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## Pictorial misrepresentation without figurative misrepresentation

### Abstract

*As many people have underlined, as regards pictures there are at least two different layers of content. In Voltolini (2015), these layers are: i) the figurative content of a picture, i.e., what one can see in it viz. what the picture presents; ii) the pictorial content of a picture, i.e., what the picture represents, as constrained by its figurative content. As regards ii), there undoubtedly is pictorial misrepresentation. Having the possibility of misrepresenting things is a standard condition in order for a picture to be a representation (Fodor 1990, Hopkins 1998). Yet as regards i), things are more problematic. First, if one intends that a picture is seen in a way that is impossible for the picture to be seen, there definitely is intentional failure, but there is no figurative misrepresentation. Second, alleged cases in which one literally sees in a picture something that does not match what the picture presents (Hopkins 1998, Brown 2010) are not cases of figurative presentational failure either.*

### Keywords:

*Pictorial representation, Figurative content, Pictorial content*

Received: 30/1/2021

Approved: 18/2/2021

Editing by: Serena Massimo

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As many people have underlined under various notions that differ both intensionally and extensionally, as far as pictures are concerned there are at least two different layers of content. In Voltolini (2015), these layers are: i) the *figurative content* of a picture, i.e., what one can see in it viz. what the picture *presents*; ii) the *pictorial content* of a picture, i.e., what the picture *represents*, as constrained by its figurative content.

As far as ii) is concerned, there undoubtedly is *pictorial misrepresentation*. Having the possibility of misrepresenting things is a standard condition in order for a picture to be a pictorial *representation* (Hopkins 1998), or better a representation *tout court* (Fodor 1990). Yet as regards i), things are more problematic. First, if one intends that a picture is seen in a way that is impossible for the picture to be seen, there definitely is intentional failure, but there is no *figurative misrepresentation*: either there is no picture, or if there is a picture, this goes on presenting what one *can* see in it, which is alternative to what one erroneously intends to be seen in it. Second, alleged cases in which one literally sees in a picture something that does not match what the picture presents (Hopkins 1998, Brown 2010; see also Nanay 2016, 2017) are not cases of figurative presentational failure either. For they can be instead dealt with as cases in which, appearances notwithstanding, what one sees in it does match what the picture presents, i.e., its *figurative content*. Indeed, this content is not only something that one can see in the picture, but also what is *correct* for one to see in it, given the creator's figurative intentions (Wollheim 1980, 2003a), or better, what is intentionally to be seen in it, provided that it can be seen in it; in a nutshell, as far as pictures are concerned, seeing-in is *intentionally-based*.

### 1. *Content layers of a picture*

As anyone knows, there is a sense of "picture" according to which a picture is an entity-*cum*-meaning, i.e., a hybrid entity made up of a physical basis, its *vehicle*, plus its *interpretation*, its having a content. Leonardo's masterpiece, *La Gioconda* (1503-6), is a canvas hung on a wall in one of the Louvre's rooms that depicts a mysterious lady enigmatically smiling, Mona Lisa, on the background of a typical central Italy landscape. On this respect, many people have maintained that, as far as a picture so meant is concerned, there are different layers of content. The first one typically accounts for what makes a picture a *pictorial* representation; namely,

something endowed with a *figurative* value, i.e., its displaying a certain, possibly very schematic, situation. The second one typically accounts for what makes a picture a pictorial *representation*; namely, something that is about something else and has something that makes it either an accurate or an inaccurate model of how things unfold in the world<sup>1</sup>.

Now, philosophers interpret this content distinction in different ways, basically depending on how much detailed the first layer of content must be and on how it relates to the second layer.

On the one hand, in Kulvicki's (2006, 2013, 2020) account, the first layer of content is very thin: in his terminology, a *bare bones* content, i.e., something that supervenes on the mere syntactic features of a picture (colors, shapes, etc.). As such, it is very far from the further definitely richer content of a picture, which involves its broader representational features: *fleshed out* content, in his terminology. In this perspective, a picture of myself and a picture of my twin differ in their fleshed out content, although they share the same bare bones content; they share the same syntactic features.

Although this account is very intriguing, it seems not to take into due consideration the fact that what a picture immediately displays is something more than a bare bones content. Consider the phenomenon of *perceptually ambiguous* pictures, in which, in conformity with different pictorial interpretations, a perceptually relevant Gestalt switch leads one to discern different aspectual organizations in the figure one faces, although the low-level features (colors, shapes...) of that figure remain constant: e.g. the duck-rabbit picture, the Necker cube, the Rubin vase. Now, one perceives such different aspectual organizations of a picture before grasping its different pictorial interpretations, e.g. the fact that the picture is either the picture *of a duck* (on a certain background) or the picture *of a rabbit* (on a certain background). Yet appealing to bare bones content of a picture seems to be unable to capture such different aspectual organizations. For since bare bones content supervenes on the syntactic features of a picture, i.e., its low-level features, it remains identical in spite of the fact that the picture displays such different organizations (Voltolini 2015).

<sup>1</sup> A possible further layer of content is *symbolic* content, what a picture is taken to symbolize over and above what it represents and unlike the latter, is not bound by the picture's figurative value. Cfr. Grzankowski (2016: 151), Voltolini (2015: 14).

On the other hand, in other accounts, the first layer of content is rather thick. Such accounts differently develop what Wollheim (1980, 1987, 1998, 2003a,b) originally said as regards what we see *in* a picture. As is well known, for Wollheim *seeing-in* is the distinctive pictorial experience, provided that it is conceived as a *sui generis* twofold perceptual experience that suitable spectators of pictures entertain. A seeing-in experience is indeed made of two folds: the *configurational* fold (CF) in which one grasps the picture's vehicle, and the *recognitional* fold (RF), in which one grasps what the picture presents. According to Wollheim, first of all, such folds are inseparable, for neither is identical with the corresponding experience taken in isolation. Seeing-in is indeed a proper fusion experience (Voltolini 2020a). For on the one hand, seeing the picture's vehicle *qua* picture's vehicle is not the same as having a perceptual experience of it *qua* mere physical object in the world, while on the other hand, grasping what the picture presents is not the same as perceiving that thing face-to-face (Wollheim 1987: 46). Moreover, the second fold depends on the first fold, at least in the sense that the former could not exist if the latter did not exist as well (Hopkins 2008).

Now, in these accounts the first layer of content is precisely related, though in different ways, to what we see in a picture. For some people, one must draw a distinction between what one literally sees in a picture and what the picture presents, the picture's *depictive* content (Hopkins 1998; see also Brown 2010). For some other people, who take their inspiration from Husserl (2006), one must draw a distinction between what one literally sees in a picture, its *image-* or *virtual* object, and what the picture is about, its *subject* (Nanay 2016, 2017). For some further people – inspired from the liberal view of what one sees in a picture that Wollheim defended in some of his last papers (2003a,b) – what one sees in a picture coincides with what the picture presents, its *figurative* content. Yet the *pictorial* content of a picture, including what that picture is about, outstrips what one can see in a picture in this liberal sense, although it is constrained by it (Voltolini 2015, 2018); similar distinctions are respectively in Lopes 1996, *content* recognition and *subject* recognition, and in Dilworth 2005, *aspectual* and *intentional* content)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> For this paper's purposes, I want to remain neutral as to the issue of whether pictorial content is propositional, just as sentential content. For arguments in favour of this option, cfr. Grzankowski (2016). Granted, people denying a propositional content to pictures might instead limit themselves to ascribing them something like figurative content. For, as we will see later, figurative content is not representational. But the

It is easier to illustrate the differences between these latter accounts by means of the following example. In Henri Matisse's *The green stripe* (1905), according to the first of these accounts one may literally see a woman with a green stripe on her face, yet what the picture presents is an ordinary flesh-and-blood woman. But for the second of these accounts, the image-object one sees in it is still the same as what one literally sees in it, i.e., the alien woman, and yet what it is about is M.me Matisse. Yet for the third of these accounts, what one sees in it viz. what it presents, i.e., its figurative content, is an ordinary flesh-and-blood woman lying on a background, yet the pictorial content involves M.me Matisse lying on a certain background.

In the proceeding of this paper, I want to claim that, if one endorses the third of the above accounts, one may show that, while, as anyone agrees, there can be mistakes as far the second, representatively based, notion of content is concerned – pictorial content – there are no mistakes as far as the first, figuratively based, notion of content is concerned – figurative content. In a slogan, while there is *pictorial misrepresentation*, there is no *figurative misrepresentation*. Sect. 2-3 respectively articulate these points.

## 2. *Pictorial misrepresentation*

Clearly enough, there are pictorial misrepresentations; namely, pictures that represent things as they do not actually unfold. Hopkins (1998) explicitly says that for pictures to be able to misrepresent is a *desideratum* that every theory of depiction must satisfy. And *pour cause*. As Fodor (1990) originally said, in order for something, whether pictorial or not (Fodor had in mind mental non-pictorial representations), to be a representation, it must be included in a class that contains both accurate and inaccurate items<sup>3</sup>.

two issues may be separate. Crane (2009) ascribes to pictures a perception-like representational content, yet not a propositional one.

<sup>3</sup> I weaken Fodor's original formulation, which says that in order for something to be a representation, it must be possible for it to turn out to be inaccurate, in order not to rule out apriori true representations, such as representations with a mathematical content. I am here talking of accuracy/inaccuracy and not of truth/falsity, in order for allow the possibility for a pictorial representation to be accurate but not true, since the first but not the second notion admits of degrees (Crane 2009: 458). For Crane,

Granted, as regards the formulation of his *desideratum*, Hopkins literally says: “Pictorial misrepresentation is possible, but has its limits” (1995: 431). In a later paper (2012), he has given a clear explanation of what he means by such limits. There are cases in which what seems to be a representational failure is simply something that systematically depends on the limited depictive powers of a depictive technique. Hence, it cannot count as a misrepresentation. For example, black-and-white photos apparently depict as black and white ordinarily colored individuals and things. Since this fact systematically depends on the poor light elaboration of the cameras that shot such photos, they cannot be taken as being all false because of their black-and-white depiction. Likewise, Casati (2012) points out that because of optical reasons, mirrors invert the position of the parts of the things facing them (what stands on the right of something facing the mirror is apparently depicted by the mirror as standing on its left, etc.). Yet since this fact systematically depends on the optical laws of light reflection, mirror images cannot be taken as being all false because of such a depictive inversion.

Yet all this considered, it remains that there are inaccurate pictures. If I draw a map of Italy that depicts Italy as an island rather than as a peninsula, this map is inaccurate, for it represents things as they do not actually unfold. As Wittgenstein masterfully said in his early work, the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*: “A picture agrees with reality or fails to agree; it is correct or incorrect, true or false” (1961: 2.21).

This inaccuracy is evident as regards pictures whose representational content is *singular* for it involves particular individuals, as in the above example of a map of Italy and in portraits<sup>4</sup>. A famous portrait of Niccolò Machiavelli, *La Testina*, is an unfaithful graphic picture of the famous Florentine philosopher (see Campi 2019 for details). Yet it may even be found in pictures whose representational content is *general*, for it involves no particular individual. Consider the anachronism occurring in Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s *The procession to calvary* (1594). It represents

this difference is related to the fact that pictures have no propositional content (Crane 2009: 458), a point on which, as I said (see the previous footnote), I want to remain neutral.

<sup>4</sup> Here I cannot deal with the discussion of what makes a portrait a portrait (and distinguish it from other kinds of pictures, possibly maps as well). Anyway, everyone involved in this discussion (for a nice recap cfr. Maes 2015) agrees on that portraits are pictures of particular individuals.

people attending the Crucifixion, not identified as particular individuals, as dressed in contemporary Flemish clothing.

Now, this kind of mistake is located at the *representational* level, the one that a picture shares with any other representation even if of a different kind: it affects its representational content, what is labelled the *pictorial* content in the third of the seeing-in inspired accounts we saw in the previous section. But can there be mistakes at a *presentational* level, i.e., at the level of what qualifies a picture as the kind of representation it is; namely, a *pictorial* representation? In the next section, I will try to show that if one endorses a liberal notion of the first kind of content that can be ascribed to a picture, the kind of content that one can trace back to Wollheim's reflections and that can be labelled as *figurative* content, this is not the case.

### 3. *No figurative misrepresentation*

In dealing with the problem with which I concluded the previous section, let me start by recalling the very liberal account of what one sees in a picture that Wollheim defends. By pointing at a particular example involving Nicolas Poussin's *Landscape with Saint John on Patmos* (1640), Wollheim says that we have a test for successfully telling what is seen in a picture:

We look at a painting showing a figure seated amongst classical ruins [...], and someone starts to ask questions of us, to which we must answer, Yes, or No. So, for example, Can you see those columns as having been thrown down? Yes. Can you see those columns as having been thrown down hundreds of years ago? Yes. Can you see those columns as having been thrown down hundreds of years ago by barbarians? (with some difficulty) Yes. Can you see them as having been thrown down hundreds of years ago by barbarians wearing wild asses' skins? (with little difficulty) No. Though we are perfectly ready to believe that the barbarians whose handiwork our eyes are prepared to acknowledge in this picture did indeed wear wild asses' skins, there is no way in which this belief, or the concept that figures in it, can help us to structure our perception of the painting, or can affect how we see the columns. So, of the range of concepts put to us in this test, it is the only one that is not instantiated by something visible in the picture. (2003a: 10)

Now, as I said the criterion that Wollheim proposes is very liberal. For according to him, the seeing-in experience is strongly cognitively penetrated, in the sense that its content – at least, the content of its RF – is made out by concepts the experiencer mobilizes in her cognitive states of belief, expectation and knowledge<sup>5</sup>. This cognitive penetration allows many sophisticated features to be seen in a picture, as the above example shows.

I take that one can even strengthen what Wollheim maintains here. For in actual fact, as regards what we see in the RF of a seeing-in experience, that content is *superstrongly* cognitively penetrated, in the sense that 1) a seeing-in experience is *strongly* cognitively penetrated, and 2) that content features that experience *as a whole*, i.e. as regards *the temporal entirety* of the perceptual process underlying it (Voltolini 2015, 2020b). This kind of cognitive penetration enables one to explain, for example, that once we know that Franz Auerbach's *Sketch from Titian's Bacchus and Ariadne* (1970-1) is a contemporary attempt at mimicking Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1520-3), (in the RF of the relevant seeing-in experience) we see normally human-like beings in it, not outlandish sketchy items. In this respect, this kind of cognitive penetration is different both from the strong form of cognitive penetration that according to modularists (Pylyshyn 2003, Raftopoulos 2009) affects only the final phase, *late vision*, of an ordinary perceptual experience, and from the *weak* form of cognitive penetration, i.e., penetration as affecting the mere phenomenal character of such an experience, which Macpherson (2012, 2015) defends.

Nevertheless, the above criterion does not allow one to see in the picture whatever one likes to see. As Wollheim already established when he started considering what seeing-in amounts to. For in considering the famous Rorschach tests, in which one is invited to say what certain

<sup>5</sup> So continues Wollheim: "whatever credence we might give to the role of modularity in perception in general, there is obviously a level of complexity above which it doesn't apply, and there is reason to think that picture perception lies outside its scope" (2003a: 10). Granted, in one of his last papers Wollheim has narrowed down the scope of his views about the cognitive penetration of the seeing-in experience. For he draws a distinction between two forms of 'seen-in' contents of a picture. The former, which he calls figurative content, provides the paradigmatic 'seen-in' item of a painting, what is grasped, as he says, through a 'non-abstract' concept: "table, map, window, woman". The latter, which he calls representational content, provides a non-paradigmatic 'seen-in' item of a painting, something that is not grasped through such a concept. For him, abstract paintings have only representational content, while figurative paintings have both. Cfr. Wollheim (2001: 131).

patches one faces suggest to one in one's imagination, he said that such tests do not provide cases of seeing-in (1980: 138). Let us see things more in detail.

In his first essay on seeing-in (1980), Wollheim considered a seeing-in perceptual experience as originated in a natural phenomenon – a phenomenon well described in the history of art since Lucretius and exploited, as Wollheim himself recalls, by Leonardo – that manifests itself in cases of “images by chance” (Janson 1961)<sup>6</sup>. Such “images” have a figurative value even if no one produced them with the purpose of their having such a value. Wollheim himself provided many examples of these “images”: one appealed to precisely by Leonardo, that of damp-stained walls or stones in which one sees scenes of battle or violent action and mysterious landscapes (1980: 145), and other ones of walls and frosty glasses in which boys and dancers are seen, or even clouds in which one sees headless torsos (1987: 46-8). Now, this phenomenon already shows that one cannot see something in a picture at will, for what one can see in a picture is bounded by certain constraints. As Wollheim stresses, what one can see in a picture is what a competent and informed audience can see as well. As he puts it, it is not the case that “someone should see a particular representation in a particular way if even a fully informed and competent spectator could not see it that way” (1980: 137). From this constraint two consequences ensue, one more radical and the other less radical. First, one cannot see something in an object if no competent and informed audience can see that something in it. If a little child draws some scribbles on a sheet of paper and then says, “this is a house”, and yet no-one competent and informed can see a house in those scribbles, no such house will be seen in it. And second, if someone says that she sees something in what she has drawn, but any competent and informed people see something else in it, her drawing cannot be a picture presenting the original something; at most, it is a picture presenting that something else. Again, if a little child draws something and says that she sees an elephant in it, but any competent and informed people see at most a ball in it, that drawing does not present an elephant; at most, it is a picture presenting a ball.

Now, the above cases certainly show that as regards seeing-in, there may be *intentional failures*: one may want to see something in something else and yet fail, either because nothing can be seen in it, or a different

<sup>6</sup> This kind of “images” is labelled “fortuitous images” by Cutting and Massironi (1998).

thing is seen. Yet such sorts of failures also show that as regards a picture there may not be something like a *figurative misrepresentation*; namely, that a picture erroneously presents what is supposed to present. For in such cases, since in something nothing is seen that corresponds to one's intentions, that very something does not misrepresent what conforms to one's intentions. Either it presents nothing, or, at most, it is a picture presenting something else.

One might immediately object that, if there may not be figurative misrepresentations, the allegedly figurative content of such presentations is hardly a content at all. For in order for something to be legitimately said to be a content, it must be such that is either accurate or inaccurate. But this can hardly be the case, if it turns out that there cannot be presentational failures.

Yet such an objection implausibly conflates what holds of *representational* content with what holds of figurative content. As we saw in the previous section, a representational content can either be accurate or inaccurate, for having the possibility for representations to be either accurate or inaccurate is a condition for something to be a representation. Yet, as I said at the very beginning, figurative content and representational content are different *layers* of content. As such, they may also be *typologically* different. The only purpose of a figurative content is for something, typically a picture, to present a scene to someone facing that something. Either that something manages to perform such a presentation or it fails to do that, and that's all<sup>7</sup>.

At this point, however, one might remark that if, as we have seen in sect. 1 by talking of the first seeing-in inspired accounts, one must separate what one literally sees in a picture from what the picture presents, one might then wonder whether one may apply the notion of figurative misrepresentation not to pictures, but to what one literally sees in

<sup>7</sup> First, this is not the only case in which one may distinguish between kinds of contents by saying that only one kind of content has semantical features of the sort, being accurate or being inaccurate. Consider e.g. Montague's (2016a,b) parallel distinction between the *phenomenal* content of an experience, what is given to the experiencer, and its representational content. Second, the idea of no presentational failures is compatible with the idea that the RF of a seeing-in experience has an illusory character, in giving certain things as being out there when there are no such things. For that character is *constitutive* of the RF's content, insofar as in the RF one sees the picture's vehicle *as* a certain scene out there (Voltolini 2015). Hence, if what one sees in a picture is what a picture presents, as I am claiming, it cannot be the case that one can have both veridical and falsidical presentations. All such presentations are illusory.

a picture. For one might say that, insofar as what one literally sees in a picture does not match what the picture presents, the former figuratively misrepresents the latter; namely, the scene that is given in that pictorial presentation. For example, in the aforementioned Matisse case, what is literally seen in *The green stripe*, i.e., an alien woman with a green stripe crossing her head from the top to the bottom, figuratively misrepresents what the picture presents, i.e., an ordinarily coloured flesh-and-blood woman.

Yet no such misrepresentation occurs if one rejects that distinction, by claiming that, in conformity with Wollheim's standpoint as well as with the third of the aforementioned seeing-in inspired accounts, what one sees in the picture coincides with what the picture presents. For, says Wollheim, at least as far as pictures are concerned, seeing-in is endowed with *a standard of correctness*: seeing-in is *correct* seeing-in, which is precisely what the picture presents. In its turn, Wollheim cashes out this standard of correctness in *intentionalist* terms: a correct seeing-in is what conforms to the figurative intentions of the picture maker – provided that, as we just saw, those figurative intentions are supported by the picture itself, in the sense that what the picture maker wants to be seen in the picture is something that can be seen in it (Wollheim 1980: 137-9). So conceived, the standard makes in the case that, in the case of images by chance, it is meaningless to talk of correct seeing-in. For in that case there is no picture maker to whose figurative intentions one must conform, if one can, in one's seeing-in experience. So, to stick again to the Matisse's case, what one sees in *The green stripe* is what one *must* see in it; namely, an ordinary woman. For this is what Matisse wanted for one to see in it (and it is possible for the former to be seen in the latter). If this is the case, then of course there cannot be any misrepresentational failure. For insofar as what is seen in a picture coincides with what one must see in it and this is moreover what the picture presents, there is obviously no room for what is seen-in to misrepresent what the picture presents. Simply, there is a mismatch between what one sees in the CF of the relevant seeing-in experience – the colours and the shapes of the picture's vehicle – and what one sees in the RF of that experience – the different colours and shapes that one ascribes to what the picture presents. Again in the Matisse's case, in the CF of the seeing-in experience with *The green stripe* one sees a green patch in a certain area of *The green stripe's* vehicle, while seeing, in the RF of that experience, in the corresponding area of what that picture presents, the ordinary colours of

a human face that one ascribes to the ordinary woman one sees in that picture.

At this point, one might reply that talking of correct seeing-in presupposes that there is also *incorrect* seeing-in. Thus, the distinction between what one literally sees in a picture and what the picture presents may surface again as the distinction between what one incorrectly sees in a picture and what one correctly sees in a picture viz. what the picture presents. Hence, one may again say that what one incorrectly sees in a picture misrepresents what one correctly sees in it.

Granted, there is room in Wollheim for putting things in this way. For he explicitly confronts a case of correct seeing-in with what he takes to be a case of incorrect seeing-in. In Hans Holbein the Younger's famous *Portrait of Henry VIII* (1536-7), he says, one normally sees the renowned English Majesty. Yet in it one might even see the famous British actor Charles Laughton, for example if one were influenced by having seen many movies involving that actor. Now, seeing Henry VIII in that portrait is the right thing to see in it, for this experience conforms to Holbein's figurative intentions, while seeing Charles Laughton is the wrong thing to see in it, for this experience does not conform to Holbein's intentions (Wollheim 1980: 138).

However, I think that Wollheim has been led astray by his own example. The error he is talking about involves the *representational*, not the presentational, level. Thus, since being correct typically entails the possibility of being incorrect and there seems to be no genuine example of incorrect seeing-in, it would be probably better not to talk of correct seeing-in, but of seeing-in as something that (in the standard cases) conforms to the figurative intentions of the picture's maker, provided that, as we saw, it can so conform. Let me explain.

To begin with, Wollheim does not unfortunately draw a distinction (as instead Husserl, and Nanay along with him, do: cfr. sect. 1), between what a picture presents and what it is about. If he had drawn this distinction, he would have noticed that a picture may go on presenting one and the same thing, i.e., a *very generic* item (to be properly captured in *quantificational* terms: a picture presents that *there is something* that *F-s*), and still have an actual, representational or better pictorial, content that is either less general or even singular, vs. a possible such pictorial content. In particular, the picture in which one goes on seeing the very same

generic item may be actually about something and possibly about something else<sup>8</sup>. What the picture is actually about is its *right* referent, insofar as it conforms to a public negotiation. What the picture is possibly about is its *wrong* referent, insofar as it does not conform to that negotiation. Hence, to put things in conformity with the third of the abovementioned seeing-in inspired accounts, a picture has both a correct pictorial content and an incorrect one. For example, in Piero's portrait (1460) of St. Louis, bishop of Toulouse, one sees a certain very generic item, i.e., a venerable adult man in a hieratic position. Of course, the portrait is about the bishop, for so Piero decided and we have agreed with him. Yet somebody who were completely ignorant about medieval history might erroneously take Piero's fresco as being about the former F1 pilot Michael Schumacher (who actually somehow resembles the bishop), while still seeing in that fresco the same very generic item<sup>9</sup>. Now, Holbein's portrait is precisely a case of the same type. While sticking on seeing one and the same generic item, i.e., a respectable adult fat man, one may both rightly take it to be about Henry VIII and wrongly take it to be about Charles Laughton.

Thus, *pace* Wollheim, his example involves a representational, not a presentational mistake. Hence again, no mistake has arisen involving the presentational level. Thus, it seems that seeing-in trivially is correct seeing-in, insofar as it conforms to the figurative intentions of the picture's maker, as satisfied by the relevant picture. Therefore, it would be better not to talk of correctness for seeing-in. Instead, one may say that a seeing-in perceptual experience conforms with the relevant picture's maker's figurative intentions and that these intentions are such that one can see what that maker intends to be seen in the picture. Hence, one must rather distinguish between *intentionally-based* seeing-in, to be cashed out as before (what is seen in conformity with the picture's maker's figurative intentions when they are such that one can see what that maker intends

<sup>8</sup> On this point, see also Abell (2005, 2009), who speaks of the *visual content* of a picture as undermining what the picture is about.

<sup>9</sup> I here stand with Spinicci (2009: 41) against Maes (2015: 313) in holding that what fixes the aboutness of a portrait is a matter of negotiation, not of the mere author's intentions. This shows why in certain cases, i.e., the cases of *representationally ambiguous* pictures, one and the same picture in which one and the same generic item is seen may be rightly taken to be about *different* subjects. This is typically the case of movie shots, which may be rightly taken to be both pictures of certain characters and pictures of the actors impersonating such characters. Cfr. Wiesing (2010), Voltolini (2015, 2018).

to be seen in the picture), and *non-intentionally-based* seeing-in. This occurs in the case of “images by chance”, in which there is no picture’s maker, a fortiori no intentions on her part.

At this point, one may finally wonder why one must stick to the idea that seeing literally something in a picture coincides with what the picture presents, so that there cannot be any figurative misrepresentation, as the third of the aforementioned seeing-in inspired accounts claims. Why is this account of seeing-in better than the other two available accounts I exposed before, the Hopkins’ and the Husserl-inspired one? The reason is simple. As I said before, for Wollheim seeing-in is cognitively penetrated, to be taken in the superstrong sense of cognitive penetration, in particular as regards its RF (Voltolini 2015, 2020b). In our being influenced by what we believe, expect and know, what we see in a picture cannot be what is literally seen in it, if this is taken as being different from what the picture presents. Instead, what we see in a picture must be such that it coincides with what the picture presents. For example, in watching a soccer match in an old black-and-white tv, in the tv stream one does not see (in the RF of that seeing-in experience) black-and-white alien players, as the other two accounts hold, but ordinarily coloured flesh-and-blood players; namely, what the TV stream presents. For one knows that soccer matches are played by such players. Granted, if one arrived from Mars while knowing nothing about soccer, one might see in that tv stream (in the RF of that seeing-in experience) such alien black and white players. But we are not such Martians (Voltolini 2018, 2020b)<sup>10</sup>.

### *Conclusion*

To sum up. Pictures may certainly misrepresent how things unfold. In point of fact, they must be allowed to do that, insofar as they are representations just like any other such thing. Yet pictures may not mispresent how things unfold. For either they present something or they do not. There could be a sort of misrepresentation only if what one literally sees in a picture differed from what the picture presents. But there are good reasons to think that such a difference does not obtain.

<sup>10</sup> Another example involves a picture in which one sees an ordinary person, notwithstanding the fact that an important part of her body – say, her head – is “out of the picture” – that picture is *inexplicitly non-committal* as regards the fact that the person’s body has that part, as Lopes (1996: 118) would put it.

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