

# Photographic Phenomenology as Cognitive Phenomenology

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Photographic pictorial experience is thought to have a peculiar phenomenology to it, one that fails to accompany the pictorial experiences one has before so-called ‘handmade’ pictures. I present a theory that explains this in terms of a common factor shared by beliefs formed on the basis of photographic pictorial experience and beliefs formed on the basis of ordinary, face-to-face, perceptual experience: the having of a psychologically immediate, non-inferential etiology. This theory claims that photographic phenomenology has less to do with photographs themselves, or the pictorial experiences they elicit, and is a matter of our cognitive response to those experiences. I illustrate this theory’s benefits: it is neutral on the nature of photography and our folk-conception of photography; it is consistent with photographic phenomenology’s being contingent; and it accounts for our experiences of hyperrealistic handmade pictures. Extant theories of photographic phenomenology falter on one or more of these issues.

## I

It is commonly recognised that pictorial representation is a visual phenomenon in ways that linguistic representation is not. When one encounters a picture, one seems to be visually presented with the objects or events that the picture represents. This is said not to be the case when one encounters a word or sentence: straightforwardly, seeing a picture of a dog does, while seeing the word ‘dog’ does not, cause one to have a visual experience that is, in some sense to be

explained, *as of* a dog.

Strikingly, this contrast is amplified when the picture in question is a photograph. The point is sometimes put by saying that our pictorial experiences before photographs have a peculiar ‘affect’ or ‘phenomenology’ to them that is absent when we consider the pictorial experiences we have before so-called handmade pictures, e.g., drawings, paintings, etchings and so on. Characterising this phenomenology is no easy task, but an intuitive thought is that seeing an object in a photograph feels more like being in actual, face-to-face perceptual contact with that object than does seeing that object in a handmade picture. Phenomenologically, seeing a photograph of a dog is more on a par with seeing a dog than is seeing a painting or drawing of a dog (which, in turn, is more on a par with seeing a dog than is seeing the word ‘dog’). When I talk of photographic phenomenology, I shall have in mind precisely this feeling of quasi-perceptual contact, which seems less pronounced in the case of viewing handmade pictures. I take it that this phenomenology is what Kendall Walton illustrates in the following:

Photographic pornography is more potent than the painted variety. Published photographs of disaster victims or the private lives of public figures understandably provoke charges of invasion of privacy; similar complaints against the publication of drawings or paintings have less credibility. I expect that most of us will acknowledge that, in general, photographs and paintings (and comparable nonphotographic pictures) affect us very differently.<sup>1</sup>

Walton’s explanation for photographic phenomenology is that photographs are ‘transparent’: seeing a photograph of an object is a way of indirectly seeing that object, of a kind with seeing an object by virtue of seeing that object’s reflection in a mirror. Handmade pictures, according to Walton, are not transparent. So when one sees an object in a photograph, but not in a handmade picture, one literally sees the depicted object. On this view, the quasi-perceptual phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience is a product of actual, albeit mediated, perceptual contact.

Gregory Currie also takes it that there is a difference in phenomenology between pictorial experiences elicited by photographs and those elicited by handmade pictures. He writes: “Other

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<sup>1</sup> Kendall Walton, ‘Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism’, *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984), 247.

things being equal, we are likely to be more offended or disturbed by an offensive or disturbing photograph than by a painting.”<sup>2</sup>

Currie’s explanation is that photographs are ‘traces.’ Again, this is a term of art. Currie means that the state of a photograph counterfactually depends upon the state of the photographed object, and in a belief-independent way. Had the properties of the photographed object differed, then the object’s image in the photograph would have correspondingly differed, irrespective of the photographer’s beliefs. Currie claims that handmade pictures are not traces. Had the properties of the painted object been different, then the object’s image in the painting would have correspondingly differed only conditional upon the painter’s beliefs about the object having correspondingly differed. Hence, according to Currie, the distinctive phenomenology of photographs and why they affect us more strongly than handmade pictures.<sup>3</sup>

Walton’s and Currie’s explanations of photographic phenomenology are distinct, but they share a striking commitment. Both affirm that the correct account will reference facts about the photographic medium itself: that *photographs* are ‘transparent’ or that *photographs* are ‘traces’, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

This is not the only explanation currently circulating. Mikael Pettersson’s account, rather than mentioning any putative fact about the photographic medium itself, references psychological facts about us, the viewers of photographs. Pettersson takes it to be a datum that the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience is explained by our attitude towards photographs,<sup>5</sup> i.e. by our beliefs about the nature of the photographic medium, rather than by mind-independent facts about photographs themselves. In particular, Pettersson holds it is the

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<sup>2</sup> Gregory Currie, ‘Visible Traces: Documentary and the Contents of Photographs’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (1999), 289.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> One way Walton’s and Currie’s accounts are related is that being transparent entails being a trace, but the converse does not hold. Walton holds that belief-independent counterfactual dependence is part of the explanation for the transparency of photographs.

<sup>5</sup> Mikael Pettersson, ‘Depictive Traces: On the Phenomenology of Photography’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69 (2011), 187.

*content* of these beliefs that is explanatory and, moreover, that the content of such beliefs is that photographs are traces (in what seems to be Currie's sense, or something very close to it). That is, we *believe* photographs to counterfactually depend on photographs objects in a particular, mind-independent way, whereas we do not believe this to be true of handmade pictures. Hence, the former's peculiar phenomenological effects upon us.

Pettersson does not affirm that photographs are in fact traces. His claim is merely that we take them to be.<sup>6</sup> We can define an analogue of transparency along similar lines. This theory claims that, while it may or may not be the case that photographs are transparent, our attitude towards photographs is one of believing them to be transparent, while we do not believe this of handmade pictures. Moreover, the theory would claim, such beliefs explain the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience. One can find a view along these lines defended by Jonathan Friday.<sup>7</sup>

Robert Hopkins offers another explanation for the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience.<sup>8</sup> Whereas Walton and Currie reference facts about the photographic medium, and Pettersson and Friday reference psychological facts about viewers, Hopkins's explanation, as I understand it, references both. According to Hopkins, the photographic medium is designed to elicit pictorial experiences that are 'factive', where to be factive is to be

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<sup>6</sup> That may not be entirely right. Although Pettersson chiefly frames his thesis as one concerning our beliefs about photographs, he also talks of photographs themselves as being traces. One reason for this may be that Pettersson wishes to avoid endorsing an error-theory regarding our beliefs about photography. Moreover, Pettersson links the epistemic value of photographs, something he explains by them being traces, to photographic phenomenology too. Either way, the claim that photographs are traces, and the claim that viewers believe photographs are traces, are claims about different parts of reality (photographs and, distinctly, viewers). So, I shall treat Currie's and Pettersson's accounts of photographic phenomenology as conceptually distinct.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Friday, *Aesthetics and Photography* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 56-63. In particular, Friday writes: '[T]he photograph is treated, in some respects, as a means to perceptual contact with what it depicts.' (60) Friday also claims we have an 'attitude of transparency' (61) towards photographs.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Hopkins, 'Factive Pictorial Experience: What's Special About Photographs?', *Noûs* 46 (2012), 709-731.

necessarily accurate. Moreover, Hopkins claims that viewers *believe* photographs are designed to elicit factive pictorial experiences. He claims that neither holds true in the case of handmade pictures: they are not designed to, and viewers do not believe they are designed to, elicit factive pictorial experiences. Hence why handmade pictures do not elicit pictorial experiences that have the phenomenological distinctiveness of those elicited by photographs.

The above views are representative of three types of explanation one might give for the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience. Those accounts that, like Walton's and Currie's, seek an explanation in terms of the nature of the photographic medium itself, I shall call 'realist'. The label is appropriate insofar as these accounts appeal to (putative) facts that are, in an important sense, viewer independent. Photographs are transparent, or are traces, independent of our believing them to be so. Those accounts that, like Pettersson's and Friday's, look to explain the phenomenon in terms of the content of viewers' beliefs about the photographic medium, I shall call 'folk-psychological'. This label is appropriate insofar as these accounts reference (putative) facts about our *conception* of the photographic medium, and not the medium *per se*. Those accounts that, like Hopkins's, seemingly reference a combination of the two, I shall call 'hybridic'.

In this paper, I examine the case a fourth type of explanation for photographic phenomenology: that the contents of the pictorial experiences we have when seeing photographs are taken up into belief in a psychologically immediate, non-inferential manner, while those pictorial experiences we have before handmade pictures are not. On this account, the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience is a product of a common factor such experiences shares with ordinary (i.e. non-pictorial) visual experience, since the latter likewise elicit belief in a psychologically immediate, non-inferential manner.

Situating this account relative to the above three, it is non-realist insofar as it does not reference facts about the photographic medium. It also remains silent on our folk-psychological conception of the medium. For both reasons it also fails to be hybridic. However, the account shares a number of features with the folk-psychological account. First, the account I am going to examine explains the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience by reference to psychological facts about viewers. Second, it references viewers' beliefs, in particular.

However, I want to immediately dispel any sense one might have that the views are not distinct. The folk-psychological account references the *content* of viewers' *background* beliefs about the photographic medium. The account I explore here references *etiological* facts about viewers' beliefs, rather than the content of such beliefs. Moreover, those beliefs in particular are ones viewers form about objects *on the basis of undergoing photographically-induced pictorial experience of those objects*.

In addition, rather than turning to background beliefs, this fourth account turns to the occurrent, 'on-the-fly' beliefs that viewers form when looking at photographs; in particular, it concerns the occurrent, 'on-the-fly' beliefs that viewers form about the photographed *object* on the basis of experiencing that object in the photograph. Accordingly, I shall call this account a 'cognitive-etiological' one.

In the following section I describe in greater detail both the account itself and how it seeks to explain the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience. In section III, I discuss three virtues of this account. Along the way, I discuss some challenges the account faces and indicate how they might be dispelled. My aim is not to make a decisive case for the cognitive-etiological account. I merely aim to investigate an option for explaining the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience that has so far gone unexplored, and to highlight what I believe are its relative merits.

Before doing that, however, I want to focus on a worry one might have about the descriptions of photographic phenomenology given Walton, Currie, Hopkins and Pettersson. This is that they characterise the relevant phenomenology in differing ways. Walton speaks of a 'feeling... of intimacy',<sup>9</sup> as does Hopkins, though the latter also describes the phenomenology as 'our sense that [photographs] place us in a relation to the photographed events which is specially... direct'.<sup>10</sup> Currie describes a feeling of 'contact',<sup>11</sup> while Petterson says the

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<sup>9</sup> Walton, 'Transparent Pictures', 269.

<sup>10</sup> Hopkins, 'Factive Pictorial Experience', 725.

<sup>11</sup> Currie, 'Visible Traces', 289.

phenomenology is one of ‘proximity’ or ‘closeness’.<sup>12</sup> The varied nature of these terms I take to be a natural consequence of these philosophers engaging in a phenomenological analysis; that is, of their undertaking to characterise, and subsequently explain, the *feel* of certain of our psychological states, i.e. what it is like, experientially, to undergo those states. However, there is a question to be asked about whether the parties of this debate take it to be the case that the phenomenology in question is specifically *perceptual*, or at least *quasi-perceptual*, as I have claimed it to be. It is difficult to pronounce with absolute certainty on this matter, but there seems to me to be good reason to think so.

Strikingly, the accounts developed by each philosopher end up appealing, either explicitly or implicitly, to there being something perception-like about photographs (in the case of realists). Or, they appeal to our believing there to be something perception-like about photographs (in the case of folk-psychological theories). Or, they appeal to both (in the case of hybridic theories). As such, the analyses given by the above philosophers would strike us as obvious non-starters, were the phenomenology in question non-perceptual. For instance, whatever worries we might have about the claim that photographs are transparent, this does not strike us as an in principle confused account of photographic phenomenology. But it would do, were the phenomenology non-perceptual. After all, the claim that we see objects by seeing photographs of objects will only be a candidate explanans of photographic phenomenology if, in the first place, the latter has some perceptual phenomenology to it. Similarly, whatever worries we might have about the claim that photographic pictorial experience is *factive*, this, likewise, does not seem an in principle mistaken explanation of photographic phenomenology. Moreover, Hopkins seemingly agrees that photographic phenomenology has a perceptual flavour to it, writing: ‘*factive pictorial experience... presents the relevant facts experientially. (In this respect, it is like seeing.)*’<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, Currie’s claim that photographs are traces, i.e. that they have a belief-independent counterfactual dependence on their objects, was first introduced by Walton as

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<sup>12</sup> Pettersson, ‘Depictive Traces’, 185.

<sup>13</sup> Hopkins, ‘Factive Pictorial Experience’, 725.

something that photographs share with ordinary perception.<sup>14</sup> And insofar as Pettersson's explanans is folk-belief in photographs being traces, I take it that his account also relies on the idea of photographic phenomenology being somewhat perceptual. The matter is relatively straightforward with transparency's folk-psychological analogue. Though we may wonder whether viewers of photographs do believe that such pictures are transparent, the claim does not strike us as a confused account photographic phenomenology. It thus seems that all the above theories, either explicitly or implicitly, appeal to something like functional similarity (or belief in functional similarity) between photographs and perception. The account I will develop agrees that this is the correct strategy.

## II

The core claim of the cognitive-etiological account is that the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience is explained by the fact that viewers endorse the contents of such experiences in a psychologically-immediate, non-inferential manner. I begin by explaining what this amounts to.

First, the beliefs which the cognitive-etiological account is concerned with are those occurrent, on-the-fly, beliefs viewers form about a photographed objects on the basis of pictorially experiencing that object in a photograph. Consider looking at a friend's vacation snaps. One will likely form a myriad of beliefs about the photographed objects. Seeing a photograph of one's friends stood before the Sphinx, one may, for example, see in the picture one's friends stood before the Sphinx and then go on to form the *belief* that one's friends stood before the Sphinx. Seeing a photograph of one's friends riding a camel, one may see in the picture one's friends riding a camel and go on to form the *belief* that one's friends rode a camel. Cases like this are commonplace. Consider watching the evening news or a sports broadcast, say. Again, on the basis of one's pictorial experience, one will likely form a myriad of beliefs about the depicted news-presenters themselves or the sporting event itself. One may believe that there are two presenters and that one of them is blonde male while the other is a brunette woman, say.

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<sup>14</sup> Walton, 'Transparent Pictures', 264-265.



In watching the sports broadcast, one may believe that one team wears red and that the other wears green; that the playing field is in poor condition; and that a foul was committed or a goal scored, etc.

Last, consider seeing a photographic reproduction of a painting. In this situation, one has a photographic pictorial experience of a painting. In undergoing this experience, one will likely form beliefs about the painting itself, e.g., that it has, on *its* canvass, coloured patches in roughly the same spatial locations at which one sees those patches in the photograph. For example, if one searches the internet for a picture of one of Mark Rothko's colour field paintings, then what one shall see is a photograph of one of his paintings. When one sees in the photograph that the upper half of the painting is orange, one may come to believe that the upper half of the photographed painting itself, Rothko's 'Orange and Yellow', is orange.

It is the above beliefs that viewers form about objects, on the basis of having pictorial experience of them in photographs, which take centre-stage in the cognitive-etiological account. By contrast, the beliefs that take centre-stage in both the folk-psychological and hybridic accounts appear to be dispositional beliefs, the intentional object of which is not the particular concrete individual one sees in the photograph; rather, such beliefs appear directed towards the photographic medium itself.

Second, it is the *way* these beliefs are formed that also takes centre-stage in the account. True to its name, the account concerns the *etiology* of the on-the-fly, occurrent beliefs viewers form about objects on the basis of pictorially experiencing those objects in photographs. In particular, the account affirms that viewers' on-the-fly beliefs are formed in a psychologically immediate, non-inferential manner. When one sees in a photograph two people stood before the Sphinx, one spontaneously believes of the depicted persons that they stood before the Sphinx. When watching the game, one sees in the television screen the striker kick the ball into the back of the net. Typically, one simply finds oneself believing that the striker scored a goal. When one sees in a photograph one of Rothko's predominantly orange colour field paintings, one immediately believes the painting itself to be predominantly orange. Of course, one may fail to see such things in these pictures, or one may fail to undergo pictorial experience at all. But insofar as one does undergo pictorial experience, assent to the content of one's pictorial experience is not easily separated, in introspection, from the act of undergoing that experience in

the first place.

This can be illustrated with a contrast. Here is what our endorsement of the contents of the pictorial experiences we have before photographs is not like: it is not the case that we withhold assent until satisfied that there are positive reasons for assenting to that content. What might be included among such reasons? Potential candidates include facts pertaining to the reliability of the photograph (e.g., confirmation that it has not been doctored), facts pertaining to its maker (e.g., confirmation that the photographer does not try to fool viewers with doctored photographs) or facts pertaining to the place the photograph is displayed (e.g., confirmation that it is published somewhere, a newspaper, say, that is a reliable source of information). It is relatively few instances in which such positive reasons for assent are available to us, yet assent to the contents of photographs is widespread. This is a reason for thinking that our response to photographs is typically as described above: we assent to the content of our pictorial experiences before photographs by default; that is, so long as we do not possess reasons for thinking the photograph *uncreditworthy*. Seemingly, we are satisfied by the mere absence of counterevidence, rather than requiring the *presence* of evidence for creditworthiness. Strikingly, it is not the case that our response to a photograph is to first be sceptical of the content of the pictorial experience we have in response to it. We do not suspend judgement in the pictorial experience, and only go on to assent to its content once we get to know a bit more about who took the photograph or where it was displayed or published.

There are important questions to be asked about the epistemic permissibility of this practice. But the issue of belief's being well-grounded is not relevant here. Only belief formation itself is what matters. Nevertheless, the account under discussion may be thought to risk a degree of naivety. Someone who defends it should surely not hold that viewers are insensitive to the presence of counterevidence for the creditworthiness of photographs. If we suspect a photograph to be doctored, or believe that the person showing it to us often doctors their photographs, or believe the photograph to be published somewhere that is not a reputable source of information, then likely we would suspend judgement in the content of our pictorial experience. But the account makes ample room for this. The claims above are best encapsulated in the idea that the withholding of judgement is not our *default* response towards photographs; rather, withholding judgement is something we do only in special circumstances, circumstances in which we take

ourselves (wrongly or rightly) to possess counterevidence for the photograph's creditworthiness. This is precisely what we would possess in the above cases. Just as we generally believe what we are told by others unless we have grounds for doubt, the cognitive-etiological account claims that we typically believe what we see in photographs, unless we take ourselves to have grounds for doubt. This is perfectly compatible with our practice of suspending judgement in the content of others' utterances and, likewise, their photographs, given awareness of countervailing considerations. Indeed, it is surely correct to say that we often examine photographs with a critical eye, sceptical that what we see in its surface is 'true to the facts'.

Moreover, just as some utterances, e.g., fictive ones (recognised as such), do not elicit the doxastic responses of other utterances, e.g., assertions (recognised as such), there may be genres of photographs that elicit certain doxastic responses in suitably informed viewers which differ from those doxastic responses we have to, say, holiday snapshots, news reports, sports broadcasts, photographic reproductions of paintings etc. But all this is compatible with it being the case that absent any grounds for scepticism, we *typically* endorse the contents of the pictorial experiences such pictures give rise to. Or, that we at least do this for a large number of photographs we see in our everyday lives. Absent any counterevidence, we do not *reason* our way to assenting to a photograph's content—we do not, in such cases, exploit what we see in the photograph as a premise in an argument from which we derive conclusions about how things stand (or stood) with the object when it was photographed. We may do so when counterevidence *is* possessed, or is suspected to obtain. But without grounds for doubt, we acquiesce.

By contrast, consider the way one assents to the content of one's experiences of handmade picture, if one assents at all. In these cases we are more discriminating and cautious; the bar for assent is one we set higher, holding that there are stricter standards of belief-formation to be met. It does not come close to a *prima facie* rationalisation of belief-formation to answer the question "Why do you believe that?" to respond with "Well, I saw it in a painting." At least, not without some further comment about the type of painting one saw (e.g., courtroom or anatomical sketch, say), who made it, where it was displayed, and so on. The presence of such positive reasons matters for the permissibility of assent in the case of handmade pictures and the experiences they elicit. This epistemic norm is matched by psychological facts about our uptake

of the contents of the pictorial experiences we have before handmade pictures.<sup>15</sup> That is, our default doxastic response to handmade picture is unlike our default doxastic response to photographic pictures. We tend to assent to the content of handmade pictures only in the presence of positive reasons. Hence why assent happens less often—positive reasons typically are not available to us. Believing what one sees in such pictures, solely on the basis of lack of grounds for doubt, is epistemically reckless.<sup>16</sup>

How can all this explain the quasi-perceptual phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience? Here is how: By reference to a common-factor shared by ordinary perceptual experience and photographically-induced pictorial experience. For, ordinary perceptual experience also elicits belief in a psychologically immediate, non-inferential manner. Indeed, the latter is arguably a hallmark of perceptual knowledge. As Alan Millar puts it: ‘If you know perceptually that something is a bottle of milk then it simply strikes you that this is so... You do not infer that it is so from an assumption to the effect that it looks a certain way.’<sup>17</sup> Keith Hossack similarly writes: ‘[W]e are not normally conscious of any inference in perception. When we know by seeing, usually the only mental act that occurs is the visual experience itself.’<sup>18</sup>

Although couched in terms of knowledge, these claims can easily be recast as being about the etiology of perceptual belief: that such belief is formed on the basis of perceptual experience in a spontaneous manner, unmediated by inference. Similarly, the cognitive-etiological account claims that the beliefs we form about objects, on the basis of pictorially experiencing those objects in photographs, are also arrived at in a spontaneous manner, unmediated by inference. When we see in a photograph, but not a handmade picture, some object

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<sup>15</sup> Recall it is the psychological issue alone that matters here: how such beliefs are formed, and not whether we are right to form them. I have helped myself to discussing epistemic matters only by way of illustrating what our psychological responses to photographic and handmade pictures are typically like.

<sup>16</sup> These claims have relevance for epistemic, and not just phenomenological, differences between photographs and painting. I pursue the epistemic question in Dan Cavedon-Taylor, ‘Photographically Based Knowledge’, *Episteme* 10 (2013), 283-297.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Millar, ‘The Scope of Perceptual Knowledge’, *Philosophy* 75 (2000), 73-74.

<sup>18</sup> Keith Hossack, *The Metaphysics of Knowledge* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 244.

or event, we spontaneously believe that things were just so when photographed. Thus, the account explains the quasi-perceptual ‘immediacy’ of photographic pictorial experience by reference to the psychological immediacy with which the content of photographic pictorial experience is endorsed by viewers. Ordinary face-to-face perceptual experiences and the pictorial experiences we have before photographs share phenomenology with respect to the ‘immediacy’ of their uptake into belief. So, we are more shocked, or embarrassed, or aroused by photographic pornography than that of the handmade variety because, seeing a pornographic scene in a photograph, we find ourselves having uptake of the experience’s content, whereas this is not the case when seeing a comparable pornographic scene in a handmade picture, all else being equal (at least not without some further knowledge of the picture, e.g., who made it, where it is displayed, etc.). When seeing a pornographic scene in a handmade picture, one may be shocked, aroused, etc. and one *may* go on to adopt the attitude of belief towards the content of one’s pictorial experience, but this will typically be because of inferences one performs from beliefs about who made the picture, where it is displayed, and so on. Assent is not only much less likely to occur, but, if it occurs, it is delayed and relatively slow, relying either on inference from background beliefs or the weighing of evidence. Hence, on the view under consideration, why our pictorial experiences before handmade pictures typically fail to have same phenomenological impact upon us—they lack the same immediate, causal impact upon belief.

### III

Why should one think this is a good explanation of the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience? I believe there are at least three considerations in its favour.

#### III.i

First, the cognitive-etiological account remains neutral on two vexed issues in the philosophy of pictorial representation: the nature of the photographic medium and the nature of viewers’ beliefs about the photographic medium. To date, these two issues have proved fertile grounds for debate. No account of the nature of the photographic medium, and no account of the nature of

viewers' beliefs about the photographic medium, commands anything close to widespread assent. The variety of philosophers whose conflicting views I have discussed so far, e.g., Walton's and Currie's realist accounts, Pettersson's and Friday's folk-psychological accounts, and Hopkins's hybridic account, aptly illustrates this diversity of disagreement here.

Thus, the fact that the cognitive-etiological account supplies an account of photographic phenomenology while remaining neutral on these two issues is a theoretical virtue. Realist, folk-psychological and hybridic accounts require that we endorse substantial theses about photographs and/or our beliefs about photographs. Such accounts are first committed to controversial theses before one begins to assess whether their explanations of photographic phenomenology are in good shape. To be clear, the worry is not that these views, taken together, give conflicting explanations of what underwrites the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience—that much is to be expected. The worry is that they do so by first being committed to specific accounts of either the photographic medium or our beliefs about the photographic medium (or both, in the case of hybridic accounts).

The cognitive-etiological account sidesteps such controversies. In advancing no claims about the nature of the photographic medium, and no claims about the nature of our beliefs about the photographic medium, it has a distinct advantage over realist theories, folk-psychological theories and, in particular, hybridic theories. Whatever challenges the account must face, it at least does not require its defenders to take a stand on these challenging issues.

### III. ii

Second, the account is consistent with the fact that, and offers an explanation of why, the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience is contingent. Crucially, the fact that a viewer sees an object in a photograph does not entail that their experience will have the phenomenology typical of photographic pictorial experience. This may seem too obvious a point to worth pausing on. But it is one that realist accounts, like Walton's and Currie's, cannot accommodate. For, if what explains the phenomenological immediacy of photographs is facts about photographs themselves, that they are transparent or that they are traces, say, then there can be no situation in which a viewer undergoes a pictorial experience before a photograph,

while failing to undergo such phenomenology. The reason why realists are unable to accommodate this possibility is that photographs are transparent, or are traces, independent of anyone's believing them to be so. So, on these views, any situation in which a viewer sees an object in a photograph is, of necessity, a situation in which that subject undergoes photographic phenomenology.

This consequence cannot be right, and it independently questionable: why *must* a viewer's pictorial experience, in such circumstances, exhibit the phenomenology in question? In seeing an object in a photograph, there are a variety of ways one's pictorial experience may fail to exemplify the phenomenology typical of photographically-induced pictorial experience. This illustrates a key point: the phenomenology in question is merely *typical* of having a pictorial experience before a photograph. It is not a necessary feature of photographic pictorial experience. So, it must be contingent upon further facts, extrinsic to the medium.

How might our pictorial experiences before photographs fail to instantiate the phenomenology under discussion? One way is if a viewer sees an object in a photograph and simply fails to realise they are seeing a photograph. They may believe that they are seeing a sketch or a painting, say. They may even wrongly take it that what they see is a 'photo-shopped', composite image. Still, the viewer is seeing a photograph, which, if transparency is true, say, entails that the viewer is in perceptual contact with the photographed object. It is just that the viewer fails to realise this. (Compare the situation with one in which a subject fails to realise that they are seeing, face to face, a violin, and wrongly takes themselves to be seeing, face to face, a *trompe l'oeil*. What they see is a violin, despite their false belief.) It is doubtful that the pictorial experiences in such cases will involve photographic phenomenology, though such cases involve undergoing pictorial experience before a photograph. So, according to the transparency theory, the pictorial experiences of viewers in the described circumstances cannot fail to exemplify photographic phenomenology, since, according to that view, by virtue of seeing a photograph it is made true that the subject sees the photographed object. Whether or not transparency itself is an acceptable claim, its account of photographic phenomenology is not. No account of photographic phenomenology should have the consequence that viewers of photographs, so long as they see an object in a photograph, of *necessity* undergo photographic phenomenology. But realist theories, *qua* realist, cannot escape this consequence. I have put this objection to the

transparency theorist, but the same points can be put against the trace theory, since a photograph's being a trace of an object is true irrespective of any of our beliefs.

Again, the cognitive-etiological account has benefits here. According to this account, the phenomenology of our pictorial experiences before photographs turns out to have nothing very much to do with photographs themselves, and everything to do with us, the viewers of photographs. That phenomenology is therefore contingent upon facts extrinsic to photographs: specifically, on whether the content of our pictorial experiences is taken up into belief in a particular way. So the view can accommodate the possibility of situations in which a viewer sees an object in a photograph, yet fails to have photographic phenomenology. The account does take a firm stand on why this is so: a lack of the relevant phenomenology tracks a lack of a particular kind of uptake by belief. This requires some comment, which I provide below. The point I wish to emphasise at present is that by treating the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience as contingent, the theory has a benefit over realist accounts; it can accommodate the possibility of situations in which a subject sees an object in a photograph and yet fails to undergo photographic phenomenology.

Now, this benefit is one that the cognitive-etiological account may share with folk-psychological accounts, since such theories likewise consider the relevant phenomenology to be extrinsic to the medium and consequent upon facts concerning viewers. (As mentioned at the beginning, these facts differ from those appealed to by the cognitive-etiological account.) Whether hybridic accounts also treat the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience as contingent is somewhat unclear, given their hybridic nature.

In spelling out how the cognitive-etiological account treats the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience as contingent, this is a good point at which to make clear a unique feature of the account. This is its holding that, strictly speaking, there is *no* distinctive 'photographic' phenomenal character possessed by the pictorial experiences one has before photographs. Instead, what sets the phenomenology of one's experiences before photographs apart from the phenomenology of one's experiences before handmade pictures is immediate endorsement of the content of one's pictorial experience. There is, on the cognitive-etiological account, no difference in phenomenal character between the pictorial experiences themselves. This is to picture the target phenomenology as entirely cognitive, rather than sensory; it belongs



to one's *response* to one's pictorial experience, rather than to the pictorial experience itself. However, in specifying the overall phenomenal character of one's experience before photographs, the view holds that this is a matter of sensory phenomenology (i.e. that of pictorial experience) plus cognitive phenomenology (i.e. that of immediate assent).

Framed in such a way, the theory may be thought obviously false, since it might be read as claiming that the pictorial nature of photographs has nothing whatsoever to do with their phenomenological impact on viewers. Consider testimony. On a widely endorsed theory of testimonial justification, the assertions of others are taken up into belief just as immediately and spontaneously as are the contents of one's perceptual experiences.<sup>19</sup> If this theory of testimony is right, then the hearing of testimony should, according to the view developed here, result in a feeling of quasi-perceptual contact with the events testified. Yet it is obvious that uptake into belief of a testified content does not result in perception-like contact with the events described.<sup>20</sup>

However, the account I am exploring here does not hold it is the spontaneous uptake into belief of a content that is the explanans. Rather, it talks of the spontaneous act of uptake of a content already packaged in sensorial form, i.e. the content of one's pictorial experience. It is the psychologically immediate endorsement of *pictorial experience* that is explanatory, not the uptake into belief of content *tout court*. Photographic phenomenology is the mental event: non-inferential uptake into belief of pictorial experience. As such, pictorial experience is one of the event's relata.

In claiming all this, the cognitive-etiological account carries commitment to there being such a thing as non-sensory, cognitive phenomenology. Cognitive phenomenology is increasingly recognised as a *bona fide* type of phenomenal experience, covering phenomenology of propositional attitude type, phenomenology of conceptual classification and phenomenology of conceptual content, to name but a few.<sup>21</sup> The cognitive-etiological view is not committed to

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<sup>19</sup> I have in mind so-called 'non-reductive' theories of testimony.

<sup>20</sup> This point is well-made by Elizabeth Fricker, 'Second-Hand Knowledge', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73 (3) 609-610.

<sup>21</sup> See papers in Tim Bayne and Michelle Montague (eds), *Cognitive Phenomenology* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

the existence of *all* such types of cognitive phenomenology. The account requires only the existence of what we might call ‘assent phenomenology’; that is, the felt quality of assenting to a content (as opposed to desiring or entertaining a content). This is to commit to there being a phenomenology of attitude type.

The idea that assenting to a content has a phenomenology distinct from, say, entertaining a content, is, I believe, an intuitive one. Assent has a characteristic felt quality—it is a mental happening, something that one reasons one’s way to or, very often, does spontaneously. In both cases, there is something it is like for the subject: to reason to a conclusion or to immediately form a belief. Deniers of cognitive phenomenology would try and explain away these cases by offloading the phenomenology to associated mental imagery, something distinct from the act of assent itself. This strategy may explain away some supposed cases of cognitive phenomenology, e.g., David Chalmers’s claim that what it is like to think of a lion differs in phenomenal character from what it is like to think of the Eiffel Tower.<sup>22</sup> But it has no clear applicability to assent-phenomenology verses, e.g., entertain-phenomenology.

While cognitive phenomenology is increasingly gaining in supporters, is it not unanimously endorsed; many hold that phenomenal character attaches only to perceptual experiences, bodily sensations and emotions. If commitment to cognitive phenomenology is a drawback of the theory, it is one that it presumably shares with folk-psychological theories, and maybe hybridic ones too. If our folk-psychological beliefs about the medium are to explain the phenomenology of our experiences of photographs, then such states are likely being pictured as phenomenally conscious, i.e. that there is something it is like to be in such states.<sup>23</sup>

Given the controversy over whether there is such a thing as cognitive phenomenology, it might be thought that the transparency theory has something of an advantage over the cognitive-

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<sup>22</sup> David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), 10.

<sup>23</sup> It may be that folk-psychological and hybridic theories are not committed to cognitive phenomenology, but are more committed to cognitive penetration instead (i.e. that non-sensory states can impact the phenomenology of sensory states). To my knowledge, the two theories have not explicitly stated whether they rely on cognitive phenomenology or cognitive penetration, so the matter is somewhat unclear.

etiological, folk-psychological and hybridic theories; transparency, it seems, requires no assumptions about cognitive phenomenology. However, that depends on it being the case that seeing through photographs is less controversial than cognitive phenomenology. I am sceptical that this is so, though I recognise that intuitions may vary.

### III.iii

A third relative advantage of the cognitive-etiological account is its providing an explanation of puzzling features of our pictorial experiences before hyperrealistic handmade pictures. The theory's handling of such cases is connected with the second advantage of the theory, discussed above: that it treats the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience as contingent upon psychological states of the viewer, rather than a product of the medium itself.

Many of those involved in the debate over the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience have remarked on the fact that hyperrealistic handmade pictures produce something of a 'jolting' effect, once one discovers their handmade status. Hopkins writes: '[I]f we find that what we took for a photograph is in fact a hyperrealist painting (or vice versa) our experience shifts.'<sup>24</sup> Writing of a hyperrealistic self-portrait by the artist Chuck Close, Walton illustrates the effect of such a discovery as follows:

[It] jolts us. Our experience of the picture and our attitude toward it undergo a profound transformation, one which is much deeper and more significant than the change which occurs when we discover that what we first took to be an etching, for example, is actually a pen-and-ink drawing. It is more like discovering a guard in a wax museum to be just another wax figure.<sup>25</sup>

As Pettersson and Walton have noted, this effect nicely illustrates why the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience cannot be a matter of mere detail.<sup>26</sup> But there is also reason to

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<sup>24</sup> Hopkins, 'Factive Pictorial Experience', 709.

<sup>25</sup> Walton, 'Transparent Pictures', 255.

<sup>26</sup> Pettersson, 'Depictive Traces', 187; Walton, 'Transparent Pictures', 255.

think that the jolting effect shows that photographic phenomenology cannot be explained in realist terms. That is, Walton's own theory cannot make sense of the phenomenon he describes. I shall focus on Walton's account, but similar points can be raised against Currie's. The problem is how realist theories can account for the fact that, in first encountering the self-portrait, the phenomenology of photographically-induced pictorial experiences has attached itself to a painting-induced pictorial experience.

Recall that Walton's account of the phenomenology in question is that one indirectly sees the photographed object. But this can provide no explanation for why, at first, one feels in quasi-perceptual contact with Chuck Close. For it is a painting one sees. Paintings are non-transparent on Walton's account. So, by Walton's own lights, it is not true one is indirectly seeing Close. So, to the extent that Walton explains photographic phenomenology solely in terms of transparency, we have no explanation for how the phenomenology typical of seeing objects in photographs managed to occur in the case of seeing an object, i.e. Close, in a handmade picture. Furthermore, on the assumption that Walton's claim is that transparency is necessary, and not merely sufficient, for photographic phenomenology, then, such a thing should not be possible. Yet it is. What we have here, everyone agrees, is a case of a painting-induced pictorial experience exhibiting the phenomenology typical of photographically-induced pictorial experience. Appeal to facts about differences between paintings and photographs cannot explain this. I take this to be an important mark against realist accounts.

Indeed, Walton's actual account of the relevant 'jolting' effect is very telling in this respect. For, instead of explaining it in realist terms, he slides into a folk-psychological explanation. Walton writes: 'My theory accounts for the jolt. At first we *think* we are (really) seeing the person portrayed; then we *realize* that we are not.'<sup>27</sup>

Now, Pettersson has complained that it is unlikely that viewers really do think they see Chuck Close, whether pre- or post-jolt.<sup>28</sup> That may be right, but that would be to argue against a Friday-like folk-psychological transparency theory, rather than transparency proper. Pettersson's slip is entirely understandable. For, as we can see, Walton's account of the jolt is positioned

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<sup>27</sup> Walton, 'Transparent Pictures', 255. Emphasis mine.

<sup>28</sup> Pettersson, 'Depictive Traces', 188.

precisely in terms of what we *think*. This is to give an explanation of photographic phenomenology in terms of our folk-conception of the medium, i.e. that we think photographs are transparent and that we think they allow us to indirectly see objects. But that is not what transparency claims. Transparency is a theory about photographs themselves: that *they* are transparent. Transparency is not a claim about our folk-psychological conception of photographs. So Walton cannot help himself to an explanation of the ‘jolt’ in the way he in fact does, at least not without misrepresenting his theory or blurring it with a folk-psychological account, which would be to give an entirely different explanation of photographic phenomenology. What account of the jolt Walton should give, in terms of transparency-proper, is entirely unclear; Close’s hyperrealistic self-portrait is, by Walton’s own lights, not transparent.<sup>29</sup>

What does the cognitive-etiological account say about the jolt? The first thing to highlight is that this view does accommodate the possibility that photographic phenomenology might attach to *non*-photographically-induced pictorial experiences. This is because the theory claims that the phenomenology is not, in fact, peculiar to, but is merely typical of, such experiences. In particular, because the account claims the phenomenology is contingent upon a fact external to the pictorial experience (i.e. spontaneous uptake into belief), the view therefore predicts that when that fact accompanies a painting-induced pictorial experience, the latter will

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<sup>29</sup> It has been suggested to me that maybe Walton is no realist after all, given that he accounts for the relevant jolt in folk-psychological terms. So does he hold a folk-psychological account? That is unlikely. Given that “Transparent Pictures” is devoted to arguing for functional similarities between photography and vision, this signals adherence to a realist approach. Could Walton defend a hybrid theory? Clearly, Walton holds that photographs themselves are transparent. And we have seen, via his discussion of Close’s self-portrait, that Walton believes viewers *think* of photographs as transparent. However, this does not mean that Walton affirms a hybrid theory. To do that, Walton would need to affirm that both the ‘fact’ of transparency, along with belief in transparency, must figure in the *explanation* of photographic phenomenology. I can see no evidence in “Transparent Pictures” that Walton holds this. Moreover, in affirming such a view, Walton would be claiming that the ‘fact’ of transparency is insufficient to explain photographic phenomenology. Yet on any plausible reading of “Transparent Pictures”, this is the opposite of what Walton claims. Moreover, it would be an odd view to defend in the first place, since the ‘fact’ of transparency does seem sufficient to explain photographic phenomenology (what is questionable is whether transparency is, indeed, a fact). These remarks hold, *mutatis mutandis*, for Currie’s view.

exhibit the phenomenology that typically attaches to a photographically-induced pictorial experience. Crucially, this possibility is precisely what the view claims to actually occur in the case of the jolt. In first seeing Close's self-portrait, we undergo pictorial experience (all being well). That is, we see in the picture Chuck Close and pictorially experience his cigarette, horn-rimmed glasses, wild hair, and so on. We immediately endorse the content of this pictorial experience. We believe of the depicted object (whom we may not know to be Close) that he looks (or looked) just that way. Such are the beliefs we would form on basis of seeing Close face-to-face, and we would similarly form them in a spontaneous, psychologically immediate way (assuming we had no counterevidence for the experience's veridicality). That is, a feeling of quasi-perceptual contact with Close arises in us due to immediate assent to the content of a sensory experience of Close, one which just happens to be a pictorial one.

Upon realising the picture is a handmade one, our attitude shifts. Recognising the picture to be handmade, we are more guarded. Where before we believed Close to look how our pictorial experience represented him to be, we now suspend judgement in the content of that experience. We take ourselves to require positive reasons to render permissible an endorsement of the content of the type of pictorial experience we now understand ourselves to be undergoing.

So Close does seem more distant somehow, less present to us, upon the realisation it is a painting we are looking at. The cognitive-etiological account explains this in terms of the suspension of judgement in a content previously endorsed. Walton is exactly right when he claims that, in coming to know it is a handmade picture, the discovery jolts us, as 'our experience of the picture and our attitude toward it undergo a profound transformation.'<sup>30</sup> For, our attitude, which was previously one of assent, is now one of withholding belief; it is precisely this transformation in doxastic attitude towards our pictorial experience that brings about a shift in phenomenal character.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Walton, 'Transparent Pictures', 255.

<sup>31</sup> I follow orthodoxy here in treating the withholding of belief as a doxastic attitude, distinct from merely lack of belief combined with lack of disbelief.

## IV

My aim in this paper has been to sketch out a new position in the debate about the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience. I have discussed some merits of the theory and pointed out some weaknesses. I have not offered anything close to a full-blown defence of the theory. My aim has been to make this new theory *prima facie* plausible.

This view is somewhat unique in its being sceptical of such a thing as ‘photographic phenomenology’ *per se*. On the view, photographically-induced and painting-induced pictorial experience do not themselves differ phenomenal properties; a lesson well-taught by hyperrealistic handmade pictures. Phenomenally, there is no difference *in kind* between the two experiences, save that one is photographically-induced and the other painting-induced.

Hyperrealistic handmade pictures also illustrate that the claim that photographs affect us in a fundamentally different way than do handmade pictures is too strong. What is plausible is the more moderate claim that photographs *tend* to affect us differently; there are occasions when handmade pictures can strike us with all the immediacy of photographs. This is contingent, the theory claims, upon the immediate uptake into belief of the pictorial experience elicited. What’s more, there may be genres of photographs that fail to exhibit photographic phenomenology, such as abstract ones, say.

What does this view say about the claims made by realists and folk-psychological theorists, *qua* theories of photographs and viewers of photographs, respectively? Take realism first: because the cognitive-etiological account makes no claims about the nature of the photographic medium, it is compatible with it being the case that photographs are transparent, or that they are traces, respectively. Nothing here puts in doubt the transparency or trace theories, *qua* theories about the nature of the photographic medium. What has been put in doubt is whether photographs being transparent, or their being traces, could satisfactorily explain photographic phenomenology. The chief problem for these accounts is that some handmade pictures, which are supposedly non-transparent, or are non-traces, elicit the phenomenology of quasi-perceptual contact. Since Walton’s and Currie’s realist views are motivated, either wholly or in part, to explain photographic phenomenology, an upshot is that their theories should be

motivated on different grounds.<sup>32</sup>

Now to folk-psychological accounts: because the cognitive-etiological account makes no claims about the nature of our background beliefs about the photographic medium, the account is therefore compatible with it being the case that we take photographs to be transparent, or that we take them to be traces, respectively. My belief, however, is that the content of our folk-psychological conception of the photographic medium is entirely unclear. With the now widespread rise of digital photography, my a priori suspicion is that folk-belief about the medium is currently in a state of flux. So I am sceptical that looking to folk-belief will yield a satisfactory account of photographic phenomenology.

Relatedly, however, one might think that the prevalence of digital manipulation, and greater awareness such techniques, casts doubt on the cognitive-etiological account. It's not at all obvious, one might think, that an informed viewer of digital photographs takes things to be as they are presented in pictorial experience, absent reasons to believe otherwise.<sup>33</sup>

Granted, it may well be that our doxastic attitudes towards photographs are not what they used to be. But that, if true, does not challenge the cognitive-etiological account. The theory says only that where we *do* have psychologically immediate uptake into belief of pictorial experience's content, we thereby also have photographic phenomenology: that quasi-perceptual feeling of contact, or closeness, or proximity, or intimacy, with the depicted objects and events. The theory is thus a conditional one, and so has a degree of flexibility built into it. Where we do not have that uptake, the view predicts that the relevant phenomenology will be absent. Now, while it is widely remarked that our doxastic responses to photographs are not those of our

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<sup>32</sup> In the case of transparency, one option would be to motivate the view on epistemological grounds alone. If we affirm that photographs have an epistemically special status, then their being transparent would seem to explain this. Transparency is commonly thought to be motivated on epistemic grounds, despite Walton's protestations that it is not. In the case of the trace theory, Currie's motivation for the view is only partly to explain photographic phenomenology. I take it that Currie is much more interested in the epistemic status of photographs than is Walton.

<sup>33</sup> Thanks to one of the journal's anonymous referees for pressing me on the following points.



predecessors, it is also plausible that this is true of our phenomenological responses to photographs too. On the cognitive-etiological account, this is no coincidence. It is difficult to pronounce on these matters without it seeming like one is crystal-ball gazing, but I find it reasonable to think that greater awareness of digital manipulation techniques has compromised photographic phenomenology, and may continue to do so. We may well reach a point at which what we see in photographs we no longer feel in (quasi-)perceptual contact with, at least not in the way that previous generations did. However, insofar as we continue to undergo pictorial experiences before such photographs, *some* degree of quasi-perceptual phenomenology should be thought to occur.

These points hold for cinema too. In watching *Gravity*, one does not have a spontaneously formed belief that Bullock and Clooney are floating weightless in space.<sup>34</sup> Strikingly, however, one has countervailing evidence for that being so in the form of one's background beliefs about how such films are made. Contrast watching the film, under the false belief that it is a fly-on-the-wall documentary of real events. The cognitive-etiological account predicts that our feeling of perceptual contact with the actors will be stronger the second case, assuming we have immediate uptake into belief of pictorial experience. In the first case we still have pictorial experience, however. So, again, we have *some* phenomenology that is perception-like in such a situation. In the second case, we have that same sensory phenomenology, since we also have pictorial experience, but with the addition of the cognitive phenomenology of immediate assent to the former's content, something that, I have argued, is no less perception-like.

If a firm case could be made for situations in which one lacks the relevant uptake, yet undergoes photographic phenomenology, then the cognitive-etiological account would be in trouble. But clear-cut cases like that are not obvious. Certainly, it is not obvious that cases of digitally manipulated photographs, recognised as such, whether still or moving, are like this. Moreover, it is difficult to see how such a delicate matter of there being such cases could be settled, absent a crude appeal to introspection. I think we should be sceptical that our introspective powers are so keen. So those hoping to mount a clear case against the cognitive-

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<sup>34</sup> I owe this example to an anonymous referee.

etiological account would do well to look elsewhere.

One final aspect of the cognitive-etiological account which deserves comment is that it is surely not a brute, unexplainable fact that we respond to photographically-induced pictorial experiences in the way the theory claims we typically do. Indeed, someone defending the cognitive-etiological account might defer to our folk-psychological conception of the medium to explain *why* we tend to take up into belief the contents of photographically-induced pictorial experiences. However, what they must insist on is that it is the taking up into belief, rather than the folk-psychological conception, that is the explanans. In this way, it might be thought that the plausibility of the cognitive-etiological account is dependent on first identifying the correct folk-psychological theory of the medium. But this need not be so. One option is for the defender of the cognitive-etiological account to take a quietist approach. They might claim that, whatever our folk-psychological conception of the medium, that is what explains our doxastic response to photographs, while remaining silent on what that conception is; they may even remain sceptical about the possibility of unearthing that folk-conception. But alternative explanations are available. One option, stated crudely, is the hypothesis that the detail typical of photographic pictures ‘fools’ viewers’ cognitive system into responding to photographically-induced pictorial experience as it would ordinary face-to-face perceptual experience. For that would account for our taking up into belief, in a psychologically immediate manner, the content of photographically-induced pictorial experiences. Moreover, this hypothesis would also explain why the phenomenology in question accompanies experiences of hyperrealistic handmade pictures, since the hyperrealism of these pictures consists in their rich detail. As an empirical hypothesis, this matter could not be settled from the armchair. The point I wish to emphasise is that there are various options open to defenders of the cognitive-etiological account, if they wish to explain why our doxastic response to photographs (and hyperrealistic handmade pictures) is of the kind they claim it to be.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Thanks to an audience at the University of St Andrews for many incisive comments on an earlier version. This paper was also improved by comments from two of the journal’s anonymous referees. My thanks, also, to the journal’s editors.