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Photograph of Old Faithful Geyser Erupting in Yellowstone National Park from Ansel Adams Photographs of National Parks and Monuments, compiled 1941 - 1942, documenting the period ca. 1933 – 1942 (image courtesy of Department of the Interior. National Park Service. Branch of Still and Motion Pictures)

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# *Contents*

# PHOTOGRAPHY AND MUSIC
# ANSEL ADAMS MEETS CAGE, RICHTER AND RICHARDS

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*Ansel Adams pointed to an analogy between photography and music, in particular to similarities between, on the one hand, negatives and prints in photography, and, on the other hand, scores and performances in classical music. Dawn M. Wilson uses her 'multi-stage view' of photography to* (*among other things*) *make the analogy more precise. She also invites others to expand on the analogy. In this piece I do so by, first, discussing darkness in photography and silence in music; and, second, covers or versions in music and in photography.*

## 1 Introduction

In what ways is photography similar to music? This might seem like a risky question, as – as Plato pointed out, or at least what Plato lets Protagoras and Parmenides say – everything is like everything else, and in endless ways. Ansel Adams, Dawn M. Wilson reminds us (2024), pointed to an analogy between, on the one hand, scores and performances in classical music, and on the other, negatives and prints in photography. Wilson uses this analogy to further illuminate her 'multi-stage' account of photography, and invites others to expand on the analogy between music and photography. In this short piece, I take up the invitation to do so by discussing some puzzling cases in music and photography: (i) darkness in photography and silence in music; and (ii) covers or versions in music and photography.

## 2 What is it for a picture to be a photograph? An orthodox/traditional view

What is it for a picture to be a photographic picture? For, surely, photographs are pictures, but of a special kind, although some might seem to have denied that photographs are pictures.[1] The following is a quote from Fred Dretske (2003), and it is useful partly because it is not from a discussion primarily about photography. Instead, Dretske takes how photography allegedly works as an uncontroversial datum to cast light on how perception works.

> Think about photographs. What makes a photograph of a yellow station wagon a photograph *of* a yellow station wagon—indeed, a photograph of *my* (not your) yellow station wagon—are facts about the causal origin of the image on the paper. If the film from which this image was produced was exposed by light reflected from my yellow station wagon [...] then it is a picture of my

1 Roger Scruton (1981) suggests that a photograph 'presents' its subject matter, but does not 'represent' it.

> yellow station wagon. If the light came from your car, then it is a picture of your car, and it would be a picture of your car even if it were indistinguishable from a picture of mine—a perfect forgery, as it were. What makes a photograph of x is not that it looks like x. It may not. [...] A photograph of a yellow station wagon taken in funny light, at an unusual angle, and at great distance may not look like a yellow station wagon at all. [...] What makes it a picture of a yellow station wagon – in fact, a picture of *my* (not your) yellow station wagon – is simply the fact that it is my (not your) car that is at the other end of an appropriate causal chain. It is my car that (via camera, film, developing, etc.) affected the paper. (Dretske 2003, 156-7)

Three claims from this quote are worth highlighting in particular, all of which I think are orthodoxy, or at least a traditional view. First, photography is a causal medium: only things that have causally interacted with a photo can be part of the photograph's content, or what it is of. Second—and this is more visible in a footnote (fn. 3)—photography is a *merely* causal medium, where the intentions of a photographer play a different role than those of a picture-maker making a hand-made image. That is, what shows up in a photograph does so independently of what a photographer thinks about what she sees through the viewfinder, an idea carefully developed in Kendall Walton's (1984) so-called *transparency thesis*. Third, Dretske holds that what a photograph is a photograph of has little to do with how it *looks*, and instead, causal chains matter more. Dretske refers to Nelson Goodman's (1976) example of a photograph of a black horse. The horse cannot be seen in the picture, but which is still, allegedly, part of the photograph's content: "If I tell you I have a picture of a certain black horse, and then I produce a snapshot in which he has come out a light speck in the distance, you can hardly convict me of lying; but you may well feel that I have misled

you" (Goodman 1976, 29).[2]

## 3 What is it for a picture to be a photograph? Less orthodox views 1

Less orthodox views of photography might take issue, in particular, with the role causation is given in the (orthodox/traditional) view exemplified by the quote from Dretske. Again, on traditional theories of photography, only things that have caused a photographic image can be what the photograph is of. Two kinds of apparent photographic content might be counterexamples: fictions and absences, respectively. According to Paloma Atencia-Linares (2012), photographs can be photographs of fictional beings and scenes. For instance, Wanda Wultz' *Io + Gatto* (1932) is, on Atencia-Linares view, a photograph of a cat-woman, although the cat-woman did not cause the image; fictional as she is, she cannot cause anything. But, so Atencia-Linares contends, as the image is produced by 'photographic means', what we can see in the image—i.e. the cat-woman—is what the image is a photograph of.[3]

Absences pose a similar problem, as their causal efficacy is somewhat unclear. Can, say, a hole in my pocket—something not being there—be the cause of my losing my keys? We do at least speak this way, sometimes, but again, a hole is a kind of nothingness and nothingness and causation might seem to be an unholy alliance. But, photographs seem to be able to capture things not being there. Umbo's *Mystery of the Street* (1928) is a photograph of shadows. Shadows are plausibly best thought of as being absences of light and it is unclear whether light *not being there* can cause anything. Physical objects can be seen, and indeed photographed, because they have surfaces which can act upon our

2 Walton would possibly disagree, as one reason photographs are transparent, on his view, is that they transmit what he calls 'real similarities'. See, Walton (1984, 270–273).

3 Gregory Currie (2008) argues that photographs can be of ficta, but not by photographic means. For further discussion of the 'fictional incompetence' or otherwise of photography, see also Dan Cavedon-Taylor (2010).

sensory organs (or on a camera), but, shadows have no surfaces. As Roy Sorensen puts it, "no part of a shadow acts. Shadows are creatures of omission. Shadows are where the inaction is" (2008, 74).

Other absences might seem even more difficult to capture by photographic means. A shadow, even if causally inefficacious, still has a 'look', or an 'outline shape'.[4] Other absences lack such 'looks'. In 1993–1994, Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong was demolished. It used to be an extremely densely populated area of Kowloon, with a history dating back to The Song Dynasty. An estimated fifty thousand people lived in basically one city block—roughly 7 acres. Today one can go and see, and indeed take photographs of, the absent Walled City. What is left of previously one of the most densely populated areas on earth is an absence and nothing to see of the Walled City, except its absence.[5]

These examples of possible photographic content might be problems for the kind of orthodox or traditional view embodied in the quote from Dretske. A more fundamental criticism from less traditional theorists would be how Dretske (and others) thinks of what he puts in brackets: '(via camera, film, developing, etc.)'; or, perhaps better, taking issue with the fact that traditional views put these elements of photography precisely in brackets, leading to a 'snapshot view' of photography.

## 4 What is it for a picture to be a photograph? Less orthodox views 2: lights, camera, action—and events

### *4.1 Lights and events*

As an alternative and in opposition to the traditional, snapshot view of photography, Dawn M. Wilson has in several papers, including the one in the present issue, developed a multi-stage account of photography.

4 For an account of depiction in terms of 'outline shape', see Robert Hopkins (1998).

5 For further suggestions regarding 'absence tourism' with respect to seeing and photographing absences, see, Roy Sorensen (2018).

Two details of Wilson's picture of photography are: first, that a photograph's origin lies in a 'photographic event', which is, roughly speaking, light-sensitive material being exposed to light from a scene, not yet resulting in a photograph proper, but in a 'register'; second, another stage is 'rendering', resulting in what is a visible image produced from the 'register'.[6]

What is a photographic event? As Wilson puts the idea in the current paper, "[t]he production of the image is a multi-stage process that necessarily includes the registration of light during a photographic event, while extending, concertina-fashion, to activities before and after that event." (2024, 41)

Is light *necessary* for producing a photograph? I think it is not, and here an example relating to Adams' analogy between photography and music might be illuminating, although it is about darkness and silence.

John Cage famously wrote a piece of music consisting of 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence, in three movements, i.e., *4'33"*.[7] When David Tudor sat down at the piano and started 'playing' Cage's piece in New York in 1952, nothing much could be heard, as it is arguably completely silent. Some sixty years later, a death metal cover of Cage's piece was recorded by the band Dead Territory. In their version of Cage's piece, nothing can be heard, either. I played this recording to students in a course on photography, apropos the question whether there could be photos of absences. Or rather, I *attempted* to play the recording, but the AV system did not work, so my students could not hear anything of the piece,

6 For a recent version of these ideas, apart from the one in the current paper in this Journal, see Wilson (2022, especially 144-148).

7 Is silence really all what this piece is of, or consists of? Some would/have argue(d) that the piece is also of environmental or 'accidental' sounds. For a recent illuminating discussion, and a defence of 4'33'' as being silent, see Julian Dodd (2018). Dodd argues that 4'33 is not music, but instead conceptual art. It matters little in the present context whether it is or is not music. Whatever it is, it is silent. I use the example only as an illustration of the difference between representing nothing, and not representing anything. Nothing much hangs on whether 4'33 is music, for my purposes.

not even its silence. The students were disappointed, and rightfully so, because all they could hear was the silence in the lecture hall, not the recorded silence in Dead Territory's studio. Jonathan Westphal points out that there is a difference between a recording of an absence, and an absence of recording, although the result might be indistinguishable, i.e. silence (Westphal 2011, 193). As to the failed attempt to let students hear the silence in Dead Territory's studio, one might add that there is a difference between a playback of an absence, and an absence of playback.

A photographer, inspired by Cage, might take a photograph of a pitch-dark night sky or, perhaps even better, of a completely dark object. A completely dark object absorbs all light, so there would seem to be no causal traffic between it and the resulting photograph. I submit that the envisioned photograph is indeed a photograph, despite no photographic event having occurred, if this implies that light has to be involved. But maybe Wilson's notion of a photographic event should not be understood as its having to involve light, or a registration of a 'light-image'; maybe it could also involve the registration of a 'darkness-image'. The production of the envisioned absolutely dark photo is still *sensitive* to light: had light been in the scene, it would have shown up in the photo. The photo is sensitive to the absence of light, and not, for instance, of sound. It records darkness, but it cannot record silence.[8]

### *4.2 Events and actions*

I will now consider the notion of rendering in Wilson's account and how actions result in visible images stemming from the photographic event. It is the distinction between a register and a rendering which provides a more solid theoretical foundation to Adams' suggested analogy between on the one hand scores and performances in music, and on the other, negatives and prints in photography. Let us grant that renderings

8 For discussion of photographs of darkness and dark things, see Sorensen (2008, 29, 206) and Pettersson (2012; 2017).

can be, according to the suggested analogy, performances of a work. A question that arises is: how 'far away', as it were, from the register can the rendering be to still count as the same work? In line with Wilson's invitation to expand on Adams' analogy, I will take a detour via the topic of covers in music.

An intriguing case of covers in music is British band The Verve's 'Bitter Sweet Symphony'. Although the song was first presented as an original, new song by The Verve, its composers were said to be The Verve's Richard Ashcroft alongside Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones. The short explanation of the credits to Jagger and Richards goes as follows. In 1965, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards wrote the song 'The Last Time', their first original A-single in the UK. Not long after, the Andrew Oldham Orchestra (formed by previous manager of The Rolling Stones, Andrew Loog Oldham) recorded 'The Last Time'; an instrumental (more precisely, orchestral) version of it which does not sound very much like the original, adding, for example, a strings section not included in the original version. The Verve was allowed to sample parts of the latter instrumental version but, according to lawsuits, incorporated too much, and in the end had to include Jagger and Richards as the writers of the song. (Only recently, in 2019, were royalties given 'back' to The Verve.)[9]

Why would or should 'Bitter Sweet Symphony' be said to be composed by Jagger and Richards? One reason would seem to be that the song originated in an event, namely a sound event—the recording, or registering of 'The Last Time' as played by The Rolling Stones—and then rendered by The Verve into something very different. And despite the fact that what The Verve rendered into a song sounds very different from the original, it was (so the initial lawsuits said) still that song.

One may be reminded, here, of comparable issues in relation to photography. Recall Goodman's claim (cited by Dretske) that a photograph

9 For details regarding this event, and other details of the story, see Tsioulcas (2019).

does not need to look like much of what it is of in order to be a photograph of it. So long as there is, in Dretske's idiom, an appropriate causal chain leading to the image, it matters less how the image looks. Similarly, one could argue, so long as there is an appropriate causal chain leading to 'Bitter Sweet Symphony' from The Rolling Stones' 'The Last Time', it matters less whether the two pieces sound much alike in order for them to be the same song or not.

The question as to whether a photograph needs to look like what it is a photograph of, therefore, has a history, but has received new momentum precisely in relation to Wilson's multi-stage account of photography. Again, on the multiple-stage account, first a register is recorded; another stage is rendering so that a photograph proper is produced. As indicated above, one question that arises is what constraints could plausibly govern the rendering, so that it is still a rendering of the register. A relevant case is Gerhard Richter's image *Betty*.

In 1978, Richter took a photograph of his daughter Betty. Ten years later, by projecting a slide of the photograph and tracing the image, he rendered a visual image by means of painting on canvas. Is the resulting image a photograph? Richter himself thought so, and Dominic McIver Lopes, in his discussion of this picture, agrees (2016, 89-91). The information registered in a photographic event can be made into visual displays in various ways, for example, in a darkroom, via a printer and, as in the case of Richter, by projecting a slide and applying paint to a canvas. Of course, Richter's way of producing the display differs from, say, a smartphone generating an image, or a printer, in being mind-dependent. But this, so Lopes contends, is not decisive for the question of whether the resulting image is a photograph, so long as Richter was 'guided by' the original register. How much, and what kind of guidance is needed for an image to be a rendering of a register? Diarmuid Costello offers the following challenge regarding how far away a rendering can be from a register, and still be a rendering of that register:

> Imagine the following case: Using an opaque projector, Richter projects a postcard of Kölner Dom onto a canvas and sets about painting in the image. Almost finished, he begins to 'blur' the image, by dragging solvent across its wet surface. [...] The resulting image is a largely gray monochrome [...]. Like *Betty*, it originates in a photographic event [...] But if it is a photograph, what is it a photograph of? Can it still be described as a photograph—let alone 'a photograph of Kölner Dom'? (Costello 2017, 446)

Is the envisioned photograph *of* The Kölner Dom? I think we might be of two minds here, as were lawyers in The Verve case. Origin and causality seemingly played an important role, but matters were actually more complex than in my short version of the Bitter Sweet Symphony story, as similarity did get involved in the lawsuits. A musicologist involved in the lawsuit said the vocals of 'Bittersweet Symphony' resembled a half-time version of the melody of 'The Last Time'. But, I would think no one would have noticed this had it not been for the causal story of the production of 'Bittersweet Symphony'. With respect to Costello's Kölner Dom, a plausible thought, I think, is that it is *not* of the Dom, as it does not *look like* the Dom. But here we are back with Plato's thought that everything is like everything, and in endless ways, brought up earlier. One could view this stand-off of intuitions, if it is one, as what Patrick Maynard (2007) calls – in a different context of photography debates – a (Platonic) 'photo aporia'. The Platonic aporia is not really a 'no way', but an invitation for others to think more. I believe the 'way out' of the possible impasse is to think of photographs necessarily involving capturing the 'looks' of things[10]—unless, as in the case of absent Walled City, they do not display any look.

Looks do matter in photography.[11] But sometimes nothing can be seen. In the following section, I move on to cases of music and photographs

10 Cf. Costello's discussion of his imagined Richter photo (Costello 2017, 447).

11 On looks in photography, see Pettersson (2012) and the references therein.

where we apprehend nothingness: holes in pictures and holes in sound.

## 5 Silent film: Holes in sound and vision

As Cage's *4'33"* arguably illustrates, music can be absolutely silent and, so I have suggested, photographs can be absolutely dark, and 'of' that darkness that they record, or register, though being, as the etymology has it, 'light writing'. More situated silences in music often play a role for rhythm and indeed the sound of the music, in being absences of sound, or pauses. Think, for instance, of the opening bars of AC/DC's 'Highway to Hell'. The song would not sound as it does sound if it did not include the pauses between the chords, and if we did not hear those situated silences.[12]

Pauses in music, or in any temporally extended sound sequence, can fruitfully be seen as holes in that sound.[13] Are there comparable 'pauses' in photographs? According to one influential idea, images, photographic or otherwise, are 'saturated' in a way other representations, e.g., mental imagery or words, might not be. Rudolf Arnheim expresses this idea in the following way:

> Within the frame of a painting every spot is positively present, first as a material part of the paint-covered canvas and secondly as a substantial element of the pictorial construction. In a completed painting, the units of the composition vary as to their apparent density and also as to their spatial position within the figure-ground hierarchy, but none of them may give us the impression of an empty gap, a hole torn in the pictorial tissue. (Arnheim 1948, 33)

I think Arnheim is overly optimistic in claiming that 'every spot is positively present'. Consider Fan Ho's *A Sail* (1957). There are dark spots in

12 Here I am heavily indebted to Ian Phillips' (2013) discussion of hearing pauses in music.

13 See again Phillips (2013, especially 341).

the image, either because the fishing boat cast a shadow on the water, or they are what Sorensen calls 'para-reflections' (Sorensen 2008, Ch. 7). It would depend on where the sun is in relation to the boat and it is difficult to tell from the photograph alone. Whatever the case may be, there is a sense in which the image is silent about portions of the sea, namely whatever else is located in those areas are invisible. One could of course say that this example does not challenge Arnheim's claim that in a picture 'every spot is positively present', but if so, one has to say that some spots that are positively present represent something absent, at least absences of light.

A clearer challenge to Arnheim's claim is Ned Block's (1983) suggestion, developed by Dominic Lopes (1996) in the context of philosophy of depiction, that images may be 'non-committal' to various portions of a scene. An illustrating case might be a tattoo on one's skin, say, an 'Ouroboros Snake' tattoo. In such an image, we see the snake biting its own tail. Inside the circle made by the shape of the snake, there is a hole, of sorts. Is it a 'hole in the pictorial tissue'? I am not sure. It does not seem implausible to view the absence as depicted empty space, which the tattoo artist depicts by not making any holes in the tissue/flesh of the tattooed person. But then a question arises as to whether empty space is also depicted around the snake, where the artist has not made any marks either.[14]

A third kind of 'pause' is where the 'pictorial tissue' is indeed torn, as in scenes from Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966). This pause does not really challenge Arnheim's claim, which, again, concerns 'completed' images, but it is nonetheless interesting in its own right. The film, roughly halfway through, splits apart, starts burning, and there is nothing more to see for a while except a hole in the film. This is really a pause in the picture, in the sense that the film is no longer, in Block's

14 For further discussion of this issue, see Pettersson (2018).

idiom, committal to anything, not even absences.[15]

## 6 Coda: Covers in photography, and concluding (negative) remarks

Covers in music can be of various kinds.[16] Some versions take on a new meaning because they sound very different from the original. The Californian band The Red House Painters made a wrist-slasher of Kiss' 'Shock Me'. The lyrics 'Shock me, make me feel better/ Shock me, put on your black leather / Shock me, we can come together', when sung accompanied by melancholy chords, take on a significantly different meaning than when sung by Ace Frehley in Kiss' original metal version. At other times, a cover version might take on a new meaning despite sounding very similar to the original simply due to context—e.g. due to the gender or race of the respective artists.[17] Adams, as Wilson discusses, was happy to have other people to render/perform his negatives/registers in different ways, resulting in appreciably varying renderings. But photographs can take on different meanings even though they look more or less indistinguishable from previous renderings, and are thus similar to the kind of musical cover where context changes the meaning of the piece. One case in point is Sherrie Levine's 'After Walker Evans'. What Levine did was to photograph photographs in a catalogue of Evans, so Levine's series—if it should be seen as a 'photographic cover', and I think it could usefully be seen as such—is perhaps best seen as a cover, where the context (historical factors etc.) gives new meaning to the original. As Stephen Davies puts it, the works 'differ in their *contents* [...] Sherrie Levine's photographs make an art-political point about the fact that women typically gain entry to the gallery via the works of

15 I am indebted to a discussion that John Kulvicki initiated on social media regarding holes in pictures.

16 For illuminating discussion see, P.D. Magnus (2022).

17 For interesting discussion regarding these issues (for instance, of covers of Bob Dylan's 'Just Like A Woman' by female artists), see Magnus (2022, 61-62, Ch. 3).

male artists, whereas the works she appropriates have no such content' (2006, 63). Again, Adams' analogy primarily addresses how various performances can result in different looks of a composition; Levine's images have more or less the same 'look' as Evans' photos, but they 'say' something completely different.

I will conclude with some 'negative remarks' about what I have not done in this article. Wilson uses the analogy to draw attention to the creative aspects of print-making, and is less interested in the more ontological aspects of the analogy upon which I have focused. Also, I have not said enough about Wilson's 'multi-stage view' of photography, nor about what a photographic event is, and whether light is needed for such an event to occur. Instead, I have mostly focused on the darker and 'silent' bits that might go into the photographic process. Still, I hope that what I have provided is sufficiently similar to, or at least inspired by, Wilson's article, so one can possibly hear some of Wilson's themes through my renditions of them here.[18]

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