

Real Likenesses. Representation in Paintings, Photographs and Novels, by Michael Morris. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 228.

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The view developed in this book is that when looking at a representational painting we see a ‘real likeness’: something that is worked in paint, that really exists, that resembles what is depicted, and that, in virtue of that resemblance, counts as the same kind of thing as what is depicted. This Real Likeness view is applied not only to representation in painting, but also representation in photography and in novels. For each of these three art forms, the Real Likeness view is presented as the best solution to a problem. A constraint on any plausible solution to that problem is ‘the Non-Distraction Thesis’:

(ND) Attending to the medium of a representational work cannot inevitably be a distraction from attending to its content, or *vice versa*. (P. 21.)

In this review, I present and discuss the problem, (ND) and the real likeness view in three consecutive sections. My focus will be Morris’s discussion of paintings, which constitutes the first part of the book and which is used when applying the view to photography and novels.

Morris makes an interesting and significant contribution with his book, I think. However, presenting his view as standing alone in opposition to the ‘dominant’ views of depiction, photography and literary fiction is, in my opinion, to exaggerate its novelty. The view has some (albeit perhaps not ‘dominant’) siblings in the literature on depiction and photography, where Aasen (2015), Briscoe (2016), Martin (2012), Nanay (2018) and Wiesing (2009), like Morris, identify something which is seen in a picture or a photograph, is additional to it and what it represents, and plays a vital representational role. Some issues in the philosophy of perception, attention and language, are also clearly relevant but not engaged with. While I mainly have to bypass these issues, I will towards the end of this review compare Morris’s view to its siblings in the depiction literature and try to identify something that I believe stands out about it.

1. The problem

What is the problem to which Morris’s view is allegedly the best solution? It is the problem of resolving some apparently contradictory attitudes or states of mind that Morris thinks we have in response to pictures, photographs and novels. In response to paintings, he thinks these attitudes seem to leave us with the following commitments (supposing that we are looking at a painting of a face):

- (C1) (i) That’s a face; and (ii) that’s not a real face;
- (C2) (i) That’s a face; and (ii) that’s worked in paint. (P. 8.)

The sense in which these commitments appear contradictory is that ‘in each case clause (ii) seems to give a reason for thinking that clause (i) must be false’ (p. 9). That is, if something is not a real face or if something is worked in paint, those both seem to be reasons for thinking that the thing in question cannot be a face, Morris claims. This apparent contradiction is Morris’s ‘Paradox of Painting’.

Observe that *if* there can be faces that are not real faces and worked in paint, then no contradiction is apparent in (C1) and (C2). This is Morris's solution to the paradox (more on that later). The paradox thus looks made for his solution. Dialectically it therefore seems important that the paradox has an appearance of contradiction *not* deriving from just overlooking the possibility that Morris uses to solve it. While this does not seem to bother Morris, one might find the following observation helpful in this regard. Just after presenting his paradox, he remarks that it is a generalisation of the paradox René Margritte is creating with his painting of a pipe and the inscription 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe'. Our first thought when looking at this painting, Morris thinks, is 'Of course it's a pipe!' (p. 10), and hence we have almost the same apparently conflicting commitments as in (C1). One might thus think there is a similar appearance of contradiction for the Margritte and in (C1).

One obstacle to this generalisation from Margritte is the obvious difference, unaddressed by Morris, between Margritte's painting and an ordinary painting of a face or a pipe *without* any inscription on it. When there is no inscription, why believe that we have the commitment 'That's not a pipe', or, as in (C1ii), 'That's not a real pipe'? In fact, there is a more general and prior question here: why think that we have the commitments in (C1) and (C2) at all?

Morris does not address this question and simply seems to assume that (C1) and (C2) are our commitments. A reader, like me, who struggles to understand why that is a legitimate assumption might look to the way these commitments are motivated in order to understand at least where they are coming from. Leading up to his paradox, Morris writes that 'we [can] seem to see in a painting something which is properly described as a face' (p. 8), and that 'we know that there is no real face there' (p. 8). He then explains that these statements describe attitudes which 'involve' as 'things we think about' the commitments (C1i) (That's a face) and (C1ii) (That's not a real face). While it remains unclear how visual states, attitudes and thoughts can 'involve' one another, perhaps his idea is that (C1) is a commitment we have in so far as we agree that (i) we seem to see a face and (ii) we know that there is no real face there?

However, this motivation for the paradox is not theory-neutral. Not everyone agrees that we seem to see a face in a painting of a face. According to Experienced Resemblance view (e.g., Hopkins 1998), one instead experiences a resemblance to a face. Morris takes this to mean that the commitments of the Experienced Resemblance view are:

- (C1r) (i) That resembles a real face; and (ii) that's not a real face;
 (C2r) (i) That resembles a real face; and (ii) that's worked in paint.

Morris takes this to be part of its response to the paradox, a response that involves denying clause (i) of (C1) and (C2). He likewise develops versions of (C1) and (C2) for the other 'dominant' views (the views from Gombrich, Wollheim and Walton) and considers these versions part of their responses to the paradox. To me, it is unclear in what sense a view can respond to a paradox whose motivation it is incompatible with, as holds at least for the Experienced Resemblance view vis-à-vis Morris's paradox. In any case, Morris's main message in chapter one is that the responses from the dominant views are all 'phenomenologically implausible' because they are in tension with the Non-Distraction thesis.

2. The non-distraction thesis

By contrast to Morris's paradoxes and his Real Likenesses views, the Non-Distraction thesis is formulated uniformly for paintings, photographs and photography. To repeat, it reads:

(ND) Attending to the medium of a representational work cannot inevitably be a distraction from attending to its content, or *vice versa*.

Morris intends (ND) to reject something implicit in the ‘dominant’ approaches: that attending to the medium inevitably *is* a distraction from attending to the content. Only the inevitability of this is rejected, he emphasises: ‘there will certainly be ways of attending to the medium which interfere with our attention to the content’, and *vice versa* (p. 22).

One issue that makes (ND) hard to grasp is that, while it seems to be a claim about our *attention* to representational works, Morris sometimes considers it as concerning the *nature* of their content and medium (e.g., p. 137). His idea could be that, because of that nature, our attention is as (ND) states – but this is not discussed. Still, it would be interesting if the natures of content and medium are such that, say, attending to one can be a way of attending to the other. If this is what Morris has in mind when asserting (ND), it would seem analogous to certain cases from the attention literature: that attending to what someone says can be a way of attending to them, or that attending to the colour of something can be a way of attending to that thing. Relating to such cases from the attention literature might thus have helped to clarify (ND), as well as make it seem less controversial than how Morris presents it.

As a general claim holding for paintings, photographs and novels, (ND) is hard to grasp also because the notion of ‘content’ never is defined generally. This issue does, however, not apply to the art-form-specific readings of it. As applied to painting, Morris explains that ‘content’ includes ‘whatever, on a Wollheimian account, we may be said to *See-In* [a painting]’, such as ‘the face in [the] Rembrandt portrait [of Hendrickje Stoffels]’ (p. 22). Thus, an example of what (ND) means for painting is that one can attend to both the paint and to the face without distraction. This is *not* to be understood on the model of a ‘twofoldness’ thesis, which Wollheim famously advocates. Morris’s point seems to be that there are not two separate ‘folds’ of our experience – one of something present (the paint) and one of something absent (the face) – but rather that the paint and the face ‘occupy the same oddly timeless time’ (p. 42).

However, contrary to what Morris claims, I think the ‘content’ of painting as the term is used in (ND) is *not* what on a Wollheimian account is Seen-In. For what is Seen-In is for instance, a face, like the face of Hendrickje Stoffels. And then (ND) would be rejecting that attending to things like a face is inevitably a distraction from attending to the paint. That is not what Morris would like (ND) to reject, or at least not all of it. He would also like (ND) to reject an implicit commitment of, for instance, the Experienced Resemblance view. That view does not claim that we attend to a face; we attend to what is experienced as a resemblance of a face. What Morris would like (ND) to do, it seems, is to reject a general way of thinking about content and medium as two separate things fighting for our attention. It is not straightforward to formulate a notion of content that can serve this purpose even just for the isolated case of painting, because it would have to be a very general notion that all of the dominant approaches, as well as Morris’s own view, can relate to either by rejecting or accepting ND.

Bracketing for now what (ND) means, let us look at its role and justification in Morris’s book. A key role is to constrain the space of solutions to Morris’s paradoxes of painting, photography and novels. If a solution is in tension with ND, it is not phenomenologically plausible, Morris claims. In order to convince his reader of this, Morris provides various descriptions of the phenomenology of seeing paintings, photographs and novels. For instance, he claims that if (ND) is not true, which means that distraction from the content is inevitable if attending to the medium, then the painter ‘can only properly see the content of their own painting – in an

everyday sense, what they're painting – by not attending to the medium' (p. 25). One problem with this way of arguing for (ND) is that the descriptions seem to rest on controversial assumptions about the relationship between vision and attention. In the quotation rendered, it seems to be assumed that if being distracted from something (e.g., the content) because attending to something else (e.g., the medium), which for Morris means attending less well to it (p. 22), then one cannot 'properly see' it. Perhaps a notion of 'proper seeing' for which this holds true can be defended. Then the question is why someone who rejects (ND) is committed to it. But at least for the notion of seeing, it is far from clear that attending less well to something prevents seeing it. Partly for this reason, I think those who are said to reject (ND), such as Lopes (2005), would not recognise their view in Morris's descriptions. It also makes the descriptions seem shaky as justifications for (ND), which is unfortunate given the many and fundamental roles ND plays in the book.

In the discussion of photography, (ND) is first used to remove an obstacle to there being a paradox of photography, namely Walton's (1984) transparency view (pp. 80-101). Then it is used to argue that there *is* a paradox. Morris writes that (ND) 'seems to rule out dissolving the appearance of paradox by taking 'that' to refer to different things' (p. 129) in, e.g., 'That's a face; and that's not a real face'. Thus, (ND) does not just constrain solutions to the paradox, but also generates it. To my mind, this makes it less clear why those who hold views contrary to (ND) according to Morris should be worried about the paradox.

Finally, another key role (ND) plays in the discussion of photography and novels is that of motivating the real likeness view. Morris's claim, in both discussions, is that the fact that he can state analogues of (C1) and (C2), and that (ND) applies to the art form in question, makes it natural to look for a real likeness view, since that kind of view has been shown to constitute the best response to the paradox in the case of painting (pp. 129, 170).

3. The real likeness view

Morris's solution to his paradoxes of painting, photography and novels is to posit a 'real likeness' which removes the appearance of contradiction in (C1) and (C2) without being in tension with (ND). In the case of painting, he explains that a real likeness will be, e.g., a '*painted face*'. What is a 'painted face', such that it dissolves the paradox thus? The terminology can cause confusion, since one might think that a painted face is painted, or that it is a face with paint on it, or that it is a painting of a face. But it is none of these. Rather, it has the following two key features.

1) A painted face is made of paint, even though it need not be merely physical. How is that possible, one might wonder. Is not paint merely physical? No, not merely, according to Morris. The paint can include, e.g., the way the brush is used boldly or tentatively, Morris explains, and this 'reaches beyond mere physical constitution' (p. 64). This is the sense in which a painted face is 'worked in paint', as (C2ii) requires.

2) Although it is not a real face (as (C1ii) requires), a painted face is nevertheless 'somehow' or 'in a way' a face (as (C1i) and (C2i) require). It 'really exists' (p. 54) and 'is a unified whole in virtue of its parts and features being normatively independent' (p. 67). But what makes it 'somehow' a face? Morris's answer seems to be: 'I take it that we just do treat painted things as somehow faces, and that we do this on the basis of resemblance' (p. 72). Given this, the appearance of paradox vanishes, for there is no conflict between being somehow a face in the sense of resembling a real face, and yet not being a real face.

Superficially, resemblance seems key to Morris's view. While most other resemblance theories of depiction claim that the picture's *surface* resembles what is depicted, Morris claims that he, like Briscoe (2016), holds a 'deep resemblance' view. It is 'deeper' in the sense that not just the surface, but something seen in it, resembles what is depicted. Sadly, Morris does not say how his view differs from Briscoe's, except for that there are overlaps (fn. 11, p. 74). However, he specifies what resemblance is supposed to do in his account: it is to explain 'what has to be true of something in a painting for it to be, in a way, a face' (p. 67). What has to be true of it is this: 'it must evoke in us a response which is, in an intelligible way, similar to a response to a real [face]' (p. 71). This response is, for instance, to look into the eyes and hold the gaze of the painted face. Thus, what does the work that resemblance is supposed to do in Morris's account is, in the end, similarity between our responses. For this reason, it is unclear to me that a resemblance between a painted face and a real face does any work in Morris's account of painting. This impression is strengthened by the fact that what it is about a painted face that can resemble a real face never is explained (although it is claimed that it is a 'as-a-whole-resemblance' (p. 69) or 'gestalt-resemblance' (70), and that it is a feature of how things seem to us (p. 71)).

Although it is unclear that Morris holds a deep resemblance view as Briscoe does, I think their views have something important in common. Briscoe thinks that pictures present us with virtual models in a phenomenally three-dimensional pictorial space, and that they depict objects and scenes that these models resemble. While Morris is concerned with paintings and photographs, and not pictures in general, he likewise *posits an entity* – not a virtual model, but a real likeness – *that differs from what is depicted and from the picture surface, is seen in the painting, and has a vital representational role* (for Morris: to explain why the painting is a painting of, say, a face). Briscoe and Morris are not alone in accounting for representation in pictures or paintings in this general way. What we might call 'the perceived view' of depiction has it that we *see* (rather than see-in, have an illusion of, see a resemblance of, or imagine) something present in a picture. As Morris puts it: 'we see the face in the Rembrandt portrait with just the same simple perception as we see the paint' (p. 43). *What* is seen differs between different versions of this general view, but all agree that it is something additional to the picture's surface and the depicted object. For instance, Nanay (2016) thinks we see a three-dimensional object that the picture surface visually encodes. Wiesing (2009) thinks we see an 'image object' that is 'artificially present' in pictures. Aasen (2015; 2016) thinks we see an indeterminate and general entity present in 'pictorial space'. And, in the case of photographs, Martin (2012) thinks we see an appearance not exemplified by the photography's surface. Pictorial or photographic representation is then explained by recourse to these various entities. It would have been helpful if Morris discussed some of these views, or ones like them. By positioning his view thus, several clarificatory questions that his discussion raises – at least on my reading – might have been answered. Let me just briefly indicate a couple of the issues I have in mind.

As abovementioned, Morris claims that real likenesses 'really exist'. What contrast is the word 'really' signalling here, and as what do they exist? Real likenesses could exist as mere appearances, as Wiesing (2009) and Martin (2012) have argued in the case of pictures and photographs respectively. That would seem consistent with Morris's idea that a painted face (which is a real likeness) is a visibly unified whole (p. 61). But it may not be consistent with his rejection of the alternative version of his view, which is just like his own except for that 'there is no such thing in reality as a painted face' and 'it *merely* seems to us like that' (p. 75). Whether Morris here rejects a view about illusions of real likenesses or mere appearances of them is not clear to me. It is also not clear what the claim that they exist adds (not to mention the claim that they *really* exist). Perhaps part of what he has in mind is that real likenesses have,

as Aasen (2015) has argued, a presence, which justifies saying that we *see* them, and not merely that we have a visual experience of them. When he talks of looking into the eyes of persons seen in the paintings (e.g., p. 47), he might be thinking that these persons are present to be seen. This still leaves open what the nature of these persons is: are they, say, universals (Aasen 2015), atemporal entities (Aasen 2020), visually encoded (Nanay 2018), and/or presented in a phenomenal three-dimensional space (Briscoe 2016)? Answering questions like this might have helped to clarify what is meant by, for instance, claiming that painted faces ‘seem to inhabit some shadow world’ compared to faces (p. 74), and to square this with the claim that they really exist.

While further clarity is one purpose, a more important purpose served by relating to similar views is to increase awareness of the newly somewhat popular ‘perceived view’ in the depiction literature, of which Morris’s is an instance. The general view holds much promise, I think. But a common effort to identify it and versions of it, apart from my rudimentary classification above and elsewhere (Aasen 2015), is required if the view is to bear fruits. In this spirit, I take the liberty of departing from Morris’s terminology and interpreting his ideas quite freely but charitably in order to consider the question: What might Morris’s contribution to the general perceived view be?

My sense is that this comes from his thoughts surrounding the (ND) thesis. As part of this, he seems to think of the entity that is seen in the picture (e.g., a painted face) as sculpted, and, in my reading, as on a par with reliefs. The material that reliefs are made of stands out from a surface in sculpture-like forms. That feature makes them *unlike* paintings if one (like me) thinks of ‘pictorial space’ – a space at the other side of the window-like plane that a picture’s surface might be seen as constituting – as having an uncrossable border to the physical world. Given that, the part of a relief that stands out from the surface seems to be at the wrong side of that border in order for it to be part of the things seen in the picture. But that is *not* so on Morris’s understanding, I believe. For him, I imagine, the real likenesses we see in a relief – as well as in a painting – are all on spectator’s side of the border I have been thinking about. They are sculpted in marble or paint, although not fully voluminous. And while they are partly physical, there is also a non-physical dimension, in that, e.g., the tentativeness with which the paint has been applied by the artist is part of what we see. I think this conception of the entity that is seen in the painting is an interesting and new contribution to the general perceived view. It gives that entity a special presence, not *in* the painting or its pictorial space (as I and probably also Nanay and Wiesing think of it), but rather as *constituted by* the physical and non-physical things, facts, emotions or actions of which the picture is made.

I have focussed on Morris’s view of paintings. However, as a final note, let me mention how physicality also – and surprisingly – is important in his discussion of novels. His idea here is that there is something made of words (rather than paint) – a ‘character’ (rather than a painted thing) – which resembles the kind of thing it somehow is (e.g., a face or a person) and therefore represents. How is that possible? Morris’s answer is complicated, but a key claim is that language in novels always has a potential for being performed, a potential that is visibly and audibly realised in plays. Hence, Morris thinks a thing made of words can resemble a person: if its potential for audibility was realized, it would sound like a person, since a person would speak them (p. 194). He also thinks words can resemble, say, a horse, because the audible sounds that would result from speaking them resembles the horse’s movement or poise (pp. 195-204). To my mind, these ideas raise many questions. However, the point for now is simply that, while the characters in novels are not actually physically manifest, as Morris seems to

think the painted things in paintings partly are, their potential for such manifestation is what facilitates representation also in novels, according to Morris.*

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