education Sciences
University of Turin, Turin, Italy

© 2019 The Author
Pacific Philosophical Quarterly © 2019 University of Southern California and John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
NOTES

1 For the purposes of this paper, I assume that ‘in’ has a locative meaning when applied to a relation between holes and their physical containers. Obviously enough, however, matters are more complicated. On this, cf. Casati (2000).

2 In a different theoretical perspective, also Spinicci (2012) endorses this claim.

3 As originally remarked by Fauconnier (1985) (see most recently Recanati, 2018).

4 Consider how the case differs from another apparently similar case, in whose following argument one may feel a sense of paradoxicality: ‘The pain is in my hand, my hand is in my pocket; therefore, the pain is in my pocket’. One may account for the argument’s sense of paradoxicality by saying that the argument is invalid. For ‘in’ is ambiguous in its first and in its second premise since it respectively has an individuative and a locative sense (Crane, 2001 pp. 81–82). Even in this case, however, there is perhaps no paradoxicality, hence no ambiguity, at all, if one reads the first premise as saying ‘The pain is as if in my hand’, thereby also recovering the validity of the argument. See on this Voltolini (2013, p. 121).


6 As I said, Burri’s masterpiece is an abstract painting. Yet this does not prevent it from eliciting a pictorial experience just as any paradigmatic figurative painting. For, as Wollheim (1987, p. 62) himself originally stressed, as regards paintings the abstract–concrete distinction is orthogonal to the figurative–nonfigurative distinction. See also Geiger (2008).

7 On these different meanings of ‘picture’, cf. Wiesing (2010).

8 Cf., e.g., Husserl (2006), who explicitly holds that what is seen in a picture, the image-object as he labels it, is seen in its vehicle, as Brough (2012) underlines. Granted, Husserl distinguishes the image-object from the image-subject, taken as what the picture is about. Yet this is irrelevant for my present purposes.

9 For this property distinction, cf. notoriously Lopes (2005).

10 I owe this suggestion to an anonymous referee.


12 Cf., e.g., Spinicci (2012).


14 I owe this suggestion to an anonymous referee.

15 As Lopes (1996) holds, both a veridical and a nonveridical form of seeing are cases of visual experiences as of a F.

16 One might object that the picture’s subject cannot amount to a relatum for the being in relation since there are cases in which the picture’s subject does not exist, as with pictures of unicorns. Yet not only one may rebut, with Wollheim (2003), Hyman (2006), and Wiesing (2010), that nonexistent pictorial subjects are legitimate relata, but one may also take the picture’s subject as an existent generic item that both pictures of existents and pictures of nonexistent present. Thus, this item may work in both cases as the right-hand side relatum of the being in relation (cf. Voltolini, 2015.)

17 On such referential shifts, cf., e.g., Recanati, 2004.

18 Unlike 3-D sculpture’s vehicles. In a holey statue, we see both the hole and the sculpture’s subject as being contained by the sculpture’s vehicle.

19 This is one interpretation of what Wollheim (1987) meant by saying ‘I discern something standing out in front of, or (in certain cases) receding behind, something else’ (p. 46) (cf. Hyman, 2006, p. 133). Exegetically speaking, this interpretation is incorrect, for Wollheim (2003, p. 3) himself clarified that, by so saying, he meant that in seeing in, one sees parts of the picture’s subject as standing behind other parts. Yet by no means, these two interpretations are incompatible. In (knowingly illusorily) seeing the picture’s subject as standing in the picture’s vehicle, one indeed sees (knowingly illusorily as well) some parts of that subject as lying behind some other such parts.

© 2019 The Author
Pacific Philosophical Quarterly © 2019 University of Southern California and John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
They instantiate it in the pictorial space once this is merely taken as an evaluation point of the relevant perception’s content, not as a content-determining point, as in the above rejected weaker variant of the defense of the specific use of ‘in’ as regards seeing in.

For a possibility of articulating such a theory, see Voltolini (2015).

For more about this, cf. Voltolini (2017).

This paper has been presented at the Anglo-German Picture Group 2019 Workshop, May 31 to 1 June 2019, NYU Florence, at the Work in Progress Seminar, June 13, 2019, Centre for Philosophical Psychology, University of Antwerp, and at the Claves Seminar, June 24, 2019, Ca’ Foscarì University, Venice. I thank all the participants for their inspiring questions. I also thank both John Kulvicki and Marco Nani for some chats about holes in pictures that prompted me to think more deeply about these issues.

REFERENCES


© 2019 The Author

Pacific Philosophical Quarterly © 2019 University of Southern California and John Wiley & Sons Ltd.


