

Three Kinds of Realism About Photographs

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§I.

In this essay, I will explore the nature of photographs by comparing them with handmade paintings, as well as by comparing traditional film photography with digital photography, and I shall concentrate on the question of realism. Several different notions can be distinguished here. Are photographs such that they depict the world in a “realist” or a “factive” way? Do they show us the world as it is with accuracy and reliability other types of pictures do not possess? Do they allow us, as some have suggested, to literally *see* the world through them? Below, I will distinguish three kinds of realism about photographs, reject two, and partly endorse one. Indeed, the label “realism,” when concerning photographs, can stand for a variety of very different claims. The first (and quite obvious) distinction to start with concerns what the realist thesis is *about*: the claim that somehow photographs are more accurate or more reliable or that they somehow depict the world better than handmade pictures can be a claim about the photographic *image itself* or alternatively a claim about the *way* in which photographs are produced. In the former case, realism is a thesis about how photographs *look* and what sort of information they contain, while in the latter case realism is a claim about the *process of production* of photographs. It is the

incompletely how objects are and what properties they have; normal visual perception also allows us to see objects only partly, from a certain angle; normal visual perception also involves some blurred zones and some sharper zones in the field of vision; and so on. In short, we never totally see the world as it is; rather, we see it as our perceptual apparatus is capable of delivering it to us, a quite obvious fact that has always had a prominent place in philosophy, notably in the work of Descartes, Locke, and Kant, for instance. But of course both photographs and paintings *can* communicate to us *some* features of the objects they depict, and so they can be at least partially realist, to a degree.

The most interesting case with respect to photography is the question whether photographs can be *totally not realist* (see my “?” on the schema above). Handmade paintings can—they can, for instance, “depict” nothing at all; they can be images created by the painter using only his imagination and “depicting” objects that do not exist. Photographs, by contrast, seem always to be depictions of something existing, even if they do not depict it as it is.

What is at issue here is, I think, a matter of definition of what counts as photography and what counts as painting (I shall also come back to this at the end of the essay). Take the photographer who does a lot of retouching on her photographs (either in the darkroom for traditional film photography or on a computer for digital photography): It is possible, and sometimes actually the case, that after a certain amount and type of retouching, the resulting photograph will be completely different from how the world is and even from what there is in the world—thus the photographic image will be totally not realist, in the sense of realism under examination now. But of course one might resist this claim by arguing that such an image is not a photograph anymore and that, to put it shortly, a painting has been “painted over” the photograph (and, consequently, there are no cases of totally not realist photographs). There is surely a good intuition behind this claim, but it raises the worry concerning where to draw the line between “acceptable” retouches in the darkroom or on a computer and “not acceptable” ones. Indeed, as I think is also intuitively very plausible, there is, as a matter of necessity, always *some* amount of retouching in the process of creation of a photograph (think, just to have one quick example in mind, of how the photographer makes decisions about contrast when she develops a negative or when she develops a RAW file). It will then be difficult to find principled criteria for discriminating retouches that will be allowed to be

part of a normal photographic process and those that will not—any such attempts take the risk of raising objections from arbitrariness and under-justification. In order to avoid this risk, one would have to either insist that *no* such retouches are part of a normal photographic process, which is simply false as we shall see in detail below, or allow that *all* retouches are part of the process of creation of photographs—and then, our case of a photograph that has been “painted over” would count as a genuine case of a (totally not realist) photograph.

But these are claims not about how the resulting photograph actually *looks* but about the *way* in which it was produced, which is a different sort of realism that I will turn my attention to now.

§3.

The two more interesting types of realism about photographs I shall discuss in detail now (that is, realisms that help us to see what is *special* about photographs) are claims about the *way* in which photographs are typically produced. I insist on the qualification “typically”: indeed, the discussion concentrates on cases of “normal” or sometimes even “ideal” (Scruton 1981) photographs, rather than on “abnormal” cases like the one of a very heavily retouched photograph that I just quickly examined above. There is a good reason for doing so and for excluding these abnormal cases from discussion. Indeed, realism understood as a claim about the process of production of photographs is a thesis that always involves central claims about the role humans (photographers) play in this process: Realists claim that this role is minimal or even nonexistent, while antirealists claim that it is of (at least some relevant) importance. But in the case of a heavily retouched photograph, trivially, everybody agrees that human intervention is crucially relevant and antirealism is the prevailing attitude. Thus, the core of the discussion is based on the idea that what is special and interesting about photographs as opposed to handmade paintings is not so much the resulting image itself but, rather, the way in which it was produced, and the question then becomes whether this process is, in normal nonexotic cases, such that there is a sense in which photographs somehow “connect us” with the world in a way handmade paintings do not.

The realist thesis (that answers yes to this question) can be cashed out in different ways, of which I shall examine two, rejecting one and partly

endorsing the other. The first type of realism that can be traced back to Bazin (1960) and of which a new version has been recently put forward by Hopkins (forthcoming) defends the idea that photographic systems are designed for accuracy and that when everything is normal, photographs truthfully reflect facts about the world. The second type of realism, notoriously championed by Walton (1984), claims that photographs allow us to literally *see* the objects they depict—they are, as Walton calls it, *transparent*.

In what follows I will concentrate mostly on Hopkins's recent and well-developed defense of the first type of realism, and I will provide reasons to reject it. I will then more quickly turn to Walton's thesis and say why I think that it should be endorsed (with some revisions). My own view will gradually arise in the process of doing so.

Before I do this, let me quickly insist from the start on something that will become clearly apparent once we have examined these views, namely, that these two realisms, while both deserving the label "realism," are completely different claims. They are *not* alternatives to each other; rather, they are claims about something else: the transparency thesis is orthogonal to the "factivity" thesis.² Let us start with the latter.

§4.

There is a strong commonsense intuition about photographs that takes them, unlike handmade paintings (even hyperrealistic ones), to provide truthful testimony about the world; and this is why they are traditionally more easily accepted as "proofs" in court, for instance. Realism about photographs tries to justify this commonsense claim, with respect to normal cases of photographs: but not because the photographic image is such that it is a more faithful depiction of the world, since it is not any more faithful than a very realistic painting, but, rather, because of its allegedly *essentially mechanical* way of being produced. Here is André Bazin:

Photography . . . is a discovery that satisfies, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism. No matter how skilful the painter, his work was always in fee to an inescapable subjectivity. The fact that human hand intervened cast a shadow of doubt over the image. Again, the essential factor . . . is not the perfecting of a physical process (photography will long remain the inferior of painting in the

reproduction of color); rather does it lie in a psychological fact, to wit, in completely satisfying our appetite for illusion by a *mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part*. The solution is not to be found in the result achieved but in the way of achieving it. . . . *For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man.* (1960, 7; my italics)

Scruton also insists on the process of production of photographs being essentially causal and minimizes the role of the photographer's intentions: "*The subject is, roughly, as it appears in the photograph*. In characterizing the relation between the ideal photograph and its subject, one is characterizing *not an intention but a causal process*, and while there is, as a rule, an intentional act involved, this is not an essential part of the photographic relation. The ideal photograph also yields an appearance, but the appearance is not interesting as the realization of an intention but rather as a *record of how an actual object looked*" (1981, 579; my italics). In his recent article, Hopkins also claims that "traditional photography, in contrast [with handmade pictures], involves a causal chain free from the influence of people's beliefs and experiences" (forthcoming), which echoes Scruton's claim that "with an ideal photograph, it is *neither necessary nor even possible* that the photographer's intention should enter as a serious factor in determining how the picture is seen. . . . The causal process of which the photographer is a victim puts almost every detail *outside of his control*" (1981, 588, 593; my italics). I think that these quotes exhibit a mistaken conception of photography and the work of photographers, and I shall argue below that, as a matter of *necessity*, the photographer's beliefs and intentions *do* constitute a *central* factor in the process of production of any photograph and that the so-called causal chain that this process allegedly is, is necessarily and crucially under her influence.

But let us first examine more closely Hopkins's recent version of this kind of realism. His view is articulated around the notion of *factivity*. Saying that the experience of normal photographs is factive means, in Hopkins's view, that photographs put us in a factive mental state that handmade paintings do not put us in; thus factivity is a feature of the mental states of the observer of a photograph, not of the photograph itself. Factive mental states are then such that "they capture how things are," and "a kind of mental

state is factive if the following is true: for any token state of that kind, if that token state represents it as the case that *p*, then it is indeed the case that *p*" (Hopkins forthcoming). Of course, Hopkins acknowledges that people are involved in the making of photographs, but only in a nonessential way, that is, in a way that does not affect the preservation of information and thus does not preclude factivity. Here is a quote from Hopkins that nicely summarizes his view: "But unlike for other pictures, [the experience of photographs] is *factive*: it is guaranteed to reflect the facts. What we see in traditional photographs is, *of necessity*, true to *how* things were when the photograph was taken. At last, this is the experience traditional photography is *designed to produce* and which it does indeed produce, *when everything works as it should*" (forthcoming; my italics).

Apart from his central notion of factivity and from the central (non) role played by the photographer, Hopkins also insists on two other crucial notions, the first of them being the notion of *accuracy*: Any photographic system's overarching aim is accuracy, and accurately capturing how things are in the world is what photographic systems are designed for. The second claim that plays a crucial part in Hopkins's view insists on the existence of a *norm* that tells us when it is the case that "everything works as it should"—for only when this condition is satisfied, photographs can produce factive mental states in the observer. This norm, which is specific to each technical aspect of the process of production of a photograph (focusing, for instance), can be in general terms simply put as the norm of "things working properly." Hopkins thus claims that "*every one of the cases seeming to show that our experience of photographs is not factive involves an infringement of some norm of proper functioning.*" To sum up, in Hopkins's view, "traditional photography is *designed to produce factive seeing-in* [and] that is precisely what it does produce, *when everything works as it should*" (forthcoming; my italics).

I shall now resist these realist claims, and this will provide us, I believe, with a view of photography that is true and also fits better how photographers themselves see what they are doing. In order to do this, I need to spell out in some detail how photographic systems actually, *normally*, work. Let us examine the two schemas below:

The schema on the left represents the process of production of a photograph produced by traditional photographic systems that use film to record the image, while the schema on the right represents the process of production of a photograph using a digital photographic system. I will examine

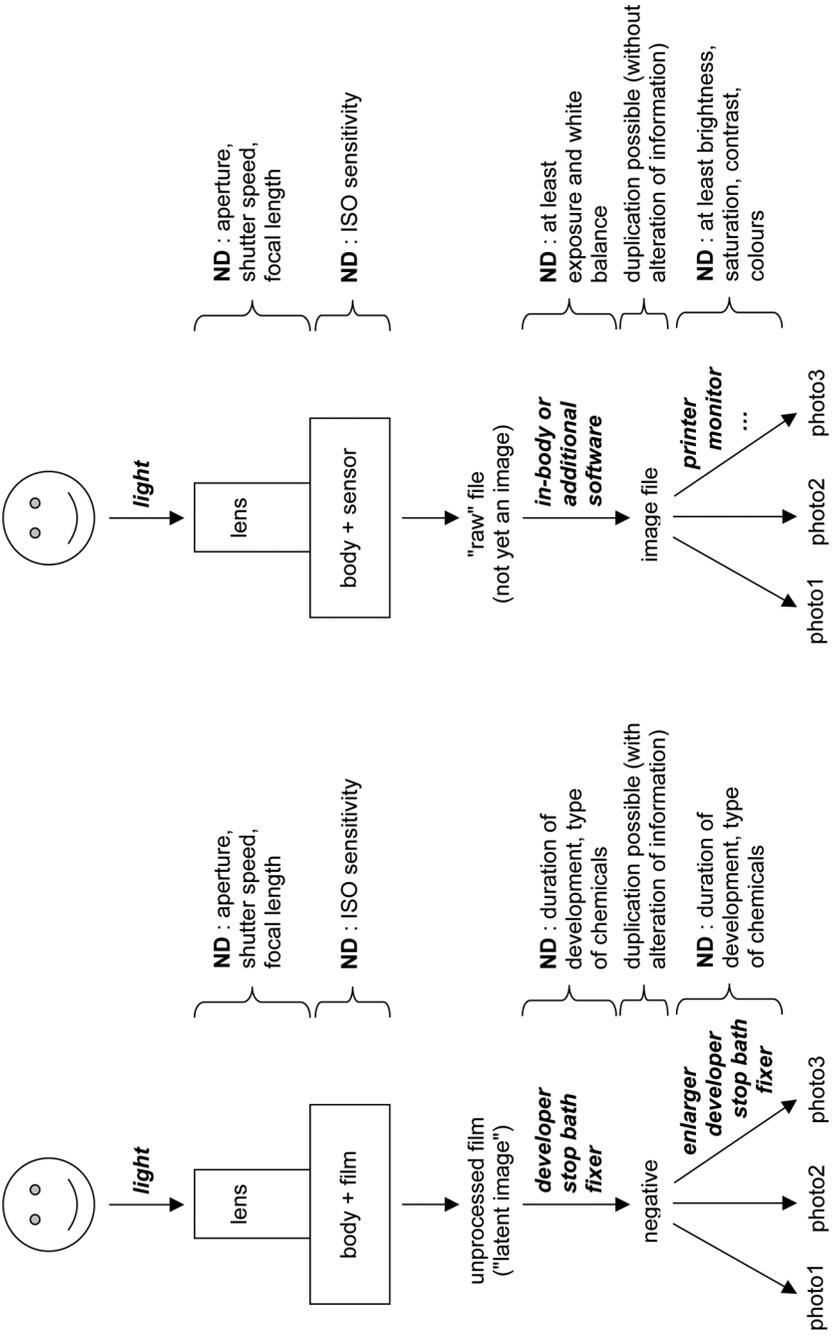


FIGURE 2.

both types of systems in parallel, and as we will see there is no significant difference between the two with respect to the question of realism.

The point of these schemas is to make clearly apparent that there are several stages of production that involve *necessary decisions* (NDs) made by the photographer. These NDs are decisions that a photographer *has to* make every time she takes a photograph—it is *impossible not to make these decisions when taking any normal photograph*. Of course, sometimes, especially when amateur photography is concerned, such decisions are automated, but this just means that the photographer decides to let somebody else (the one who programmed the automated system) make the decision in her stead. The upshot of this simple fact about how photographic systems work is that, *as a matter of necessity*, the photographer's intentions, beliefs, and decisions *do* play a central role in the process of production of a photograph, and this has a great influence on the way the resulting photograph looks. To have clear examples in mind, let us first examine three cases of NDs: aperture, shutter speed, and focal length.

Aperture

Look at the photographs in Figures 3 and 4: They were taken with a large aperture setting (2.8), which creates a shallow depth of field, and consequently some parts of the world are depicted as being blurred; but since the world is not blurred, these photographs are not factive (a hyperrealistic painting could have been more factive), and at the very best they could be said to be partly factive (I will come back to partial factivity in the next section).³ *Pace* Hopkins, this is *not* “how things were when the photograph was taken.” It is important to note that it would be entirely arbitrary to claim that such and such aperture setting is “more normal” than another (why would 2.8 be more or less normal than 32 or than 16?). Rather, what is normal is that the photographer has a range of possible settings at her disposal and that she has to make a choice whenever she takes a photograph. Besides, it is worth noting (and it will become important below) that depending on what the photographer wants to convey, that is, depending on the story she wants to tell us with her photograph, she can choose to focus either on the wedding rings or on the faces; and consequently in one case the photograph conveys more the idea of a wedding, and in the other case it conveys more the idea of love shared by the two persons.



FIGURES 3 and 4. Photograph of couple taken with an aperture setting of 2.8 (left). Photograph of couple's rings taken with an aperture setting of 2.8(right).

Focal Length

Look at the photographs in Figures 4, 5, and 6: The first was taken using a 320-millimeter focal length lens, the second was taken using an 80-millimeter focal length lens, and the third was taken using a 16-millimeter focal length lens. Due to this choice of different focal lengths, there is a distortion that is apparent in *all three* photographs. But since the world is not distorted in such a way, the photographs are not factive. This is *not* “how things were when the photograph was taken.” It is important to note that it would be entirely arbitrary to claim that such and such a focal length is “more normal” than another (since all three images are distorted). Rather, what is normal is that the photographer has a range of possible focal lengths at her disposal and that she has to make a choice whenever she takes a photograph. Besides, depending on what the photographer wants to convey, she can choose either a short or a long focal length: The former can be used, for instance, to produce a comic photograph (as in Figure 7), while the latter (Figure 5) is typically used in fashion portrait photography, for instance.



FIGURE 5. Photograph of a woman taken with a focal length lens of 320 millimeters.



FIGURE 6. Photograph of a woman taken with a focal length lens of eighty millimeters.



FIGURE 7. Photograph of a woman taken with a focal length lens of sixteen millimeters.

Shutter Speed

Look at the photograph in Figure 8: It was taken using a long exposure time, which makes the moving objects (the person and the train) appear as blurred, but since the world is not blurred in this way, the photograph is not factive. This is *not* “how things were when the photograph was taken.” Another well-known example that could be used here is the case of a photograph of a crowded street taken with a very long exposure time, which results in a photograph of the very same but *empty* street, because moving objects will simply not be recorded enough to be visible on the resulting image. Here again, it is important to note that it would be entirely arbitrary to claim that such and such a shutter speed setting is “more normal” than another. (For why would two seconds be more or less normal than $1/100$ th of a second or $1/500$ th of a second etc.? Any such setting selects some interval of time, shorter or longer.) Rather, what is normal is that the photographer has a range of possible settings at her disposal and that she has to make a choice whenever she takes a photograph.

Depending on what the photographer wants to convey, that is, depending on the story she wants to tell us with her photograph, she can choose either a short or a long exposure time: The former can be used if one wants



FIGURE 8. Photograph of a person and a train taken with a shutter speed setting of two seconds.

a sharp photograph that shows many details, and the latter can be used, for instance, as an illustration in a paper about perdurantism, to show that some material objects are temporally extended (that is why I did this photograph sometime ago in the first place [see Benovsky 2009]). It is worth mentioning that it would *not* be correct to say that a sharp photograph (taken with a shorter shutter speed) would be more factive than the photograph in Figure 6. Granted, due to more sharpness some more detail would be preserved (so on this point the sharper photograph *would* be more factive), but some other information would simply be lost by comparison with the photograph in Figure 8, namely, information about how the objects evolved through time, how they moved, and so forth (on this point the sharper photograph would be *less* factive). Thus, both the sharp and the less sharp photographs are partly factive (again, I shall come back to partial factivity in the next section), but no one of them is fully factive, and no one of them is clearly more factive than the other.

Now, the important thing to realize with respect to all these cases of Necessary Decisions (as with respect to the other NDs on the schemas above) is that they all exhibit normal, standard settings and that they *are* cases “when everything works as it should.” Aperture, focal length, and shutter speed are indeed the three most standard and normal settings that any photographic system traditionally uses. To repeat what I already said above: when making any photograph it is simply impossible not to make a decision about these three settings. Thus, not only are these settings normal cases of the proper working of the photographic system (and so they do satisfy Hopkins’s norms); but also they show us that using aperture to create at will shallow or less shallow depth of field, using focal length to choose among the wanted or unwanted distortions, and appealing to such and such a shutter speed to produce a sharp or a blurred photograph are typical examples of what photographic systems are *designed for*: not, as Hopkins and realists in general believe, accuracy. Rather, photographic systems are creative tools that, necessarily and by their very nature, oblige the photographer to make creative choices that not only allow her to make decisions that have a strong impact on the resulting image but make it compulsory for her to do so. Thus, the claim that “the overarching aim with which photographic systems are designed is accuracy” is too restrictive about what photographic systems are designed for and what they typically achieve. Consequently, photographs are not *in principle* factive. Both photographs and handmade paintings *can* be (at least to a degree) factive—and perhaps it is true that a photograph can be more factive than even a hyperrealistic painting in some cases—but they are in principle not such, since any photograph depends on Necessary Decisions all of which are sources of nonfactivity.

Scruton thinks that he can avoid the relevance of Necessary Decisions by claiming that *his* realism is not about *normal* photographs but about *ideal* photographs, where *ideal* photography is something totally free of any significant human intervention and “*actual* photography is the result of the attempt to pollute the *ideal* of [the photographer’s] craft with the aims and methods of painting” (1981, 578). In my mind, one could not be more wrong. First, Scruton’s strategy is question-begging: he defines ideal photography as being such that it is free from significant human intervention, rather than showing it. Second, if there were such a thing as ideal photography, it would say nothing about *photography* (normal, actual), which is what most of us are interested in—Scruton simply changes the subject. Third, and most important, unless he changes the subject even more, as

the argument from NDs shows, ideal photography *is not even possible* (since the NDs are *necessary*).⁴

One element apparent in what Scruton says strikes me as important and correct (a point that Scruton himself rejects, in accordance with his own view): the consequence of my view and of the argument from NDs is that, as a matter of necessity, the photographer *is* in a sense a *painter*. (When explaining this to my photography and philosophy students, I like to call photography metaphorically “painting with light.”) Thus, I think that it is wrong to make a sharp distinction between photographers and painters. Of course, they do not work in the same way, with the same tools, and with the same results; and I do not deny that there are significant differences between these two arts (some of which I will discuss below). But both artists work in such a way that they observe the world, use their imagination, and then depict the world in a way that conveys feelings, facts, ideas—as they *want* to depict them.

My argument stops here, but I would like to extend it a bit further. (If you don't like what follows, you can still endorse what I said until now.) Remember the discussion from §2 about the heavily retouched photograph and the question of whether it is still a photograph or whether it is a painting. Bear also in mind the two schemas of traditional film and digital photographic systems. The photograph is a result that we can only find at the end of the chain of production, that is, not only after NDs about aperture, focal length, and shutter speed have been made but also after other NDs have been made (see the schemas), including NDs that are in the category of retouching techniques (contrast, colors, saturation). Other retouching techniques are *not necessary* but contingent (let us call them “CDs”), and these are the ones that we typically have in mind when considering the case of a heavily retouched photograph. Should we then exclude these from the process of production of photographs, just because they are contingent? If we aim at something like a strictly “ideal” photography, perhaps we should. But if we aim at talking about actual, normal photography and about the way photographers (both amateurs and professionals) actually do photography, then clearly such techniques are a common, standard, and important part of the process. (This is especially apparent in the case of digital photography, where it is extremely common to retouch photographs one takes, since it is very easy to do so using appropriate software; but it is also true of traditional film photography, even if it is technically more demanding and so less often actually used.) Not only does this

provide grounds for accepting the heavily retouched photograph discussed in §2 as a genuine case of a photograph, but this gives us a general view of photography as being a process that contains many different stages, some of them purely mechanical and causal, some of them involving necessary human decisions and choices (NDs), and some of them exhibiting decisions and choices that are contingent (CDs) but important and commonly used. The result of which is a work of art that *is* a photograph (because it was produced by using typical photographic systems and techniques) but that essentially involves the photographer as being the central element in the chain of production and that sometimes obliges her and sometimes leaves her free to behave similarly to the painter. This is the general, antirealist, view of photography that I would like to endorse.⁵ (But I will be satisfied enough if you stop following me at the end of the preceding paragraph.)

§5.

Kendall Walton (1984) also refers to his view about photographs with the term *realism*, but his claim is significantly different and even completely independent of the kind of realism defended by Hopkins and his predecessors. Indeed, as we shall now see, Walton's realism can actually be fruitfully combined with my rejection of the realism à la Hopkins. The general and intuitive idea that Walton's view shares with Hopkins's, and that I share as well, is that somehow photographs "connect us" better with the world in a way handmade paintings do not. But he sees this connection not as having anything to do with accuracy or factivity; rather, Walton claims that photographs, but not handmade paintings, are such that they allow us to literally *see* the world through them—as he labels it, photographs are *transparent*.

I share Walton's thesis, but not completely for Walton's own reasons. Here is Walton: "Putting things together, we get this: part of what it is to see something is to have visual experiences which are caused by it in a purely mechanical manner. Objects cause their photographs and the visual experiences of viewers mechanically; so we see the objects through the photographs. By contrast, objects cause paintings not mechanically but in a more 'human' way, a way involving the artist; so we don't see through paintings" (1984, 261). There are two components in what Walton says:

- When looking at a photograph, we see the photograph, but we also, literally, see the object depicted by the photograph. This is not so in

any case of any normal handmade painting. Photographic systems are analogous to telescopes, mirrors, or surveillance cameras: they are “aids to vision,” prosthetic devices that allow us to see farther than our perceptual apparatus normally allows us to see, that allow us to see around corners, that allow us to see what is going on in a different room, and, in the case of photographs, that typically allow us to see spatiotemporally distant objects. The mechanical manner in which photographs are, at least partly, produced plays a crucial role here: only thanks to this mechanical process can one claim that photographs are extensions of normal human vision.

- Objects cause their photographs and the visual experiences of viewers *purely* mechanically.

The second point is not necessary to establish the first, and I hope that I have shown that it is false. This is where I depart from Walton, at least as I understand him. But I fully agree with the first point, which I take to be the most important for Walton himself, and this is what from now on I will understand to be Walton’s thesis and refer to by the term *transparency* (I will use *factivity* for Hopkins’s thesis, so that no worries will arise from the ambiguity of the term *realism*).

Sometimes one can hear objections to Walton’s view that insist on the allegedly bizarre fact that if Walton were right, photographs would allow us, literally, to see the past. But there is nothing bizarre about this: telescopes, mirrors, and surveillance cameras allow us to see the past as well (since it takes some time for photons to travel from distant stars to us, from the surface of the mirror to our eyes, etc.). Indeed, any visual experience is always an experience of the past, even in the case of normal human visual perception (for the same reason). So, being mechanical devices similar to telescopes (after all, a photographic lens is not that different from a telescope, many photographic systems do use a mirror as one of their essential components [single-lens reflex cameras, in particular], and many other photographic systems do use video camera-like technology [compact digital cameras, for instance]), photographic systems function in such a way that they produce images that are transparent. But, as I argued at length in the preceding section, this is not the end of the story: while being partly mechanical, the process of production of photographs also and essentially involves “human” factors at various production stages (NDs and CDs). But there is no contradiction in saying this (namely, that the process

of production of photographs is typically partly, essentially, and importantly mechanical and partly, essentially, and importantly influenced by human decisions, intentions, and beliefs); and so the transparency thesis is independent of the factivity thesis: photographs can and do allow us to *see* the world through them but typically *not* in an accurate and factive way. Thus, the overarching aim of photography is not accuracy in depicting the world; it is, rather, the aim to make us *see* the world in a way the photographer *wants* us to see it.

To conclude, here is a schematic representation of how photographic realism can be correctly articulated in a way that importantly allows for degree but does not allow for a full and total realism (so one may call my thesis “antirealism” like I did myself above, meaning by that “anti-total realism” or alternatively, “partial realism”):

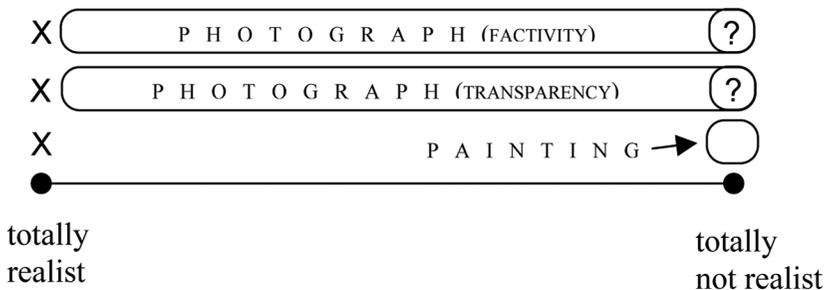


FIGURE 9.

With respect to the factivity thesis, no photograph is ever totally realist because of the necessary influence of NDs, as I argued above. The same is true with respect to the transparency thesis: NDs prevent photographs from being totally transparent for the same reason, namely, that the process of production of photographs is never purely mechanical. But they can be, and most often are, *partly* transparent and *partly* factive. The interesting truth here is, I think, that while photographs are typically transparent and factive with respect to quantified existence statements such as “*a* exists” or

“there are *x*s,” they are often nontransparent and nonfactive with respect to attributions of properties to the objects depicted as existing, like “*a* is *F*.” All the photographs in Figures 3–8, for instance, are factive and transparent with respect to the existence of a person but only partly factive and partly transparent with respect to how the person is.

As far as transparency and factivity are concerned, not only are handmade paintings (obviously) never totally realist, but they are not even partially realist since the process of production of a handmade painting does not contain any purely mechanical/causal stages and is entirely influenced by ND-like decisions, beliefs, and choices of the painter—thus, paintings are always essentially totally nonrealist. The tricky question is whether photographs can be such as well. Can photographs be totally nontransparent and/or nonfactive? More precisely, the question is: If a photograph, such as the heavily retouched photograph from §2, is totally nontransparent and nonfactive, is it still a *photograph*? If we take away completely the influence of the mechanical stages of production on the resulting photographic image, there is no ground anymore to claim that we can actually *see* anything through the photograph: thus, a very heavily retouched photograph, where all influence from the mechanical stages of production has been “painted over,” does not allow us to see the world any more than a painting. As we have already seen, the same reasoning can apply to factivity. But then, do these images still “count as” photographs? The point upon which a decision can be made here is whether not only NDs but also an *unlimited amount of CDs* are to be allowed to be part of the process of production of a photograph. Above, I have suggested that they should, thus minimizing the difference between the photographer and the painter (the photographer becoming a “painter over,” in the case of heavily retouched photographs).⁶ But maybe doing so makes us lose an interesting distinction between photography as being essentially partly mechanical and handmade paintings that are essentially totally nonmechanical, and so while some amount of CDs should of course be allowed to be part of the process of production of photographs, perhaps an unlimited amount of them should not, and heavily retouched photographs that have been completely “painted over” should not count as genuine cases of photographs. I take it that understood in this way, this is largely a terminological matter of definition, since nothing conceptual remains clouded.

NOTES

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1. These cases will be discussed in detail below in §4 where I talk about realism understood as a thesis about the process of production of photographs.

2. Unfortunately, these two very different claims, maybe because they sometimes go around under the same name, are often mixed up together, often implicitly but sometimes explicitly. Savedoff, for instance, writes: “This close connection between what the photograph shows and what exists in the world is what Kendall Walton refers to when he speaks of the ‘transparency’ of the photograph, what André Bazin refers to when he speaks of the ‘realism’ of the photograph, and what Rudolf Arnheim has in mind when he says that the objects in a photograph print their own images ‘by means of the optical and chemical action of light’” (1997, 202).

3. For simplicity of formulation, I will say that a photograph is factive when I mean to say that it is such that it produces a factive mental state in the observer.

4. One might also realize that there is something wrong with Scruton’s view since it leads him to almost absurd assertions like this one: “If one finds a photograph beautiful, it is because one finds something beautiful in its subject. A painting may be beautiful, on the other hand, even when it represents an ugly thing” (1981, 590).

5. This is also how I do photography myself; see www.benovsky.com.

6. Compare with Noël Carroll’s (1996, 60) similar and analogous claims about film. Walton also makes a similar claim (about photographs) when he says that “our experience of digital images becomes more like that of painting” (2008, 115), except that he thinks there is something special about *digital* photographs. But as we have seen this latter claim is unfounded since there are NDs and CDs involved in the process of production of traditional film photography as well.

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