Look a Little (Chuck) Closer: Aesthetic Attention and the Contact Phenomenon

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There is a sustained phenomenological tradition of describing the character of photographic pictorial experience to consist in part of a feeling of contact with the subject of the photograph. Philosophers disagree, however, about the exact cause of the 'contact phenomenon' and whether there is a difference in the phenomenal character between the pictorial experiences of photographs and handmade pictures so that, if a viewer mistakes the type that a token image belongs to, their sense of contact can alter. I argue that the contact phenomenon is contingent upon, and triggered by, the viewer's perceptual experience of the image, which may be subject to change depending upon how a viewer attends to an image. I develop a hybrid account to resolve how the perceptual and cognitive aspects of a viewer's experience interact and produce the complex phenomenology, including conflicting mental states, that a viewer can undergo during the described experiences.

1. The Contact Phenomenon

There is a sustained phenomenological tradition of describing the character of photographic pictorial experience to in part consist of a feeling of contact with the subject of the photograph (Bazin, 1967; Currie, 1999; Barthes, 2000; Sontag, 2000; Blood and Cacciatore, 2014). An example that vividly illustrates the purportedly distinctive character of photographic pictorial experience can be found in Kendall Walton's work:

> Suppose we see Chuck Close's superrealist *Self-Portrait* thinking it is a photograph and later learn that it is a painting. The discovery jolts us. … We feel somehow less 'in contact with' Close when we learn that the portrayal of him is not photographic. (Walton, 1984, p. 255)

In some cases, however, Walton has suggested that 'even after this realization it may well continue to *seem* to us as though we are really seeing the person (with photographic assistance), if the picture continues to look to us to be a photograph' (1984, p. 255). According to Walton then, the phenomenal character of pictorial experiences before photographs is different to that experienced before handmade pictures: should the viewer realize that they are not in fact viewing a photograph, the sense of contact that they experienced with the subject of the image can either be diminished or it can, in active conflict with the viewer's updated mental representation of the aetiological origins of the work, linger (Figure 1).

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This proposal has generated a lot of debate: Dan Cavedon-Taylor (2015), Robert Hopkins (2012), and Mikael Pettersson (2011) have each maintained, albeit differently to Walton and to each other, that a viewer's sense of contact can alter should they learn that they have mistaken a photorealist painting for a photograph. Meanwhile, Berys Gaut (2008) and Scott Walden (2016) have argued that such a transformation only pertains to epistemic aspects of the experience, including the ascription of warrant to beliefs formed

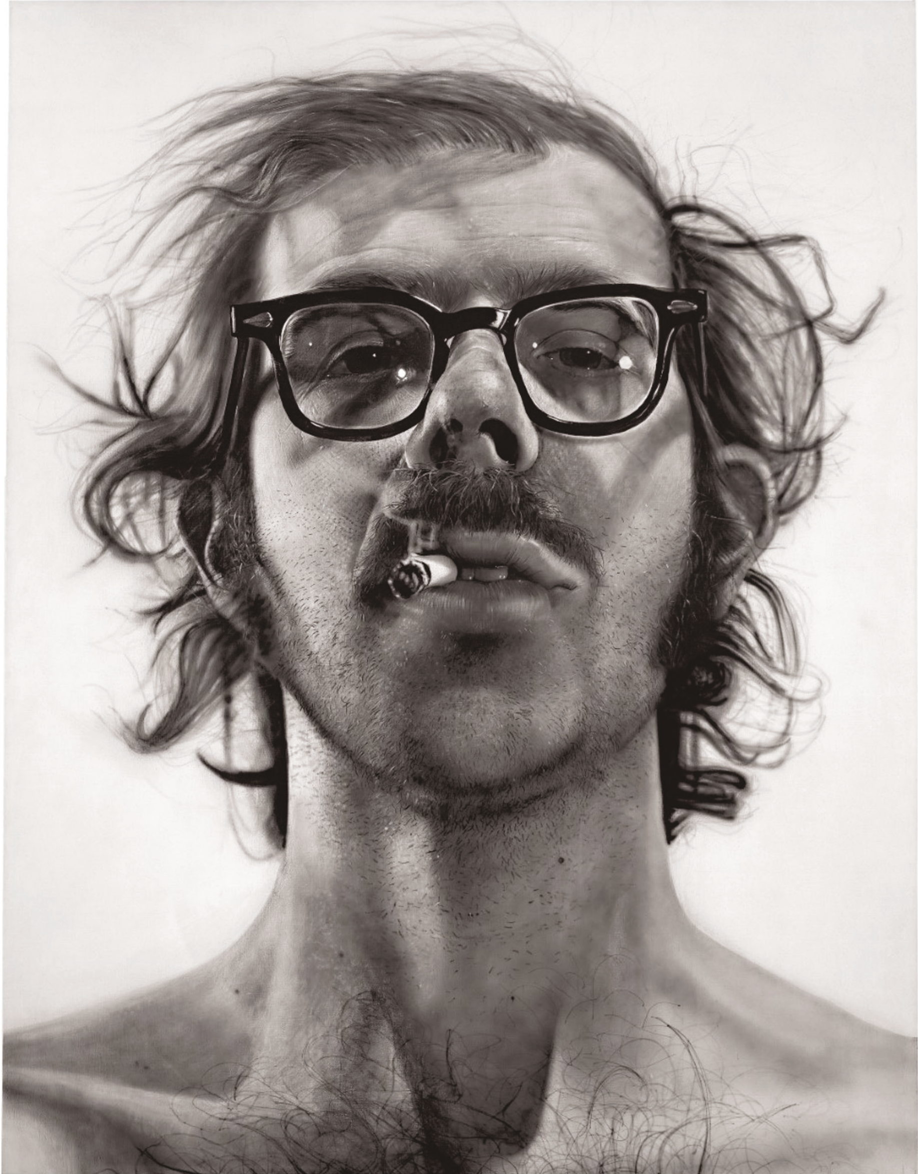

Fig 1. Chuck Close, ***Big Self-Portrait***, 1967-68. Acrylic on canvas. 107-1/2 × 83-1/2 × 2 unframed. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Art Center Acquisition Fund, 1969. © Chuck Close, courtesy Pace Gallery.

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on the basis of viewing the subject through the image. The disagreement among theorists about this phenomenon is also manifested in how the experience of contact is described. For example, Pettersson refers to 'proximity' (2011) while Walton writes that 'when we perceive, we are … intimate with what is perceived' (1984, p. 271), and similarly Hopkins discusses a 'special intimacy' (2012, p. 712). As Cavedon-Taylor has suggested, this may be a natural quirk of these philosophers engaging with phenomenological analysis (2015, p. 75). However, I think that these varying descriptions reinforce the idea that, as Gregory Currie has proposed, there are two kinds of contact: epistemic contact and emotional or affective contact (1999, p. 289). Based on the different descriptions of contact given by those who have explored this phenomenon, I will characterize epistemic contact as a feeling of perceptual contact or a kind of immediacy, and affective contact as a feeling of being intimate, or connected, with the subject. I will elaborate on this distinction and the relation between these kinds of contact in Section 2.

Despite these differences, my intuition is that Walton has outlined a genuine array of experiences that, in keeping with his description of these probable experiences before photographs, some we are likely to be familiar with and others not. So, what accounts for this phenomenon? There have been a number of attempts to answer this question. Following Cavedon-Taylor (2015, pp. 73–74), we can distinguish between at least four different kinds of approaches for explaining the phenomenology of photographic pictorial experience: realist approaches (Walton, 1984; Currie, 1991), which appeal to viewer-independent factors, such as the idea that photographs, through their mechanistic origins, instantiate both counterfactual dependency on, and real similarity relations to, the subject of the work (Walton, 1984); folk-psychological approaches (Friday, 2002; Pettersson, 2011), which appeal to viewers' conceptions of the medium, like the idea that photographs are traces that typically allow greater epistemic access than other types of image (Pettersson, 2011); a 'cognitive-aetiological' approach which is similar to folk-psychological approaches, but appeals to aetiological facts about viewers' beliefs rather than 'the *content* of viewers' *background* beliefs about the … medium' (Cavedon-Taylor, 2015, p. 74), which is to say that viewers tend to automatically assent to the pictorial contents of photographs, but withhold belief before handmade pictures (Cavedon-Taylor, 2015, p. 78); and finally hybrid approaches (Hopkins, 2012; Walden, 2016), which appeal to a mixture of realist and folk-psychological approaches, such as the fact that photographic means can be used to easily produce images that have a high degree of similarity to the subject and so cast patterns that are similar to those cast by the real subject and cause an experience of contact (Walden, 2016, p. 39).

The first three approaches however, fail to account for the full spectrum of experiences as described by Walton. A realist account cannot explain why viewers would feel a sense of contact with Close's painted self-portrait at any point (Cavedon-Taylor, 2015, p. 85). A folk-psychological approach cannot explain why, if the beliefs of the viewer are responsible for the phenomenology under discussion, a viewer would continue to feel a sense of contact with Close, despite the fact they come to believe that they are viewing an image that is neither a trace nor an image that allows greater epistemic access than other types of image. For similar reasons, a cognitive-aetiological approach cannot account for these

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lingering feelings, because *despite* withholding belief as they learn the true aetiology of the image, viewers continue to experience feelings towards the image that they experienced 'pre-jolt'.

The fourth approach shows more promise in this respect. Indeed, to date, Walden is the only theorist who has tried to substantively account for the 'lingering' phenomenon that Walton describes. Walden has argued that, following the discovery that an image does not have the aetiological origins that a viewer initially perceived it to have, viewers may experience a 'lingering dissonance' between their 'tendency to assign a high degree of warrant to beliefs formed on the basis of what appears to be a photograph, on the one hand, and the need to refrain from doing so as a result of the surprising discovery on the other' (2016, p. 48). A sense of contact cannot change, Walden has maintained, because the phenomenon is triggered by marks that cast patterns similar to those cast by the real subject and so as these marks remain unchanging, it is only epistemic aspects of the viewer's experience that change. Although Walden has said that he 'cannot concur with [Walton's] report that there is a lessening of perceptual contact' (2016, p. 48), that this might and does occur is still not beyond dispute.

While the marks that constitute an image remain unchanging, there is a growing body of work that supports the notion that perceptual experiences of the same picture can differ depending on what a viewer attends to (Stokes, 2014; Nanay, 2015; Prinz, 2019). For instance, a viewer may start to notice the less-than realistic thinly applied layers of paint, upon learning that Close's portrait is painted. If their perceptual experience of the observable properties of the image, upon which this phenomenology depends, changes, it follows that a sense of contact can alter. This certainly should not rule out the fact that epistemic aspects of the viewer's pictorial experience may change—as Walden rightly says, viewers do tend to attribute a higher degree of warrant to beliefs formed on the basis of what appears to be a photograph—but importantly, it indicates that these should not be conflated with other aspects that may also be subject to change, including a sense of contact. This, and the foregoing, suggests that photographic phenomenology is complex and that the character of these experiences may alter in different ways and that, moreover, these different changing aspects may interact with one and another. The goal of this paper then, is to resolve how the perceptual and cognitive aspects of a viewer's experience interact and produce this complex phenomenology, including the conflicting mental states that a viewer can undergo during the described experiences.[1]

To achieve this aim, I propose a hybrid account, which may be summarized as follows:

(1) Epistemic contact, or a feeling of immediacy, is caused by images that appear to have a high degree of visual similarity to the real subject, which is frequently, but not necessarily, achieved using image-making techniques that automate some aspect of image-making, such as photography.

1 Notably, this goal does not entail presenting a knock-down argument for the penetrability of perception, but to show that it is highly plausible that changes in attention can bring about the sort of phenomenal changes examined here. For an overview of the debate between modularists and perceptual penetration theorists, see Prinz (2019).

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(2) Affective contact, or a feeling of being connected with the subject, is triggered by the representation of the apparent actual stimuli, which, through sub-doxastic associative mechanisms, causes feelings and behaviours associated with the subject (Gendler, 2010).

(3) The degree of perceived similarity may be subject to change depending on what a viewer is attentive to during their viewing of an image, which can affect their sense of contact with the subject of the image.

Thus, on this account, a sense of contact may alter if, upon further inspection, after discovering that an image does not have the aetiology the viewer initially found it to have, it no longer appears to have a high degree of similarity to the subject. However, if a viewer continues to see an image as having a high degree of similarity to the subject after this discovery, they may experience a changing sense of warrant which can come into conflict with their perceptual experience. Further cognitive dissonance may also be generated by sub-doxastic associative mechanisms, which continue to be triggered by the representation of the apparent actual stimuli.

To demonstrate the validity and explanatory utility of the proposed hybrid account, I will discuss each of these points in turn. In Section 2, I will elaborate on the mechanisms described by (1) and (2) to explain the causes of, and relation between, epistemic and affective contact. Building on this explanation, I will, as per (3), argue that a sense of contact may change, depending upon what a viewer attends to when viewing an image. In Section 3, I will connect this with aesthetic attention, and I will examine some artworks that exemplify the described experiences to demonstrate the aesthetic significance of the contact phenomenon, and the cognitive dissonance that this may involve. Finally, in Section 4, I will further demonstrate the explanatory utility of the proposed hybrid account by showing that it predicts and explains the reactions of viewers to digital photographs that have been subject to post-processing. It is worth noting that my investigation in this paper will only focus on visual works. There is undoubtedly much to say about works that cater to different sense modalities, such as audition. However, I restrict myself here to visual cases to give a fuller account of the ways in which our experiences with pictures are affected by the phenomenon under investigation, and to explain how artists utilize this in service of generating visual experiences which give rise to particular aesthetic effects.

2. Epistemic and Affective Contact

Epistemic contact, as I have characterized it in (1), is a feeling of immediacy, whereby the experience of seeing the subject of the image is similar to the visual experience one would have seeing this face-to-face. This results from arrangements of marks on surfaces that produce figurative pictures 'which, when presented to our visual systems, cause those visual systems to operate in more or less the same ways as they have been caused to operate had they been exposed … to the things of which they are pictures' (Walden, 2016, p. 39). There is empirical support, to suggest that as per (1) this kind of contact is frequently caused by photographs, from a growing body of psychological evidence which

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has shown that, due to extra surface and texture detail, photographs are particularly powerful triggers of our visual systems (Salmon et al., 2014). One could conjecture that photographic grain or pixels may detract from the perceptual similarity between the picture and the subject, however grain and monochromatic tones are not dissimilar to the visual experiences we have in low-light settings (Walden, 2016, p. 43) while pixels are typically imperceptible to the human eye.

Nonetheless, the greater the experienced perceptual similarity is between the image and the subject, the stronger the experience of epistemic contact. For instance, the levels of brightness seen in many historic monochromatic photographs do not resemble our experiences of encountering subjects in low-light settings particularly well, hence why these subjects appear more strikingly present if the images are faithfully colourized, as the work of digital colourist Marina Amaral demonstrates. Amaral has meticulously restored and colourized many historic photographs. In transforming the degrading black and white photographs, Amaral has said of the results 'you can feel that it was real' (Amaral, cited in BBC, 2017) and that 'when you see a photo in colour I think you instantly feel more connected to what you are seeing' (Amaral, cited in Sky HISTORY TV channel, 2019). While this evidence may be anecdotal, the increasing feeling of connection with the subject, which corresponds with the increasing realism of the image, serves to support the thesis that highly realistic pictures can trigger a stronger experience of epistemic contact, which can in turn, as per (2), cause affective contact.

Epistemic contact seems to be a fairly broad phenomenon and not one that is always very noticeable, unless one views an image with a high degree of realism next to one with a lower degree of realism (Walden, 2016, pp. 39–40) or undergoes a shift in experience as described in Walton's example. However, affective contact, as Amaral's report demonstrates, does appear to be fairly pronounced. As I have characterized it, affective contact is a feeling of being connected with the subject. Such a feeling may even manifest itself in behavioural outputs. For example, as Lopes has questioned: 'who cannot confess to touching or addressing words to a photograph of an absent beloved as if he or she were present in the picture?' (2006, p. 79) Certainly, in such cases we know that our beloved is not really present to us in the picture, yet we feel a connection to them through the image. We may even be resistant to damaging photographs, despite knowing that no harm will come to the subject of the photograph as a result of doing so and moreover, that photographs are easily reproducible. Take, for instance, a case that Tamar Gendler has described where an agent is hesitant to throw a dart at a photograph of their baby (2010, p. 274), despite the certainty that no harm will come to the loved one as a result of doing so (2010, p. 286). Other examples can be called upon to show how this behaviour manifests itself in everyday situations. For example, one might be apprehensive to cut into, and eat, a birthday cake onto which has been printed a picture of the beloved recipient.

So, how does a marked surface trigger this kind of affective response, which may be at odds with our beliefs and even desires? As per (2), I propose that representations caused by the apparent actual stimuli trigger an associative chain of responses including feelings and behaviours associated with the subject, which an agent may or may not be consciously aware of and that may occur 'regardless of the attitude one bears to the content activating

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association' (Gendler, 2010, p. 270). Gendler has coined the term '*a*lief' to describe such a state, as aliefs are typically: associative, automatic, arational, action-generating, and affect-laden (2010, p. 288). Some aliefs are innate, having been formed as a result of evolution, while others are formed by habit (Gendler, 2010, p. 300).

In light of the origins of aliefs, it makes sense that images with greater visual similarity to their subjects are more likely to trigger an associative chain. Photographs are especially likely to trigger such a response as they are typically produced to instantiate a high degree of visual similarity to the subject. Markedly, photographs can capture appearances of subjects that only occur in the blink of an eye and so present viewers with subjects that appear more naturalistic than awkwardly posed sitters of formal painted portraits for example. An idiosyncratic, naturalistic expression of a known subject can, in particular, be a powerful trigger of an alief related to the represented person.[2] Relatedly, it is notable that the contact phenomenon is most frequently discussed in relation to portraits and this makes sense in light of the fact that we are primed to respond to faces. Affective contact is however, I suggest, relative to epistemic contact, a highly individualized phenomenon as habits and propensities towards different subjects and kinds of images are particular to each viewer. Hence, affective contact is not experienced every time the viewer feels a sense of epistemic contact with the subject of an image as it is only in certain circumstances that viewers experience the apparent stimuli that, for them, are triggers of the aliefs that cause a sense of affective contact.

Alief can also explain why, as the foregoing examples demonstrate, affective responses to highly realistic pictures may be at odds with beliefs and desires. Alief is distinct from belief and imagining as it is not a propositional state nor is it reality sensitive as belief is, or like imagination 'explicitly reality insensitive' (Gendler, 2010, p. 267). Indeed, on some occasions aliefs may be belief-concordant, while on others they may be belief-discordant. It is easier to discern between belief-mandated behaviour and alief-mandated behaviour on the latter occasions. For instance, an agent may want a slice of the aforementioned cake and may sincerely believe that no harm will come to their beloved as a result of consuming the edible photograph. However, given the visual-motor input associated with slicing a knife through what appears to be a loved one, they may alieve the following all at once: 'harmful action directed at beloved, dangerous and ill-advised, don't cut and eat'.[3] The agent's alief is neither deliberate nor self-controlled, but it activates motor routines associated with fear and hesitation, which compete with the motor routines that are activated by the agent's explicit intention to eat the cake which they know will not result in any harm to their loved one. There are then, three stages to the associative chains responsible for this mental state: Representation, Affect, and Behaviour (R-A-B). While paradigmatic instances of alief involve this four-place relation (i.e. an agent alieves R-A-B), Gendler has clarified that there may be cases where 'the salient content falls primarily in only one or two of these domains' (2010, p. 290), which seems to be the case in the phenomenon under discussion, where it is primarily affective, rather than behavioural, output that is exhibited.

2 See Barthes (2000, pp. 67–71) for an example of the feelings triggered by such a photograph.

3 The structure of this example was inspired by one of Gendler's examples of belief-discordant alief (2010, p. 262).

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Should a viewer have an alief that causes a sense of contact with the subject triggered by their experience of viewing an image, then it follows that in cases of lingering contact, part of the conflicting nature of the experience is caused by belief-discordant alief. Indeed, aliefs are generally quite stubborn. Nevertheless, they can be regulated to reduce discordance. Gendler has suggested two strategies for changing aliefs, one of which is 'the refocusing of attention … thereby redrawing the lines of internal association' (2010, p. 304). Gendler does not go on to explore this strategy in relation to images, however it can readily be employed to support the idea that a sense of contact may be altered.

If an agent refocuses their attention on a photorealist work, to concentrate more intensely on the surface for instance, and they resultantly see previously unnoticed, yet observable properties that fail to bear such a strong visual resemblance to the represented subject, such as canvas grain and brushstrokes, then the subject will not be experienced with such a high degree of perceptual immediacy. Consequently, a sense of epistemic contact diminishes. It additionally follows in cases of affective contact that, as the subject no longer appears as it might if it were directly before the viewer, the representation of the apparent stimuli changes, which means different associative chains are triggered and those responsible for generating the described affective contact cease to be activated. Accordingly, the degree of experienced similarity to the subject, and so experience of contact, can be altered, I propose, depending upon what the viewer attends to during their encounter with the object. So, why do some observable properties of visual works initially go unnoticed?

3. Aesthetic Attention

Findings on inattentional blindness, the phenomenon where salient stimuli right in front of an observer's eyes pass unnoticed, demonstrate that which properties we attend to 'very much influences our perceptual phenomenology', even in the earliest stages of visual processing (Nanay, 2015, p. 2). To account for the changing phenomenology under discussion then, we need to consider which properties viewers typically attend to, and in what order, when they view photorealist works.

Importantly, there a number of non-perceptual processes that may influence what a viewer attends to when they look at a visual work of art, and accordingly, their perceptual phenomenology. These processes include learning information about a work such as the title (Prinz, 2019, p. 292) or the medium (Nanay, 2016). Knowledge about art and culture, it has been argued, can improve the perception, and therefore the appreciation, of artworks (Prinz, 2019, p. 299; Stokes (2014, p. 13, pp. 21–22). This is due to the fact that different kinds of works and traditions have different aesthetically-relevant properties, or properties that change one's aesthetic evaluation (Nanay, 2016, p. 67).

Typically, for instance, the nature of the marked surface is an aesthetically-relevant property of painting and something that viewers are likely to inspect quite closely as they appreciate how an agent has applied pigment to a surface to realize the depictive content of the work (Hopkins, 2015; Nanay, 2016, p. 60). Photographic images however, are projected, printed on physical supports or displayed on electronic supports. As such, viewers do not typically attend very closely to how the surface of a photograph has been marked to build up the depictive content, but instead they attend to aesthetically-relevant properties

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such as how an agent has framed and focused the shot, adjusted the length of exposure or level of contrast, or whether the photographer has chosen to work in monochrome. Essentially, given that 'our attention depends on what we know and believe' (Nanay, 2019, p. 122), it follows that we distribute our attention among the properties of different types of images in ways that are specific to those types, based upon what we know and believe about them. Many viewers will be unaware that they even do this—these patterns of attention are skills, honed by learning—as Stokes has argued, expertise-influenced perception often plays a covert role (2014, p. 20, pp. 28–29). Indeed, in some cases, the right conditions are apparently met and so, through habit, a viewer engages with a painting as though it is a photograph (or vice versa), and experiences it as such.

Nevertheless, upon learning more about a work, from the exhibition label for example, viewers may be directed towards aesthetically-relevant properties, like the marked surface, which could change their perceptual experience of the work. Artists will sometimes deliberately exploit these patterns of attention in order to play with the viewer's perceptual phenomenology to realize the work's meaning. For example, art historian James Fox has explained in relation to one photorealist painting, *Accordi* (2015) by Luciano Ventrone, that it is difficult to accept that the depicted grapes are actually painted due to the 'supernatural precision' with which they have been portrayed in this medium (Fox, cited in BBC 2020). And yet, as Fox highlights, if viewers look closely at the work, they can see the texture of the linen and 'surprisingly loose strokes of paint' (Fox, cited in BBC 2020). Stepping back however, it once again very closely resembles the experience of seeing a real bunch of grapes. Importantly, Fox has argued, Ventrone 'wants us to be aware of that deception' (Fox, cited in BBC 2020). Like many photorealist artists, Ventrone is reflecting reality so as to question or subvert it in doing so (Fox, cited in BBC 2020). Similarly, in making works like *Big Self-Portrait*, Close was, in his words, 'interested in the tension between reality and artificiality' (Bui, 2008). Accordingly, the viewer striving to reconcile their feelings and beliefs about the image is part of the aesthetic experience generated by this work, whereby the viewer gets to experience this tension through the cognitive dissonance they undergo when viewing the work.

Although belief-discordant aliefs are usually disruptive and unwelcome for an agent, as Gendler has identified, sometimes this discord is welcome and exploited, for instance in the cases of reading, theatre, and rollercoasters, where associative chains are exploited to add to the richness of human life (2010, p. 303).[4] To this list, as the foregoing illustrates, we can also add the visual arts, more about which I will say in what follows. First, I will run through some scenarios to illustrate how different patterns of attention can impact a viewer's perceptual experience of photorealist work, and so their sense of contact with the subject of an image.

In the first scenario, a viewer wanders through a gallery and stops in front of *Big Self-Portrait*. The work appears to be a huge black and white photograph. Through habit, the viewer attends to the properties that they would typically attend to when viewing photographs: they consider the tight crop, the focus on the face, and curious angle from which they are presented with this individual. Resultantly, the viewer suffers from inattentional

4 For another account that utilizes alief to explain aesthetic phenomena, see Leddington (2016) on magic.

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Fig 2. Chuck Close, *Big Self-Portrait* (detail), 1967-68. Acrylic on canvas. 107-1/2 × 83-1/2 × 2 unframed. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Art Center Acquisition Fund, 1969. © Chuck Close, courtesy Pace Gallery.

blindness, and fails to notice any of the thinly applied layers of paint (Figure 2).[5] Wanting to know more about the work, the viewer shifts their gaze to the exhibition label next to the picture. Upon reading the medium of the work, it transpires that this 'photograph' was actually made using acrylic paint. Surprised by this discovery, the viewer experiences a changing sense of warrant, as they hold a different attitude towards the veracity of tokens of the type painting. They return to the picture and start to attend to it differently as the nature of the marked surface is an aesthetically-relevant property of painting. Once they start to notice the thinly applied layers of paint, the viewer has a new perceptual experience, where the marks on the surface, which now clearly consist of semi-transparent paint, fail to cast such similar patterns as those cast by the real subject. As a result, their perceptual and cognitive experiences align and the viewer's sense of contact with Close lessens.

Yet, in another scenario, the viewer's perceptual and cognitive experiences fail to accord: despite the fact that they assign less warrant to the beliefs that they formed about Close's facial features on the basis of looking at them in the picture, they continue to feel a sense of contact with Close. This is because, in this scenario, they have not adjusted how they attend to the image or still have not noticed any of the subtle painterly facture despite

5 Notably, it has been found that even experienced observers are prone to inattentional blindness (Drew et al., 2013).

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reassessing the surface of the image. Consequently, the patterns which are cast from the picture continue to look similar to those cast by the real subject and cause an experience of contact. As such, the experience of lingering contact is sustained as a result of the relatively stable perceptual experience of the picture.

In the scenarios just described, I have primarily outlined cases where the viewer physically directs their eyes towards different properties of the work, but it is entirely plausible that a situation could arise where it is the viewer's covert attention that is responsible for a changed perceptual phenomenology (Prinz, 2019, pp. 282–3). Consider another scenario where the viewer remains static, and so the eye maintains a particular, repeated pattern of movement. As they continue to gaze at the painting, a knowledgeable friend accompanying them explains that the image was produced by applying watered down layers of acrylic paint. The viewer, intrigued by this, continues to fix their gaze on the work, but starts to concentrate more on its surface and notices thin painterly marks and patches where the canvas grain shows through. As a result, their perceptual and cognitive experiences align and their sense of contact with Close diminishes. It is entirely plausible that this scenario could arise without such an external stimulus. The viewer could, for example, remember that this artist is known for photorealistic painting and so, initially attend to the work as a photograph through habit, but later adjust their focus as they attend to the work, upon remembering that it is unlikely to have been made photographically.

To be clear, I am not making the claim that attending to different aesthetically-relevant properties will *ipso facto* result in a changing sense of contact. This only occurs if, when attending to different properties of the image, the patterns cast appear less or even more similar to the subject, than they did upon the initial viewing of the work. As other cases show, attending to the picture differently may not be particularly effective. Take Paul Chiappe's drawings, which are rendered so that they do not betray any obvious signs of mark-making. Among his oeuvre are several tiny works that very closely resemble school class photographs. Despite the addition and replacement of figures from one image to the next, the drawings are all based upon one photograph. To produce these works, Chiappe has blended the graphite in such a way, and on such a small scale (the effect is somewhat lost when the drawings are viewed as enlarged digital images), that it is incredibly difficult to discern any evidence of handwork—even if one has expertise in such techniques. These highly realistic works are thus, particularly effective at triggering a sense of contact that lingers when viewers discover that the work is a drawing (usually learnt from reading about the work). This is an intentional effect that helps to realize the artistic content of the work. Specifically, the cognitive dissonance that viewers report when engaging with these works embodies the experience of adolescence that Chiappe explores in this series, "as a juddering process of unfolding doubt" (Artlyst, 2013), as viewers doubt the validity of their feelings towards the image in the face of their knowledge about its aetiology.

This hybrid account can also explain why the inverse may happen in cases where viewers misperceive photographs as paintings. There are few real examples to draw upon as the features of photographic images do not typically resemble those of painted images to a high degree and this I think, serves to further explain why the changing phenomenal character described by Walton and others, is discussed primarily in relation to photographs.

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Nevertheless, consider Cindy Sherman's *History Portraits* series. There are some works in this series, such as *Untitled #228* (1990) that viewers have reported seeing as paintings upon first glance (Zappella, 2020).

Unlike many photorealist paintings that are misperceived as photographs, the impression of the photograph as a painting tends to diminish very quickly and without the aid of non-perceptual cues. Upon closer inspection of the image surface, as is typical of the way that viewers attend to paintings, it soon becomes apparent that the surface has not been marked with pigment by an agent. In any case, once the viewer learns of the true aetiology of Sherman's work, they are likely to experience a changing sense of warrant. They may also experience a sense of contact with the dressed-up Sherman and scene props upon inspecting the picture and seeing a high-resolution image that does not evidence the painterly facture that would be expected to accompany the stylized features of the representational contents of the image. As with the Close and Chiappe works, this is a contrived effect, one which, in this case, prompts the viewer to reassess their relationship with the perceived reality of photography, the constructed stereotypes, and 'mannered nature of historical portrait paintings' (MoMA, 2019). It is however, albeit unlikely, possible that the viewer may, upon learning of the image's true aetiology, remain at a distance or fail to attend to this work in a way that perceptually represents the surface of the work and so continue to represent the photograph as a painting and in doing so, fail to feel a sense of epistemic or affective contact with the subject as described by (1) and (2).

The proposed hybrid account also explains why individuals like Walden have reported that, despite reading David Hockney's (2006) thesis that Caravaggio's and Vermeer's portraits may have been painted with the aid of optical devices, they experienced no change in a sense of contact with their 'early-modern subjects' (Walden, 2016, p. 48). These paintings are noteworthy for how realistically their subjects have been depicted and for their exceptionally smooth finishes. That is, they are exacting likenesses and one has to get extremely close to see evidence of painterly facture. These pictures are already primed to trigger the viewer's visual systems to operate in a similar manner as they are caused to operate when exposed to the real subjects. Moreover, given that viewers already know that these works are paintings, they are unlikely to attend to them differently upon learning that they may have been made with the use of optical devices—a fact that, as Hockney's book demonstrates, is very difficult for most of us to perceive. Accordingly, the proposed account can explain why viewers like Walden may not experience any change in a sense of contact with the subjects of such works upon learning more about their aetiological origins.

As should be clear by now, the phenomenology under discussion is complex. There are many different aspects of the viewer's experience that can change: viewers can experience a changing sense of warrant in their perceptual beliefs formed about the visible appearance of the subject of an image, and they can also experience a changing sense of epistemic or affective contact. These different aspects may be likened to channel faders on sound mixers—on some occasions they might all align, while on other occasions the channels may be turned up to different degrees. For instance, if the viewer holds beliefs that photographs (analogue or digital—some viewers are less aware, or unaware, of the possibilities

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opened up by digital photography, as I shall explain in Section 4) have a causal connection to the subject then, should they experience the images as having a high degree of visual similarity to the subject, it is likely that they will experience a stronger sense of contact than viewers who remain agnostic about the causal nature of photography. For example, one bereaved parent, who participated in Blood and Cacciatone's study on perinatal death and post-mortem photography, stated that photographs of their deceased son enabled the parent 'to be with him and honour him since I cannot do so physically' (2014, p. 230). Blood and Cacciatone have suggested that in this context 'photographs provide assurance that the subject represented was "real"' (2014, p. 225), which coheres with the proposal that viewers experience a stronger sense of contact if they hold beliefs pertaining to the causal nature of photography.

On the other hand, some viewers may experience a much weaker sense of contact with the subjects of images. Take those whose jobs involve photo editing—as a consequence of their manipulation of the medium, these agents' habits and responses to photographs are likely different from that of the general populace. The subject of photographic manipulation brings us to an important explanatory advantage of this hybrid account: photographic phenomenology in the digital age.

4. Photographic Phenomenology in the Digital Age

Post-photographic theorists feared that the epistemic standing of photography would wane with the advent of digital post-processing (Mitchell, 1998; Savedoff, 2008; Ritchin, 2010). Of course, post-processing is nothing new: for years photographers have tinkered with the features of photographs in the darkroom. However, manipulations, to the representational features of a photograph, are significantly harder to detect when achieved through digital processes, many of which are widely available and easy to use. In fact, humans are unreliable at identifying whether digital images have been subject to alteration (Schetinger et al., 2015) and even though media audiences are aware that most commercial images have been altered, they 'have trouble identifying the altered elements' (Harrison and Hefner, 2014, p. 135). Resultantly, a whole body of work exists that is devoted to finding reliable automatic methods to detecting image forgery (Korus, 2017).

If a realist, folk-psychological, or cognitive-aetiological account were correct, then viewers should feel a reduced sense of contact with the subjects of altered digital photographs. Yet, as the hybrid account predicts, it appears that for most viewers, their sense of contact with the subject of altered photographs remains intact. Despite the knowledge that digital photographs can be easily and convincingly manipulated (although not always—just search 'Photoshop fails'), evidence suggests that viewers continue to subsume the contents of photographs as veridical. Perhaps one of the most acute examples of this was demonstrated by the public outcry at the 2003 adverts for the charity Barnardo's, which seemed to feature photographs of babies in distressing situations of poverty. This prompted over 466 complaints to the Advertising Standards Agency. Ash has explained that:

> many viewers took issue with the Barnardos's ads because of their seeming exploitation of the 'real' babies in the images (the models), and this reaction was surprisingly

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> strong despite the artificiality and digital manipulation of the photographs. (quoted in Levin, 2009, p. 331)

As this example illustrates, affective contact can remain very persistent, even when digital manipulation is known about.[6]

In fact, several studies into the efficacy of different methods of visual literacy, to counteract the negative effects of altered photographs on body image, have seen a 'boomerang effect' (Bissell, 2006; Harrison and Hefner, 2014).[7] Subjects were shown altered images with written disclaimers warning that the images were digitally manipulated to enhance the appearance of the models. Contrary to what was expected, those presented with this intervention reported decreased physical self-esteem and an increased desire to look like the models, despite knowing that these images did not represent a realistic and therefore achievable appearance. One explanation offered for this effect was: 'If retouching is generally assumed to have occurred, being told that retouching has occurred would have little or no effect compared to simply viewing the retouched photos without the discounting information' (Harrison and Hefner, 2014, p. 147). Another explanation, I suggest, is that disclaimers do not actually show the viewer how to look at the contents of the image any differently. As viewers continue to have the same perceptual experience, they continue to feel a sense of contact with the subject of the image.

It is encouraging to see that this hypothesis has some empirical backing from studies, into the efficacy of different methods of visual literacy, that have focused on showing participants visual comparisons between altered and non-altered photographs. For example, one study employed the use of a short video (Dove Evolution, 2006), that demonstrates how images produced for beauty campaigns are digitally altered, to successfully prevent reductions in body satisfaction, which were evident among the comparison group who were exposed to thin-ideal images without any preceding intervention (Halliwell et al., 2011). Importantly, the altered images when viewed against the unaltered images look less realistic.

Nevertheless, while the video intervention was effective in the short term, as Harrison and Hefner have highlighted, it is 'not feasible to locate unretouched versions of all retouched imagery in commercial visual media to provide real-time before–after comparisons' (2014, p. 149). If the foregoing is correct, however, a case can be made that teaching viewers how to attend to images differently may reduce the need to have the 'before' image. For instance, it is often possible to spot deviations from the laws of linear perspective in objects in the background of photographs of extremely slim/curvy individuals (search for #facetunefail). Once this becomes obvious, the degree of experienced realism

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6 One could object that this reaction would likely have occurred with any kind of representation of a child in distress, yet, as the quote from Ash demonstrates, at stake here was the concern that *real* babies had been harmed in the making of these photographs, despite the fact that the adverts clearly stated that this was not the case.

7 These studies focus on the effects of photographic imagery as seen on commercial, popular, and social media platforms, and so naturally, there will be other factors that contribute to the 'boomerang effect', including norms pertaining to objects of desire and beauty ideals. Nonetheless, it is notable that it is photographic images that seem to be most effective at promoting these norms, arguably because they present these desires and ideals with a kind of perceptual immediacy which makes them seem realizable.

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(i.e. of the physics of the scene) decreases and so, as per the proposed account, reduces a sense of contact. Significantly, viewers could then tailor their viewing habits depending upon the context in which images are presented, meaning that fears about impinging on artistic freedoms (Reaves et al., 2004) can be somewhat mitigated. Indeed, the source of controversy surrounding digitally manipulated photographs in the media also serves as fuel for their artistic power.

Artists such as Jeff Wall and Andreas Gursky have created seamless composite photographs using digital technology. Importantly, these artists make no secret about the post-processing of their photographs. Rather, viewers are invited to appreciate the constructed nature of the photographic imagery (Nanay, 2012). This causes a conflicting experience between the perceived reality of the subject and the belief that the image does not present a single spatiotemporal scene as it appears. As a result, images such as Gursky's *Rhine II* (1999) which are composed from a number of different images, have been described as 'both convincing and deceptive' (Ohlin, 2002, 29). However, it is the fact that they are both convincing and deceptive that gives rise to the aesthetic significance of these works.

Laura Mulvey, for instance, has written of being 'fascinated and bewildered by the seemingly incompatible tendencies' that Wall's *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* (1993) depict (2007, p. 30), as it is a picture that appears too perfectly composed to be a 'snap', despite clearly placing itself 'in the tradition of the aesthetic of the instant' (Mulvey, 2007, p. 30). Mulvey has described this experience as a 'technological uncanny' (2007, p. 30). Just as Wall's work calls to mind both reality and fiction, Gursky has manipulated his images to create repetitions, alter the architecture of built and natural environments, and collapse time to 'heighten the sense of the sublime' (Ohlin, 2002, p. 24) that is created by globalization. Both these artists have exploited the fact that viewers tend to experience a sense of immediacy with the subjects of photographic imagery to induce viewers into the kind of cognitive dissonance under discussion so they experience the uncanny or the phenomenology of the sublime in a globalized world.

5. Conclusion

In sum, as per the hybrid account, the contact phenomenon is contingent upon, and triggered by, the viewer's perceptual experience of the image, which may be subject to change depending upon how a viewer attends to an image. Should a viewer discover that an image does not have the aetiology they initially found it to have, they may experience a changing sense of warrant which can come into conflict with their perceptual experience, if they continue to see the image as having a high degree of similarity to the subject. Further cognitive dissonance may also be generated by sub-doxastic associative mechanisms, which continue to be triggered by the representation of the apparent actual stimuli. A sense of contact may be diminished, however, if, upon further inspection, the image no longer appears to have a high degree of similarity to the subject.

Aesthetic attention plays an important role in the contact phenomenon as it determines the viewer's perceptual experience of the image, upon which a sense of contact is dependent. This kind of attention, as has been demonstrated here, has important

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ramifications for the experience of different kinds of images, including manipulated digital photographs and artworks that realize aesthetic qualities through the experience of cognitive dissonance that they cause. The work in this paper has drawn on an understanding of how aesthetic attention operates in the context of different kinds of aesthetic objects. If the foregoing is correct then this gestures towards an exciting new direction for studies in aesthetic attention and the exposition of how this has ramifications for our experiences with these objects which may go beyond aesthetic experience.[8]

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