

Voltolini, Alberto. *A Syncretistic Theory of Depiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

In *A Syncretistic Theory of Depiction*, Alberto Voltolini argues for a synthesis of the resemblance and seeing-in theories of depiction. Voltolini's theory is encapsulated in the following analysis:

An item *P* depicts a subject *O*, where *O* can be either a particular individual or any individual of a certain kind, iff (i) one has a certain seeing-in state involving *P* whose configurational fold grasps the grouping properties that *P* roughly shares with *O*, while its recognitional fold is the knowingly illusory perception as of a thing of a kind under which *O* falls, and (ii) *P* entertains the right causal/intentional relation with *O* (p. 167).

The Mona Lisa, for example, depicts Lisa, according to Voltolini, because (i) one has a two-fold experience of seeing Lisa in the Mona Lisa, the first fold of which consists in veridically seeing the design of the Mona Lisa organised in such a way that it resembles Lisa, and the second fold of which involves a knowingly illusory experience as of Lisa, and (ii) the Mona Lisa stands in the right causal/intentional relation to Lisa.

The motivating examples for Voltolini's analysis are what he calls, following Wittgenstein, aspect-dawning pictures, or hidden figures (p. 67). Take, for example, the well known picture of a Dalmatian, which consists only of black patches. At first, one sees only a disorganised group of black patches. But then, according to Voltolini, one experiences some of the patches as grouped together, in such a way that they resemble a Dalmatian – the first fold of one's seeing-in experience. In virtue of experiencing the patches grouped together in this way, one also has an experience as of a Dalmatian – the second fold of one's seeing-in experience. But this experience feels different from an ordinary illusion of a Dalmatian, because it is cognitively penetrated by one's knowledge that no Dalmatian is present. Since in addition the black patches stand in the right causal/intentional relation to a Dalmatian, it follows, according to Voltolini, that the black patches depict a Dalmatian.

As a version of the seeing-in theory, the main contribution of Voltolini's analysis is in its application to *Trompe L'Oeil*, or illusionistic, pictures. *Trompe L'Oeil* are widely considered to be a counterexample to the seeing-in theory, because, intuitively, in the presence of a successful *Trompe L'Oeil*, one's experience has only a

single fold, corresponding simply to an illusory experience as of what the *Trompe L'Oeil* represents, and indistinguishable from a veridical face-to-face experience of what it represents. Voltolini agrees that upon seeing a successful *Trompe L'Oeil*, one's initial experience is a straightforward illusion as of what the *Trompe L'Oeil* represents. But, Voltolini argues, once one realises that the *Trompe L'Oeil* is in fact merely a picture, one's experience changes into a two-fold one – it acquires an additional configurational fold, corresponding to a veridical experience of the picture's surface, which supports a recognitional fold which, while still illusory, is now a known illusion. The illusory part of the experience is distinguishable from the straightforward illusion of what it represents, because it is cognitively penetrated by the knowledge that it is an illusion, and lacks the feeling of presence.

As a version of the resemblance theory, the main contribution of Voltolini's analysis is in its application to ambiguous figures, such as the duck-rabbit. Voltolini argues that when one sees a duck in the picture, it is because the first fold of one's seeing-in experience, the configurational fold corresponding to veridical perception of the picture's surface, represents the picture's design features as grouped in such a way that they resemble a duck, whereas when one sees a rabbit in the picture, it is because the first fold of one's seeing-in experience represents the picture's design features as grouped in such a way that they resemble a rabbit. So the situation with ambiguous figures is similar to the situation with hidden figures, except that whereas in the latter case one switches from not seeing anything in the picture to seeing, say, a Dalmatian in the picture, in the former case one switches between seeing one thing in the picture to seeing another thing in the picture.

As opposed to experienced resemblance theories, according to which the resemblance between a picture and what it represents need only be experienced and need not be real, and resembling experience theories, according to which the relevant resemblance is between the experience of the picture and the experience of what it represents, Voltolini argues for a so-called "objective" resemblance theory, according to which the relevant resemblance is between the picture itself and what it represents. Although already widespread, the name "objective resemblance theory" is misleading, since it's open to proponents of that theory to argue that the relevant respects of resemblance between a picture are mind-dependent or, in other words, subjective. If colour, for example, turns out to be subjective or mind-dependent, then resemblances between pictures and what they represent in respect of colour would turn out to be

subjective or mind-dependent too, but in a way which is compatible with the so-called “objective” resemblance theory. Voltolini, with this distinction in mind, argues not only for the objective resemblance theory, but also argues that the respects of resemblance between pictures and what they represent are only weakly mind-dependent (pp. 140-148).

So in order to substantiate these aspects of his theory, Voltolini must argue that the grouping properties involved in picture perception are properties of the picture itself, and not merely properties of the perception of it, or properties it is merely perceived to have. Take, for example, the duck-rabbit. According to Voltolini, if one groups the elements of the picture in one way, one sees a duck in it, whereas if one groups the elements of the picture in another way, one sees a rabbit in it. Voltolini must argue that when one groups the elements of the picture in the first way, one perceives a property that the picture really has, and in virtue of which it resembles a duck, and if one groups the elements in the second way, one perceives another property that the picture has, but in virtue of which it resembles a rabbit. On the face of it, this claim seems implausible – when the only thing that has changed about the picture is the way one looks at it, it seems much more plausible to say that it is not the picture which has changed, but only one’s experience of it.

But the issue really depends on a deeper one in the philosophy of mind. According to representationalism, there can be no difference in the phenomenology of an experience without a difference in what the experience represents. It follows from representationalism that there can be no difference between seeing a duck in the picture and seeing a rabbit in the picture unless there is a difference in the properties the picture is represented as having. So if representationalism is right, then Voltolini must be right that the picture is experienced as having different properties when a duck is seen-in it than when a rabbit is seen-in it. On the other hand, it doesn’t follow that the different properties represented when a duck instead of a rabbit is seen in the picture are properties the picture really has, rather than merely properties it is experienced as having. If the different properties represented between the two experiences are different three-dimensional shapes, for example, then although the picture may be experienced as having these two different three-dimensional shapes, it, being flat, does not really have either of them. In answer to this objection, Voltolini argues that the different grouping properties involved in the two cases are merely two-dimensional (p. 139).

Putting this question aside, there remains the issue of whether Voltolini's grouping properties are subjective or, in other words, mind-dependent. Voltolini, following Michael Newall, distinguishes weakly mind-dependent properties, or properties definable in terms of a viewpoint, perspective or orientation, from strongly mind-dependent properties, or properties definable only in terms of the occupant of that viewpoint or perspective (p. 50). Robert Hopkins' outline shape, or the solid angle subtended by a three-dimensional object at a point, for example, is only weakly mind-dependent because although its definition requires reference to a point, it does not require reference to any person occupying that point. Voltolini argues that his grouping properties are weakly mind-dependent in this sense, because their definition requires only reference to an orientation of the elements of the picture's design, and no reference to any person who orients them in that way (pp. 140-148).

In many ways, *A Syncretistic Theory of Depiction* resembles the hidden figures which are its motivation. The first half of the book is an exceptionally detailed discussion of the virtues and vices of extant theories of depiction, including various versions of the resemblance theory, the seeing-in theory, the recognition theory, and structural theories. Voltolini carefully distinguishes which part of each theory he considers salvageable, but it is not until the second half of the book that Voltolini begins to explain his own syncretistic theory, culminating in the analysis on page one-hundred and sixty-seven. Another aspect of the book which dawns only slowly is the extent to which it's informed by contemporary debates in philosophy of mind – the connection with representationalism mentioned above, for example, is manifest only in the endnotes. As I read the book I kept a running list of objections which I might raise in this review. But as I reread it I found all of them answered, and in far more detail than I could hope to do justice to here. *A Syncretistic Theory of Depiction* is a book which will repay close attention.