

Perception and Depiction Conference

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Abstracts

Depiction, Systems of Representation and Resemblance – Catharine Abell (Manchester)

Some claim that what distinguishes pictures from other representations are the features of the systems of representation to which they belong and not, as is more commonly thought, those of their features in virtue of which they have the contents they do. The diversity of systems of depiction may appear to support this view. For example, we will assign very different contents to a given picture depending on whether we take it to belong to a linear perspective or a curvilinear perspective system of representation, suggesting that members of the two systems have the contents they do in virtue of different kinds of features. I seek to undermine this line of reasoning by examining what is required for a system of representation to be depictive. I argue that the relevant requirements show that, insofar as certain systems of representation are depictive, their members have less determinate contents than are sometimes ascribed to them. Acknowledging this, I argue, makes clear that the diversity of systems of depiction poses no impediment to analysing depiction by appeal to those features that determine pictures' contents.

Modernism and pictorial organization – Bence Nanay (Cambridge/Antwerp)

The period in the visual arts between (roughly) 1860 and (roughly) 1960 is known as modernism. One grand question in the philosophy of art history (or philosophical art history) is what makes modernism in the visual arts different from other periods and movements. The aim of this paper is not to give necessary and sufficient conditions for modernist visual arts – I don't think this is a feasible task. Rather, I want to capture a crucial aspect of modernist visual arts – its relation to pictorial organization. I will argue that modernism in painting, photography and film has a unique attitude towards pictorial organization that is importantly different from all other periods and artistic movements: it thematizes the conflict between two-dimensional and three-dimensional pictorial organization. But I am explicitly not saying that this distinctive feature can capture everything that is interesting about modernism. I don't think we can find anything that is both non-trivial and is still in common in all human endeavors labelled as modernist. But if we narrow down the question in two ways (to two-dimensional visual art and to one aspect thereof, namely, pictorial organization), we may be able to make some progress.

Prospects for a sensory profile account of pictorial presence – Robert Hopkins (NYU)

How do cubic or scarlet things look? In one respect, they look different, depending on orientation (shape) or the colour and angle of the incident light (colour). In another respect, they always look the same, since we are perceptually presented not merely with these varying perspectival appearances, but with the non-perspectival property that underlies them. Such properties have distinctive sensory profiles: they pattern possible perspectival appearances in distinctive ways. To be perceptually presented with them is to place current appearance in that wider profile. Since perspectival

appearances are themselves best understood as the perceptual presence to us of distinctive properties (Reid's 'visible figure' or the 'aperture colours' of the psychologist), the profiling account has one great advantage over its rivals: it allows us to explain how experience integrates two distinct sets of properties (perspectival and non-) for a given domain (e.g. shape or colour). It may be possible to generalise this form of account to the presence in perception of a far wider range of features of the world.

Might a similar account be offered of presence in pictures? There too distinct groups of properties are perceptually present to us (e.g. the shape and colour of the marks on the surface, and those of the scene visible in them), and there too a major challenge is to explain how these distinct properties are integrated in the world as we experience it. The case is of course more complex, since seeing the scene involves also seeing the marked surface before one; and while the latter is perceptually present in the ordinary way, the former is not. (It is not, for instance, given as real.) Even so, we might hope to run a broadly parallel line: depicted features are present as patterns in other features: here, in non-perspectival features of the marked surface .

In developing any such line we face various questions and challenges, concerning the ambitions appropriate to the view; how to understand its central terms; how it can maintain an appropriate distance between the pictorial case and face-to-face perception; whether its central claims are plausible; and how it relates to existing positions in the literature on pictorial experience. I will try to talk as much sense, about as many of these issues, as I can.

Picturing Possibilities – Dominic Gregory (Sheffield)

Many of us form many of our beliefs about possibility on the basis of visual imagery: we tend to believe that the scenes shown in pictures are possible, for example. I'll argue that suitable pictures and other forms of visual imagery do indeed tend to present us with possibilities, before arguing that we are consequently *prima facie* justified in ascribing possibility to the scenes displayed by many visual images. The argument will avoid appealing to controversial philosophical ideas about modality, instead calling upon our justified belief in the reliability of vision proper, plus a hypothesized sensitivity to interactions between vision's reliability and appropriate phenomenological features of potential visual experiences.

Perceptual Mediation and the Problem of Non-Existence – Maarten Steenhagen (Antwerp)

How can a perceptual mediator theory of visual images apply to images of things that do not, or could not exist? In this paper I sketch two answers to this question, and give reasons for preferring one of them.

Moving Pictures – Solveig Aasen (Oslo)

Pictures are still or static in a sense that what we otherwise see in our environment is not. But what pictures depict – e.g. persons, battles, autumn storms, etc. – are often not still, nor need be depicted

as such. How can a picture depict a scene with motion, or as in motion, when the very means by which it does this are static by nature? The paper sets up and examines this puzzle. It analyses several ways in which movement can be represented or otherwise present in pictures. The suggestion is put forward that, despite the static nature of the representational form, what we experience in pictures is not experienced as still or static. Rather, the stillness of the representation makes what we experience indeterminate and general. Perhaps this is one reason why pictures are found moving.