Pettersson, Mikael (2016). "Capturing Shadows: On Photography, Causation, and Absences," Australasian Journal of Philosophy. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2016.1197957



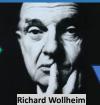
Though philosophers take negative things to be unpopular items to add to their ontology, we talk about them as if they are causally efficacious

But how can silences or holes be causally efficacious?

Artists use absences (silence, absences of letters, holes, photos of shadows [=absences of light], or absences of items one would expect [twin towers post 9/11]) often.

Question Are absence causally efficacious such that or can take photograph: them?

Investigate ways to answer the question & shed some light or the idea that photography is at base a causal medium.



What we see in a photograph is in arge part a matter of what engaged in the right way with the causal processes realized by the camera.

While paintings and their subjects stand in an intentional relation, the photographic relation is merely causal.



Photographs only depict those particulars which they are causally related to in an appropriate manner.



It must be produced mechanically or automatically, i.e., be a beliefindependent counterfactually dependent medium, or, perhaps, depend on the manipula tion of a surface by light

Final question: What are sufficient conditions for an image to be a photograph (as opposed to a realistic painting, say) of something?

I have no full response, but a suggestion.

Another response: The expression 'being a photograph of' is vague.

With respect to cases where perspectival dependence fails (as, also, in cases of photographs of photographs), our intuitions are not as firm as in clear cases.

One response: Such photographs are really of the mirror. They convey information about the object yet are not of it.

This fits views on which seeing



Not everything that causes a This photograph photograph (e.g., pressing of Picasso the shutter release button or drawing a a cat knocking over the centaur with an camera and bringing about a electric light, is it photograph of the cat) is part a photo of a of what it is then of. centaur? Not on the causal

There is no centaur, so it can't be the cause of a photo.

theory.

Well, yes,

photographs |

incompetent

like that

are fictionally



I think that's fine. I do worry, however,

that the causal theory rules out that

pictures can be of real things that are

causally inert... like shadows, which seem

to be causally inert absences of light.

Way 3: Photographs cannot be of absences of objects. Even if they may _ help cause the photograph, such absences don't have a look.

If so, then photos can convey the information that some thing or other is absent, but not by being of such absences

Suggestion: Photographic content has a factual and a perspectival dimension It counterfactually depends on both

Anticipated objection: What if, using iterated mirrors, etc., one takes a photograph of an object such that perspectival dependence fails? Surely, the photograph is still of that object, but my view implies otherwise

If so, then *perspectival dependence* may not be a necessary condition after all.



(also Mikael Pettersson

Way 2: Photographs can be of shadows not because they cause them (for on a production view, they don't) just because the latter have a look (rejects the counterfactual theory).

This yields a pseudo-causal theory of photographic content. On it, shadows don't function as what causes shadow-parts of photographs (SPP). Shadows, like SPP are caused by what casts the relevant shadow (by blocking light), but that thing need not be part of the photograph.

On the basis of this view, there are three ways to deal with absence photography.

Should we really

accept that what a

photograph

depicts is not

objective, but

relative to the

photographer 's

thoughts (and,

perhaps, those of

different viewers)?

Way 1: Since photographs counterfactually depend on shadows in both respects, they can be of shadows (accepts the counterfactual theory).

Shadows (absences of light) are located, concrete entities with shape & size properties, so they afford perspectives & looks (the absent Eiffel tower, in contrast, doesn't have such a location, properties, or a look).

Side remark: "to cause", here, mean "to exert power on something so that it changes; to produce an effect" [production view].

Unlike material objects, shadows don't reflect, absorb, block, or emit light. They can't act on photographs.

Such an acausal theory concerns the

content of photographs [it is not the view

that causation has nothing to do with

how photographs come into being].

According to it, photographic content is

not restricted to what causes an image

If photographing causally inert absences seems at least conceivable, should we have an acausal theory of

Atencia-Linares

photographs?

In the early days, people modeled thinking about photographs somewhat metaphorically on thinking about shadows.

More importantly: many photographers focus on shadows as their primary subjects.

Denying that there are photos of absences seems implausible in the case of shadows.



If we accept this view, the causal theory of photography looks very different from what it is typically taken to be.

Typically, photography (as opposed to paintings, say) is taken to be a merely causal medium. To what a photograph depicts (as opposed to what a painting, say, depicts), all that matters is what causes it, not the intentions of the photographer or what they think they see (after they have pointed the camera somewhere, that is).

On the view proposed, the difference between paintings and photographs collapses.

Suggestion: Understand causation not as production, but, with David Lewis, as counterfactual dependence. On this view, shadows in pictures are causally efficacious in the following sense: Had the shadows not been there, the photograph would have looked different.

To say that we take this counterfactual statement to be true is to say that we think that some features of the photograph counterfactually depend on the shadows. And this is just to say, on Lewis's view (as presented), that the shadow, while it doesn't produce anything, still makes a difference to the photograph and, as such, causes (relevant parts of) it.

competent.

Photographs True, photographs can be used to represent fictional entities, but fictionally not by photographic means!

That depends on what all we count as photographic means (e.g., post-production techniques). I think a lot counts!

This solution seems too easy, is



Nāgārjuna, as we know, would disagree!

That photographic

content is objective is a

"bedrock belief

egarding photography."

Let's not give it up!

Nobody thinks that causal facts depend on our interest??? Umm...I do. thought

I. too. am

Helen Beebee

Nobody within the tradition of the metaphysics of causation thinks that causal facts depend on human-dependent norms or expectations!

There are two problems with Modification 2!

Modification 2: Absences that matter to photographic content are not of things that used to be, but of things that we reasonably expected to be there.

This modification rules out irrelevant absences of the Eiffel tower and allows in relevant absences of crime suspects.



How about the view that there are photographs of absences and that absences can be causally efficacious?

controversial, perhaps unintuitive Also, if the acausal theory is true, nothing in

the medium of photography itself seems to support our practice of treating them as evidence as to what goes on in the real world. Let's look for a less pricey solution!



This conception might let in too many things as causally efficacious. Gazillions of things are absent in any scene, and we don't want them to count as what the photograph counterfactually depends on and (thus) as what causes its features. That the Eiffel tower is absent when we take a photo of the Cathedral of Learning shouldn't matter,

Problem: This, too, is too restrictive. If we use a photograph to show that a suspect was not near the crime scene, then their absence matters, but they may never have been at the scene at all.

Modification 1: Only those absences matter that concern where something used to be.

Can we be more specific about the kinds of absences that we think do matter to what's photographed?

