NEGATIVE IMAGES: ON PHOTOGRAPHY, CAUSATION AND ABSENCES

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ABSTRACT. Many photographs seem to be images of privations, lacks and absences. Umbo's *The Mystery of the Street*, for example, is primarily a photograph of shadows, and if shadows are absences of light, this image is a photograph of absences. In a different way, some photographs of Manhattan's skyline, taken after 9/11, would seem to be photographs of the absence of the Twin Towers. But the very idea of photographs of absences is paradoxical, or at least puzzling. Photography is commonly held to be an essentially *causal medium*, and it is unclear how, or even if, absences can be causally efficacious. So can there really be photographs of absences? In this paper, I investigate various ways to unravel the puzzle.

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, but with exceptions, philosophers have been unhappy to include absences, privations, and other "negative things" in an inventory of what there is in the world. Surely, one may think, all that *is*, is positive in nature, and absences and privations—something's *not* being there—are certainly not. However, judging from how we sometimes talk, we apparently do think of such "negative things" as being real; for instance, many can apparently be seen, heard, counted and are seemingly causally efficacious: as I let my gaze wander around the tables of the café, I see Pierre's absence; I savour the silence once the air conditioner in my office has been turned off; my dentist tells me that I have three new holes in my teeth since the last visit; and, at first blush at least, the hole in my pocket is the cause of my losing my keys. Still, such "negative things" arguably have a somewhat shadowy kind of existence, and it is far from clear how we are able to engage with them and how they are able to affect us: if a hole in my pocket is, as it seems to be, *immaterial* (it is a lack of fabric at a certain spatial region), and if causal powers exclusively pertain to material "positive things," then how can the hole cause my calling the locksmith?; and if a causal theory of perception is right, and if silence is the *absence* of sound, and if, once more, causal powers only belong to "positive things," how can we hear silence, let alone savour it?

If philosophers generally have taken a sceptical stance, artists have had a softer spot for negativity and absences: John Cage's *4'33"* consists of 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence, in Georges Perec's *La Disparition*, the letter "e" is wholly absent, Robert Rauschenberg erased a drawing by de Kooning, and Michael Heizer's *North, East, South, West*, is a sculpture made of large holes in the ground. Photographers—artists and amateurs alike—

seemingly traffic in absences, too. Umbo's *The Mystery of the Street* seems to be primarily a photograph of shadows, and if shadows are absences of light, as they might be taken to be, this image is a photograph of absences. In a different way, some photographs of Manhattan's skyline, taken after 9/11, would seem to be photographs of the absence of the Twin Towers. Here, however, something paradoxical, or at least, puzzling emerges. For granted that photography is, as it is commonly held to be, a *causal medium*, and given that it is unclear how, or even if, absences can be causally efficacious, it seems just as unclear that one can have photographs of absences. And yet, the examples just mentioned seem to be precisely such photographs. In this paper, I investigate various ways to unravel the puzzle, something that will also, as I hope, shed some light on the idea that photography is at bottom a causal medium.

II. PHOTOGRAPHY, CAUSATION AND CONTENT

Photography, then, has often been conceived of as being an essentially causal medium, an idea that dates back to the inception of photography. Daguerre, for instance, talks of his invention as "not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; on the contrary it is a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself,"[1] and to the extent that such processes ultimately are causal in nature, Daguerre is arguably one of the first "causal theorists" of photography. Within what is often labelled *photography theory*, which often draws on various semiotic theories of signs, the idea that photography is fundamentally causal in its nature has at times been virtually ubiquitous. A photograph, it is said, is (in the idiom of C.S. Peirce) an index, where indexicality is ultimately understood in causal terms.[2] Many contemporary philosophers, too, subscribe to a causal theory of photography. Richard Wollheim, for instance, writes that "[w]hat or whom we correctly see in a photograph is in large part a matter of who or what engaged in the right way with the causal processes realized by the camera."[3] According to Roger Scruton, "the relation between a painting and its subject is an intentional relation while the photographic relation is merely causal."[4] Arthur Danto, furthermore, holds that "[s]omething is a photograph *of x* when it is caused by what it denotes."[5]

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[1] Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, "Daguerreotype," in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography*, (New Haven, CT.: Leete's Island Books, 1980), p. 13.
[2] For discussions of the notion the index, as it has been conceived of within "photography theory," see many of the contributions in James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory*, (New York: Routledge, 2007).
[3] Richard Wollheim, "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation," in *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1980), p. 208.
[4] Roger Scruton, "Photography and Representation," *Critical Inquiry*, 7:3 (1981), pp. 577–603, at p. 580.
[5] Arthur C. Danto, "Moving Pictures," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 4:1 (1979), pp. 1–21, at p. 8.

And Robert Hopkins claims that photographs "only depict those particulars which they are causally related to in an appropriate manner."[6]

The basic idea in all of these claims seems to be that, first, photographs can only have as their content things that have caused the images, and, second, that the way a photographic image is produced is, as Scruton puts it, *merely causal*. But there is also a third issue here, surfacing in the quotes from Hopkins and Wollheim, namely how to understand the idea of an *appropriate* causal relation. What is it for something to engage in the *right* kind of way with the causal processes realized by the camera?

There are at least two problems to solve in relation to this question, both of which have counterparts in the philosophy of perception: the *distance problem* and the *deviance problem*.[7] The distance problem concerns the obvious fact that not all causal factors leading up to the photographic image can reasonably be part of the content of the image. I point my camera towards a red hibiscus flower and press the shutter release. One crucial cause of the image's being of something red is the sun, which not only provides the illumination, but also made the flower bloom, but the image is a photograph of the flower and not the sun. So one problem, then, is to specify "where" in the causal chain—at what "distance" from the resulting image—those causes are, which are part of the photographic content, and thus qualify as *appropriate* causes.

The deviance problem regards what *kinds* of causal chains that should count as appropriate. Here is an example adapted from Catherine Abell.[8] I drop my camera on the floor, light leaks into the camera, with the miraculous result that a perfect image of my cat is formed on the film. Despite the fact that the image is the result of a process, which involves many elements of the traditional photographic process—light, camera, and light-sensitive film—most would arguably hold that this hardly qualifies as a photograph. And the reason is that there is no causal dependence between image and scene. But what if my cat pushed the camera off the shelf, thereby causing the image to appear? Then the image does causally depend on my cat, but, still, few would be willing to say that this is a *photograph of* my cat: the causal chain is deviant and simply of the wrong kind. So, what makes a causal chain qualify as being of the *right* kind?

One natural strategy would be to look at how ordinary photographs are made, and point to the various stages of the process, and say that only processes that involve the said stages count as genuinely photographic. A parenthetical remark by Dan Cavedon-Taylor points in precisely this

[6] Robert Hopkins, *Picture, Image and Experience: A Philosophical Inquiry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 74.

[7] I borrow these labels from Carolyn Price who uses them to refer to the analogous problems with respect to perception. See Carolyn Price, "Function, Perception and Normal Causal Chains," *Philosophical Studies*, 89 (1998), pp. 31–51.

[8] Catherine Abell, "Cinema as a Representational Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 50:3 (2012), pp. 273–286, at p 275.

direction. Speaking of the admissible contents of photographs, Cavedon-Taylor argues that photographs cannot be images of "particulars they fail to be appropriately causally related to (where the 'appropriate' causal relation typically involves light reflecting off the surfaces of particulars and into the camera's lens)."[9] Now, it is surely true that the photographic process, as Cavedon-Taylor puts it, *typically* involves light reflecting off the surfaces of objects and into the camera's lens, but as a constraint on the appropriate causal processes (which is arguably not how Cavedon-Taylor intended the remark) this gloss seems too restrictive. True, the red hibiscus reflects light into the camera, but if I aimed the camera towards the sun, the sun would be part of the photographic content not because of any light it reflects, but rather due to the light it *emits*. But qualifying Cavedon-Taylor's gloss by adding causation by emission would still make it too restrictive as a constraint on the right causal processes, for some objects would seem to be part of the contents of photographs without either reflecting or emitting light. Consider a photograph of a solar eclipse, like the one Warren De la Rue took of an eclipse in Spain in 1860. The sun—or at least the outer edges of it—is part of the photographic content due to the light it emits. But the photograph is also of the moon, but not because the moon reflects or emits any light, but because it *blocks* (much of) the light from the sun. So neither reflecting nor emitting light is necessary for an object to engage in the right kind of way with the causal processes involved in photography, since blocking light will often do as well.

Reflecting, emitting and blocking light are arguably the typical ways for objects to become part of photographic content as we know it. But appealing to photography *as we know it* in an attempt to specify the right kind of causal processes in photography is problematic in itself, for it seems to unwarrantedly disqualify odd or novel processes, which arguably *should* count as genuinely photographic. For instance, Nadar tells of how Balzac had confessed to an "intense fear of the Daguerrotype," due to the belief that the production of daguerreotypes involved a process of "layers of ghostlike images," or "leaflike skins laid one on top of the other … [being] removed from the body and transferred to the photograph."[10] Of course, Balzac had no real reason to worry; it might even be that Balzacian photography is physically impossible. But, surely, even if the photographic process he conceives of is *physically* impossible, it does not seem to be *conceptually* so. That is, it would seem like prejudice to disqualify the process Balzac describes as being genuinely photographic despite the fact that it involves no light being reflected, emitted, or blocked. (Or, at any rate, this would be so if Balzacian photography maintains the typical *function* of photography, and yields the right kinds of *contents*, about which more below.) And if this is correct, it suggests that a specification of the

[9] Dan Cavedon-Taylor, "In Defence of Fictional Incompetence," *Ratio*, 23:2 (2010), pp. 141–150, at p. 142.
[10] Félix Nadar, "My Life as a Photographer," trans. Thomas Repensek, *October*, 5 (1978), p. 9.

appropriate causal processes should take a more *indirect* route, than one that points to the actual elements involved in ordinary photography as we know it.

One such indirect route is to adopt and adapt the strategy Alva Noë uses to solve the analogous deviance problem with respect to perception—that is, to say which causal processes yield proper perceptual experiences. Elsewhere I have argued that, while it is somewhat unclear whether Noë's account is adequate with respect to perception, it is exactly right with respect to photography.[11] Now, I am a little less certain that it really is *exactly* right: the reason for my hesitance is the problem of absences, which I will come back to shortly. At any rate, I still think that it is almost right, and gets the desired results in most cases.

The main idea in Noë's account of the perceptual process is that perception exhibits a *dual counterfactual dependence* between one's experiences and the experienced environment (for simplicity I will focus on vision). The dual dependence stems from the (alleged) fact that perceptual experiences have a dual content: factual content and perspectival content. Consider looking at a coin from some point of view. One aspect of one's experience represents the coin as being circular and (let us assume) of a uniform silverish colour—this, in Noë's terminology, is part of the factual content of the experience, or "how things are." But beside the factual content, one's experience also has perspectival content, regarding "how things *look* from the vantage point of the perceiver."[12] For instance, as one looks at the coin from various vantage points, the coin will exhibit various (perspectival) elliptical *occlusion shapes*—the shape of the area on an intersecting transparent surface, perpendicular to the line of sight, that one would have to cover in order to (just) occlude the coin[13]—and as illumination varies, the coin will exhibit different (perspectival) *aperture colours*—the colour which would dominate completely, were one to look at the coin through a small aperture.[14] Moreover, two coins at different distances from one's viewpoint might be seen to be of the same (factual) size, while differing with respect to their relative *occlusion sizes*—the sizes of the areas on the aforementioned surface one would have to cover to (just) occlude the coins. In this way, then, perceptual content is dual, or, as Noë also puts it, "two dimensional."[15] Moreover, perspectival properties, or as Noë also calls them, "looks," are "perceptually basic" in that they reveal the factual content: We find out "how things are from an exploration of

[11] Mikael Pettersson, "Shot in the Dark: Notes on Photography, Causality, and Content," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 62:249 (2012), pp. 759–776.

[12] Alva Noë, "Causation and Perception: The Puzzle Unravelled," *Analysis*, 63:2 (2003), pp. 93–100, at p. 95.

[13] The term occlusion shape is due to John Hyman. See, e.g., John Hyman, *The Objective Eye: Color, Form and Reality in the Theory of Art*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 75–79.

[14] Cf. Hyman, *The Objective Eye*, pp. 101–102.

[15] Noë, "Causation and Perception," p. 95.

how they appear."[16] And again: "We see by seeing how things look."[17] Also, as already indicated, these two dimensions of content are allegedly what we need to solve the deviance problem with respect to perception: the suggestion is that one only sees a scene if there is a counterfactual dependence between experience and scene along both dimensions; had the coin been bigger, that should be reflected in one's experience, and, also, had one looked at it from another angle, this, too, should make for a difference as to how it looks.

Now, talk of occlusion shapes and sizes, and aperture colours, suggests that this account can be modified to tackle the problem of the right causal processes in photography; after all, the transparent surface used in the definition of occlusion properties evokes the Renaissance conception of a picture as a transparent window, and also the drawing devices used in this period and which one can see in Dürer's woodcuts. Indeed, Noë's dual account of perceptual content, with its appeal to occlusion properties, has actually been accused of, in Eric Schwitzgebel's idiom, "*over-analogizing* visual experience to flat media such as paintings and snapshots."[18] The sceptical objection is that it is unclear whether we actually perceive perspectival properties, and that the reason that we—or at least Noë (and others)—*think* we do so, is that we tend to think of the mind in terms of flat media: "The coin 'looks' elliptical because that's how we'd *paint* it!"[19]

Be that as it may. In any event, it seems safe to say that photographs (and many other pictures) exhibit occlusion shapes, sizes, and aperture colours,[20] and that whatever problems there might be in specifying the appropriate causal processes in terms of such properties, photographs' not displaying them is not among them. This, of course, is not to say that perspectival properties are the *only* properties revealed by photographs. A photograph of a shaded wall, say, may exhibit the varying aperture colours of it, while simultaneously displaying its uniform surface colour. Similarly, a photograph can display the trapezoidal occlusion shape of a tabletop, while at the same time revealing its three-dimensional rectangular shape. In other words, photographs typically reveal properties along two

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[16] Alva Noë, *Action in Perception*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), p. 165.
[17] Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 165.
[18] Eric Schwitzgebel, "Do Things Look Flat?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 72:3 (2006), pp. 589–599, at p. 593.
[19] Schwitzgebel, "Do Things Look Flat?" p. 593.
[20] Indeed, some recent theories of depiction make use of occlusion properties (or similar notions) to define depiction (and not only photographic depiction). According to John Hyman, to whom the terms occlusion shapes and occlusion sizes owe, a picture depicts an object, *o*, only if the relevant part of the picture's surface has the same occlusion shape as *o*, as seen from the pictorial viewpoint. Similarly, pictures depict colours (when they do so) by sharing aperture colours with the depicted subjects. On Hopkins' view, moreover, pictures depict when parts of their surfaces are experienced as resembling their subjects in outline shape—a notion that by and large is equivalent to occlusion shape. See Hyman, *The Objective Eye*, esp. pp. 81, 101–102; Hopkins, *Picture, Image and Experience*, pp. 53–63. For Hopkins' definition of depiction, see p. 77.

dimensions: a perspectival dimension and a factual dimension. Moreover, whether or not perspectival properties are perceptually basic, it seems right to say that they are *photographically* so, for it captures well the idea that photographs (and other pictures) display the appearances of things. In using photographs, to echo Noë, we find out "how things are from an exploration of how they appear." With this two-dimensional character of photographic images hopefully established, we can now spell out the "Noëan" account of the right kind of causal engagement in terms of a dual dependence along both dimensions.

> Two-dimensional Photography (2-DP): An image is a photograph *of x* only if (i) x causes the image, and (ii) there is a suitable and sufficiently rich pattern of counterfactual dependence between the image and x along both the factual dimension—such that had the factual properties of x been different, the image would differ correspondingly—and along the perspectival dimension—such that had the spatial relations between the camera and scene been different, the perspectival properties exhibited by the image would differ correspondingly.

As I have already mentioned, I think that this way to characterise what counts as the right causal processes involved in photography gets the right results most of the time. To begin, let x be my clumsy cat, pushing the camera off the shelf. The image, I said, "matches" the cat, and we may now add that one minimal way it does so, is by exhibiting a particular occlusion shape. But this is not enough to qualify as a photograph of my cat—despite being produced by means of much of the material that goes into ordinary photography. And the reason is simply that, as the case is described, both kinds of dependence fail: it is not the case that had the actual shape and colour of the cat been different, the image would differ in a corresponding way; nor is it the case that had the camera landed closer to the cat, the relative occlusion size would have been larger, for instance. Consider, also, the distance problem. One of the causes of the image of the hibiscus is the sun, but the image is not a photograph of the sun. And the reason is that the dependence along either dimension is way too poor. Between the image and the flower, by contrast, there is a rich dependence along both dimensions. Had the flower been of a different surface colour, for instance, that would show in the photograph, and slight movements of the camera would make for differences with respect to occlusion properties. What about Balzacian photography? Is that *real* photography, despite the fact that it does not even involve light? I suggest that it is at least not disqualified as long as it maintains a dual dependence. Not only should differences in Balzac's actual size make for a difference with respect to how the photograph turns out, the relation between the camera and Balzac should be reflected in the image in a counterfactually dependent manner. For instance, the "leaflike skins" should be rather small when they hit the plate

if Balzac is far away—perhaps by shrinking as they travel through the air. As long as the dual dependence is upheld, I do not see any reason to regard any causal processes as being too odd or wild. But the dual character of the dependence is important, or so I think. To see why, consider Sherrie Levine's famous series *After Walker Evans*—a series of photographs of some of Evans' photographs of America during the Depression era. There is, I think, an intuitive sense in which Levine's images are images of Evans' *photographs*, rather than of the *subjects* of the latter. But why so? After all, the process leading from the subjects to Levine's photographs is purely causal, and there is a dependence between *factual* properties of the subjects and the images. Still, perspectival dependence fails: it is (presumably) not the case that had Levine moved closer to the subjects, for instance, that would make for a larger occlusion size, and this explains why we are prefer to say that Levine's photographs are photographs of Evans' images rather than of the subjects of the latter. Finally, the above account—like any causal account of photography—will exclude fictional entities from the possible contents of photographs. Fictional creatures are causally impotent and cannot stand in causal relations. Nor can they stand in any spatial relations to a viewer or to a camera so perspectival properties do not really apply to fictional beings, and cannot, thus, be captured by a camera.

The fact that causal accounts of photography exclude fictional content as photographic content proper has often been seen as a desired result; photographs are taken to be "fictionally incompetent," as Scruton puts it, and this is an immediate consequence if only causes can become part of a photograph's content.[21] But perhaps the idea that something is a photograph *of x* only if *x* is one of the image's causes excludes too much. For not only does this rule out fictional beings from being part of photographic content, but it also runs the risk of excluding much more common "things" that apparently *are* part of many ordinary images: darkness, holes, shadows, or, more generally, *absences*.

III. PHOTOGRAPHY AND ABSENCES I: CAPTURING SHADOWS

Absences seemingly come in many kinds. Here I will focus on two kinds: shadows (apparently absences of light) and absences of a given object. Here, again, is the puzzle. It *seems* as if photographs can be images of absences. We all take photographs of shadows, for instance. And Figure 1 seems to be an image of the absence of the Twin Towers. But it is unclear whether absences can cause anything—can the absence of Twin Towers, their *not* being there—be causally responsible for how the image turned out? So, again, can there really be photographs of absences?

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[21] Scruton, "Photography and Representation," p. 588. I will have more to say about the possibility or otherwise of photographic representation of ficta below.

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Figure 1.

As just indicated, I think it is likely that the way that photographs can capture absences—if they can—will vary with the kind of absence, so it seems plausible that solving the riddle should be attempted in a piece-meal fashion. Let us start with shadows.

Consider, as an example, Umbo's *The Mystery of the Street* (Figure 2). This image clearly seems to be a photograph of shadows. One way to unravel the puzzle of photographs of absences would of course be to say that there are no such images. If absences cannot be causes, we can still hold on to the idea that only causes can figure in photographic content by denying that there are any photographs of absences. *The Mystery of the Street* shows that—insofar shadows really are absences—this suggestion is highly implausible. For it is just a plain fact—or so it seems—that this is what the photograph is primarily of; it is its *point*. Moreover, shadows seem to maintain the dual dependence typical of photographs; (apparent) photographs of shadows seemingly capture both how shadows *are* and how they *look* from the viewpoint of the camera. So, had the cast shadows visible on the ground in Umbo's image had a different actual shape, the image would have differed correspondingly. But, also, had the photograph been taken from a different vantage point, the occlusion shapes of the shadows would have been different. So, shadows seem to satisfy the requirement of dual dependence, which I argued is necessary for something's being part of photographic content above. Or have we moved too fast? If, as I have so far expressed it, shadows are *absences* of light, can an image *depend* on them? Dependence is a relation, which requires relata, but an absence, or at least a full-blown one, is, after all, a nothing, and so it cannot be a relatum. Moreover, if *causation* is also a relation, and if absences

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are not entities, it follows that absences cannot be causes. So, once again, if photography is ultimately a causal process, absences do not seem possible to capture by photographic means. One thing, which is clear in any event, is that shadows neither emit, reflect, block nor absorb light, in the way objects may do. As Roy Sorensen puts it: "[N]o part of a shadow acts. Shadows are creatures of omission. Shadows are where the inaction is."[22] So, are shadows photographically impotent?

Figure 2. Umbo, *The Mystery of the Street.*

Now, in order to unravel the puzzle, one can of course put pressure on any of the claims that yield it. That is, one can deny that there are photographs of absences, or that photography is an essentially causal medium, or hold on to these two claims and argue for the causal efficacy of absences. I have already expressed my scepticism about denying that there are photographs of shadows, and if Sorensen is right that shadows are "creatures of omission," it seems that one would have to opt for either denying the causal theory of photography, or attribute causal powers to absences. I will look at these two options in turn.

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[22] Roy Sorensen, *Seeing Dark Things: The Philosophy of Shadows*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 74.

i. An Acausal Theory of Photography

Starting with the first option, then, how would an *acuasal* theory of photography look—that is, a theory that would *deny* that a photograph must be (appropriately) causally related to its content? Although most theorists subscribe to a causal theory of photography, dissenting views have been expressed, a recent one being that of Paloma Atencia-Linares.[23] Atencia-Linares' main concern is not the role of causality in photography (or shadows or other kinds of absence), but rather the aforementioned fictional incompetence of photography. However, her defence of fictional *competence* clearly commits her to an acausal theory of photography, as, again, fictional beings are causally impotent. Now, it is important to stress that, on Atencia-Linares' view, photographs *qua photographs* can have fictional content. Other writers have granted that photographs can indeed represent ficta, but not *qua* photographs. For instance, Richard Wollheim makes a distinction between *being a photograph of* something and *pictorial representation*, and holds that a photograph of, say, Laurence Olivier can pictorially represent Hamlet (while not being a photograph of the prince).[24] Scruton admits that a photograph of someone dressed up as Venus can represent the goddess, but not by being a photograph of Venus but rather as a "photograph of a representation of Venus."[25] And in a similar fashion, Gregory Currie argues that a photograph can be *used* to represent something other than its "source" and in *this* sense have fictional content, but not by "photographic means," where the latter is conceived of as the source "leaving a visible trace on a surface by exposure of that surface to light emitted or reflected from the source."[26] It is not this weaker fictional competence thesis Atencia-Linares subscribes to, but rather a bolder thesis: photographs can represent ficta *by photographic means*, or in other words, there can be *photographs of* fictional beings and scenes. And, again, this makes her account into an acausal theory of *photography* (as opposed to an acausal theory of "photographic representation by use" or the like). The main strategy in Atencia-Linares' defence of fictional competence is to conceive of photographic means—and by extension *representation* by photographic means—more broadly than does for example Currie. On Atencia-Linares' view, photographic means for creating an image do not only include a source leaving a visible trace on a surface, but also various (arguably rather standard) darkroom techniques, such as "selective over- and underexposure, combining negatives, burning or blurring parts of the image, manipulation of contrast, and the use of filters, various types of

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[23] Paloma Atencia-Linares, "Fiction, Nonfiction, and Deceptive Photographic Representation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70:1 (2012), pp. 19–30.
[24] Wollheim, "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation," pp. 208–209.
[25] Scruton, "Photography and Representation," p. 588.
[26] Gregory Currie, "Pictures of King Arthur: Photography and the Power of Narrative," in Scott Walden, (ed.), *Photography and Philosophy: Essays on the Pencil of Nature*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), p. 272.

photosensitive papers, and developing liquids to vary the quality of the image."[27] And such a more liberal view of photographic means would seem to immediately open up the possibility of photographs' being photographs of other things than their sources, or what they are causally related to. To illustrate, consider one of Atencia-Linares' examples, Wanda Wultz's *Io Gatto*, a photographic image seemingly representing a fictional, hybrid, creature: a catwoman (a combination of a cat and the photographer herself). This image was created by the use of multiple-exposure techniques, and since such techniques do qualify as photographic means for image making, this image, Atencia-Linares holds, is a photograph of the hybrid catwoman, although, of course, the latter has not reflected or emitted any light onto the photographic surface.[28]

Back to shadows, and to the question of whether there can be photographs of them. If we accept Atencia-Linares' acausal theory of photography, this easily solves the problem of photographs of shadows. We clearly see them in Umbo's image—as much as we see the catwoman in Wultz's image—and surely they are there due to solely photographic means—how else? (They have not been painted there, for example.) But one may worry that this solution is perhaps *too* easy. Of course, my reluctance towards accepting an acausal theory of photography is not surprising, given that I have advocated the two-dimensional account in section II, but let me here add some other grounds for scepticism, rather than mere incompatibility with my own suggestion. The main worry, I think, is that a theory that allows photographic content, which is causally wholly unrelated to the image, runs the risk of being too revisionary, running against widely shared and steadfast intuitions about photography as a medium. One such fundamental conviction seems to be photography's "ontological commitment," as it might be called. For example, Roland Barthes claims that "in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*."[29] But if Atencia-Linares' account is correct, Barthes is wrong. A causal theory of photography, by contrast, explains Barthes' thesis. As Scruton puts it, "If *a* is the cause of *b*, then the existence of *b* is sufficient for the existence of *a*."[30] Moreover, disregarding the convictions of theorists, much of our practices as ordinary viewers of photographs seem to run against an acausal theory of photography such as the one proposed by Atencia-Linares. In particular, much of our photographic practice seems to ascribe to photographs a particular epistemic value, and epistemic advantage in relation to other kinds of image. Such a widespread trust in photography's evidentiary role would seem odd and is left completely unexplained if photographs, just as paintings and drawings, have no

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[27] Atencia-Linares, "Fiction, Nonfiction, and Deceptive Photographic Representation," p. 22.
[28] Atencia-Linares, "Fiction, Nonfiction, and Deceptive Photographic Representation," p. 22.
[29] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), p. 76. Italics in the original.
[30] Scruton, "Photography and Representation," p. 588.

essential relation to reality, and is capable of representing the merely imagined and unreal. Now, I do not take these remarks as any conclusive arguments against Atencia-Linares' acausal theory of photography. The different views on photography's ontological commitment might perhaps be seen as little more than a standoff of intuitions, and an advocate of an acausal theory which allows for fictional competence of photography might come up with an explanation of why photography is ascribed a high epistemic status although nothing in the medium itself grants that status. But I hope to have made it clear that an acausal theory of photography is controversial, to say the least. Granted as much, it suggests that one should try to accommodate shadows as photographic content without giving up the causal theory of photography—or at least without giving it up completely. In the remainder of this section, I will sketch a simple *pseudo-causal account*, as it were, of how photographs can be images of shadows even *if* the latter are causally impotent. In the next section, I will explore the suggestion that absences can be causally efficacious, and, thus, that there is nothing in a full-blown causal theory of photography that prevents photographs from being images of absences.

ii. A Pseudo-Causal Theory of Shadow Photography
If we assume, for now, that causation always involves some physical mechanism—reflecting, absorbing or blocking light, for instance—then it seems clear that shadows are indeed causally impotent. They have no material surfaces that could do the reflecting, absorbing or blocking. (Also, the fact that they have no material surfaces seems to show that Balzacian photography could not capture shadows, at least if the layers of "leaflike skins laid one on top of the other" are conceived of as being material.) Physically speaking at least, shadows, in Sorensen's idiom, "are where the inaction is." (It remains to be seen if they can be active in some other sense, however.) And, once again, the (assumed) causal inefficacy of shadows implies that they cannot be part of photographic content on a purely causal theory of photography. Still, I think it is possible to, as it were, *almost* accommodate shadows on a causal theory of photography; or, again, to accommodate them on a *pseudo*-causal theory. The basic idea is simple: first, although the shadow itself, on this view, does not cause the black patch in the image, the shadow's *blocker*, on which the shadow depends, does; second, despite the shadow's (assumed) causal impotence, the image depends counterfactually on the shadow's factual and perspectival properties. A few remarks on both claims are in order, and I will start with the second, which needs some defending, since, as already mentioned, it is not entirely obvious that an image can depend on something that is privative in nature.

The first, and crucial, thing to note in this respect is that shadows are not *mere* absences. True, a shadow necessarily involves an absence of

light—there needs to be a light source and an object blocking light, resulting in light being absent[31]—but a shadow is surely not a total nothingness, the kind of absence that David Lewis has called a "bogus entity." (Mere) absences, says Lewis, "are not *anything*. Where an absence is, there is not anything relevant there at all."[32] Shadows, by contrast, may be creatures of omission, but that is not all they are. First, they are located in space and time, so they are concrete entities. And it would seem to follow from this that they can be related to other things, including photographs. More importantly, they also have properties such as actual size and actual shape, and perspectival properties, such as occlusion shape and relative occlusion sizes, or in short, looks (so where a shadow is, there *is* something relevant there, after all). And it seems plain that the black patches of Umbo's image depend on said properties of the shadows. Had the actual sizes and shapes of the shadows differed, so would the black patches. And had Umbo's camera for instance been closer to the shadows, the patches displayed in the image would have been larger. So, the earlier worry that images cannot depend on shadows was unfounded, or so I submit.

Move on to the claim that the blocker, on which the shadow depends, is causally responsible for the black patch in a photograph of a shadow. Perhaps it might be objected that searching for something causally responsible for the black patch is misguided from the outset, since, the objection goes, this part of the image is not of anything; the blackness of the image is simply due to the *absence of recording*, much like the blackness of an image developed from unexposed film, is due to nothing having interacted with the film. However, this objection would seem to exclude too much from what we ordinarily conceive of as photographic content. Consider a photograph of a completely black object. In one sense, nothing has happened to the black patch of the image, namely in the sense that there is no transferral of energy from the object to the image, since the object absorbs all light. But absorbing light that would otherwise have been reflected into the camera's lens would seem to be a *bona fide* way to interact with an image, and also a *bona fide* way to become part of photographic content. The blocker interacts with an image of a shadow in a similar fashion: it blocks the light that would otherwise have been reflected into the camera's lens. However, and crucially, although the blocker is causally responsible for the black patch in an image of a shadow, the blocker does

[31] These requirements are shared by many who have written on shadows. See, e.g. Sorensen, *Seeing Dark Things*, esp. pp. 26–28; Roberto Casati, "The Structure of Shadows," in Andrew Frank, Jonathan Raper, and Jean-Paul Cheylan, (eds.), *Life and Motion of Socio-economic Units*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2001)); István Aranyosi, "Shadows of Constitution," *The Monist*, 90:3 (2007), pp. 415–431; Tom Stoneham, "Catching Berkeley's Shadow," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 49:2 (2011), pp. 116–136, at pp. 117–118. (As Stoneham points out, this conception of the nature of shadows was also shared by Berkeley.)
[32] David Lewis, "Causation as Influence," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 97:4 (2000), pp. 182–197, at p. 195.

not typically become part of the photograph's content, and one important reason, I suggest, has to do with a failure in perspectival dependence.[33] With the sun in my back, I take a photograph of my shadow cast on the wall before me. There is a fairly rich dependence between my actual size and shape and the black patch in the image. Still, as I move the camera closer to the wall (whilst standing still) the black patch in the image gets larger and larger, despite the fact that the camera is moving away from me, the blocker. So perspectival dependence between image and blocker fails.

To sum up, on this pseudo-causal account of shadow photography, shadows cannot themselves cause anything and are not part of photographic content by having interacted with the image in any way (because they cannot). However, a shadow necessarily depends on a blocker, an object blocking light from a source. The blocker does the causal job of interacting with the image, by blocking light that would otherwise have entered the camera's lens. The blocker does not thereby become part of the photograph's content, since perspectival dependence between blocker and image typically fails. There is, by contrast, a rich factual and perspectival dependence between the image and the shadow, and this is one sense in which a photograph can capture shadows despite their privative nature.

Now, I have claimed that photographic images depend counterfactually on shadows and their properties, while assuming that shadows are causally impotent. But maybe that negative assumption was uncalled for. For it seems that (as has often been pointed out) counterfactual dependence is a notion that is very similar to causal relatedness. As Lewis puts it, "[w]e think of a cause as something that makes a difference"[34] and this, I have argued, a shadow does. So perhaps shadows are, after all, causally efficacious? In the next and final section, I have a look at one way to endow not only shadows, but all kinds of absences, with causal powers.

IV. PHOTOGRAPHY AND ABSENCES II: THE MISSING TOWERS
Consider Figure 1, a picture of Manhattan's skyline, taken on the ten-year anniversary of 9/11. This picture *seems* to be a photograph of the absence of the Twin Towers. Is it? Well, the absence of the towers would seem to be its point (a point being indicated by the presence of the light beams where the towers used to be, of course). But this kind of absence seems more elusive than shadows, since it would seem to display no look, and there would seem to be no *particular* part of the image being dependent on the absence, and where we see it in the image. True, we naturally tend to locate the absence of the towers where the light beams are, and where the towers once were, but surely the towers are absent also in other parts of the scene.

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[33] I say "typically" since some objects do, like the moon in De la Rue's image does, become part of photographic content by blocking light.
[34] David Lewis, "Causation," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 70:17 (1973), pp. 556–567, at p. 557.

Clearly, they are not *present* anywhere, at least. At any rate, dependence between image and absence regarding (factual and perspectival) sizes, shapes and colour will fail for this kind of absence—there are simply no such properties that image and absence can both display. So (ii) in (2-DP) will not be satisfied for photographs of absences of objects (should there be such). But this, I think, is no big threat to the account as such, for it was designed for photographs of objects and not such elusive "things" as absences of towers. In the last section, I argued that one can give a pseudo-causal account of shadow photography by giving up (i) in the original account, and holding on to (ii). If there are photographs of absences of objects, we will, by contrast, have to give up (ii), but perhaps absence photography still conforms to (i)? That is, perhaps we can hold on to the basic idea of any causal theory of photography—that the content must have causally interacted with the image—if it can be shown that absences of objects (from now on just "absences") can thusly interact with photographs.

i. Absence Causation/Photography

One of the best-known defences of the idea that absences can be causes is that of David Lewis.[35] Lewis takes seriously the common sense idea that failing to do things might have effects. For instance, it seems appropriate to blame me for the death of my hibiscus flower if I do *not* water it. So the absence of the event of my watering it seems to be the cause of the flower's death. Similarly, my not making safety back-ups on the paper I was working on made me lose two month's of work, and thus causing me to start from the beginning again. Lewis' suggestion is that these claims are literally true, that absences can literally be causes, and that his counterfactual account of causality can account for these cases. The details of Lewis' account need not concern us here, and the basic idea is rather straightforward. Roughly speaking, absences can be causes in the sense that the absence of the absence would have made a difference for what happened. So, *had* I watered my plants they would *not* have died. And *had* I made back-ups I would *not* have lost my work. Bringing this thought to bear on absence photography, we can now see how the absence of the Twin Towers might causally interact with the image: the absence caused the image to be as it is since the absence of the absence would have made a difference for how the image turned out. Or in other words: the absence of the towers caused the image, for *had* the towers been present in the scene they *would have* appeared in the photograph. So, on a counterfactual account of causality, nothing in a purely causal account of photography rules out that there can be photographs of absences.

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[35] See Lewis, "Causation as Influence"; David Lewis, "Void and Object," in John Collins, Ned Hall, and L.A. Paul, (eds.), *Causation and Counterfactuals*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004).

However, there is a potential problem with this account of absence causation, and by implication absence photography, which Lewis himself acknowledges, and which might be obvious enough, namely what has been called the *many absences problem*.[36] If I cause my flowers' death by not watering them due to a counterfactual situation in which my watering them did keep them alive, then it seems that the advocate of the counterfactual analysis of absence causation will have to count many—perhaps *too* many—absences as causing my flowers' death. For, there are countless counterfactual situations in which my flowers would have been kept alive. Had my neighbour, or my landlord, or the landlord's cousin, or Sherrie Levine… watered my plants, they would not have died. As Lewis puts it, if there is causation by absences, then "there is a lot of it—far more of it than we would normally want to mention. At this very moment, we are being kept alive by an absence of nerve gas in the air we are breathing."[37] With respect to absence photography, then, there is a clear risk that if there are photographs of absences, there are a lot of absences in any image. In Figure 1 the Twin Towers are absent, but so is the Eiffel Tower. Is it a photograph of the absence of the Eiffel Tower as well? And if not, why so? Attempting to solve the many absences problem in its general form clearly lies outside the scope of this paper. However, let me briefly point to a couple of possibilities and difficulties that concern the photographic variety of the problem.

So, how, then, should one address the many absences problem as it pertains to photography? A first option, of course, would be to say that there is no problem here, not because there is no absence causation, but because a lot of absences in an image constitute no genuine problem. The Twin Towers are absent in the image of Manhattan's skyline, and so is the Eiffel Tower, and the photograph *is* a photograph of both absences (and countless other absences as well). The reason why we normally would not say that the image is a photograph of the absence of the Eiffel Tower (or the absence of Tower Bridge, and so on) is not because it is not true, but rather merely a matter of pragmatics. This is how Lewis treats the issue in its general form: "There are ever so many reasons why it might be inappropriate to say something true. It might be irrelevant to the conversation, it might convey a false hint, it might be known already to all concerned…."[38] The case, it might be argued, is similar to one in which, although true, it would be inappropriate to say of the photograph in my passport that it is a photograph of my left ear, since that might convey the false hint that that is all the image is a photograph of.

One may think, however, that the above line of reasoning leads to a way too generous view of photographic content. Another option would be

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[36] The term is from Jane Suilin Lavelle, George Botterill and Suzanne Lock, "Contrastive Explanation and the Many Absences Problem," *Synthese*, (forthcoming).
[37] Lewis, "Causation as Influence," p. 196.
[38] Lewis, "Causation as Influence," p. 196.

to hold that the only absence that Figure 1 is of is the absence of the Twin Towers, and to try to get this result by analysing the notion of absence causation in a manner that makes that absence come out as the cause of the image. On this view, *that* absence caused the image, rather than the absence of the Eiffel Tower, and, similarly, *I* caused the death of my flowers while Levine did not. However, this way to approach the many absences problem runs the risk at clashing with bedrock beliefs about the nature of photography. Let me explain.

One natural way to impose constraints as to when an absence causes something would be to appeal to some *expectation* not being met, or some *norm* being violated. After all, the reason why it is so natural to say that I caused my flower's death seems to be that it was my (self-imposed) responsibility to water them, or, at least, that is what I *normally* do, whereas Levine has not even heard of my plants. Similarly, the reason why it seems right to regard the absence of the Twin Towers as the cause o the image, is that the Twin Towers can be *expected* to be part of Manhattan's skyline because they were for a long time, while it would be odd to expect the Eiffel Tower in New York. So on this view, it is not enough for an absence to be a cause that its absence would have made a difference, the absence should also be related to some violation of norms. So absence causation itself, on this view, is normative in nature. But this way to view the matter is doubly problematic. First, as Helen Beebee points out, this is a very revisionist view of causality. As she puts it, "nobody within the tradition of the metaphysics of causation … thinks that causal facts depend on human-dependent norms."[39] Second, and more important for the present discussion, such a view of causality would render the causal theory of photography a very different theory than how it is usually conceived of. Recall that one important aspect of the theory is the idea that photography is a *merely* causal medium, where the contrast is with media that involve intentional states. Handmade images, such as paintings or drawings, may have some real-world event or object as their content, and which have caused the images to appear as they do. But, with respect to handmade images, the causal chains leading up to the images go via the mind of the picture-maker: perceptual states, recognitional capacities, and beliefs about what she sees, for example.[40] Photography, by contrast, is thought to be free from such involvement of the mind: a photograph turns out as it does independently of what the photographer *thinks* she sees through the viewfinder. But if causality itself, as the present suggestion has it, is dependent on human-dependent norms, the very distinction between merely causal and intentionally mediated media collapses. In particular, if absence causation and, by implication, absence photography depends on

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[39] Helen Beebee, "Causing and Nothingness," in John Collins, Ned Hall, and L.A. Paul, (eds.), *Causation and Counterfactuals*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), at p. 297.
[40] See, for instance, Kendall Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism," *Critical Inquiry*, 11 (1984), pp. 246–277, esp. pp. 262–265.

expectations, what a given image is a photograph of, might differ between subjects, since expectations might thus differ, and this clearly flies in the face of a bedrock belief regarding photography, namely that it is *objective* in nature.[41] All of this suggests, I think, that rather than trying to solve the many absences problem, as it pertains to photography, in causal terms, by making causality and photography depend on norms, one would do better to address the problem with reference to notions that are more hospitable to normative facts and expectations. One such notion is pictorial experience, or what Wollheim has called "seeing-in," and I will close by hinting—and admittedly merely hinting—at how seeing-in might provide just the right resources to address the many (photographed) absences problem.

ii. Seeing Absences in Photographs

My suggestion, in brief, is that whether or not there are *photographs of* absences, we can account for the impression that Figure 1 is an image of the absence of the Twin Towers by saying that it is *right* to *see* that absence *in* the image (and not the absence of the Eiffel Tower). So, the suggestion here is neutral with respect to absence causality and photography. I will say a few words about what it is to see an absence in an image, and then about what it means to say that it is right to see it there.

First, then, what is seeing-in? On Wollheim's view, seeing-in is a "perceptual capacity,"[42] a "species of seeing,"[43] which is engaged when we look at pictures. Looking at the image of the missing towers, I undergo an experience of seeing Manhattan's skyline in the image. However, Wollheim notoriously said very little about what this experience or capacity amounts to, and, indeed, much philosophical theorising about pictures (and photographs) has been attempts to say more about what seeing-in really is. Most of these attempts, however, do not, it seems, offer the resources to say what it is to see an *absence* in an image. According to the *experienced resemblance view*, as defended by Hopkins and others, seeing-in is to be understood as an experience of resemblance in *outline shape* between (parts of) an image and the represented scene, where outline shape is a notion that is similar to the concept of occlusion shape that figures in (2-DP). Another influential account is the *recognition theory*, on which seeing-in is understood as viewers having their recognitional capacities for whatever the picture represents being triggered.[44] As Currie, a defender of the

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[41] Cf. Beebee, "Causing and Nothingness," p. 297.
[42] Wollheim, "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation," p. 217.
[43] Wollheim, "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation," p. 205.
[44] In fact, the issue of how triggering recognitional capacities is thought to account for seeing-in is a bit unclear. Both Flint Schier and Dominic Lopes, in his *Understanding Pictures*, seem to think that the two notions are independent. See, See Flint Schier, *Deeper Into Pictures: An Essay on Pictorial Representation,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), chap. 10; Dominic Lopes, *Understanding Pictures,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), chap. 9. In *Sight and Sensibility*, however, it sounds like Lopes does think that the recognition

recognition theory, puts it: "To see a horse in the picture is to have your horse-recognition capacity triggered by the picture and thereby to judge that you are looking at a picture of a horse."[45] The problem here is that absences do not have any outline shapes or, more generally, *looks* (unless they are of some more concrete kind, like shadows), and nor do they seem to trigger any recognitional capacities, as these capacities are surely closely linked to the way things look. So, the issue of how we see absences in images will have to be accounted for in some other way, and one natural suggestion takes its lead from how Wollheim himself characterises the possible contents of seeing-in. For not only, says Wollheim, can seeing-in be of objects (that have looks and for which we may have recognitional capacities), it can also represent *states of affairs*,[46] and it is this latter kind of content, I suggest, that is at issue when one sees an absence in an image. In a word, when one sees an absence in an image, one sees *that* the relevant thing is not there. Or in other words, seeing absences in images is *pictorial epistemic seeing*, a variety of what Fred Dretske characterises as "a coming to know by use of the senses."[47] So, what I am suggesting is pictorial analogue of a fairly traditional view of seeing absences. Seeing an absence in a picture is not to have an experience of a certain look of an absence, with a certain phenomenal character. Rather it is a matter of belief-acquisition that something or other is not there in the image, on the basis of what one sees.

What, then, makes it right to, in this sense, see the absence of certain things rather than others in a photograph? On Wollheim's view, any instance of pictorial seeing-in comes with a "standard of correctness," governing what is right to see in a given picture. And as we have seen (Section II), with respect to photography, that standard is set in causal terms. What is right to see in a photograph is largely a matter of what has causally interacted with the image in an appropriate way. However, I cannot help myself to this idea here, of course. For, insofar as we cannot solve the many absences problem in causal terms, if an absence causes a photographic image, so will others, and, so it seems, in exactly the same way. Instead, I suggest, the rightness conditions with respect to the seeing-in of absences may derive from various *uses* of photography. Two aspects of such uses come to mind. First, *intentions* on the part of someone using a photograph to convey a thought may constrain which absence it is right to see in a photograph. And in such cases, intentions might trump causal

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[45] Gregory Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 90.

[46] Seeing-in, writes Wollheim, "can be, as experiences in general can be, of either of two kinds: it can be an experience of a particular, or it can be an experience of a state of affairs." Wollheim, "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation," p. 223.

[47] Fred Dretske, "Change Blindness," *Philosophical Studies*, 120 (2004), p. 13. See also Fred Dretske, *Seeing and Knowing*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), chap. 2.

theory does account for seeing-in. See, Dominic Lopes, *Sight and Sensibility*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), chap. 1.

matters. Absences may be causally (and photographically) impotent, but intentions may still make it right to see an absence in a photograph. Or, many absences may cause a photograph, and then intentions may pick out the right absence to see. Another way in which rightness conditions may arise is from facts about what ordinary viewers naturally tend to see in a photograph, and such tendencies will often depend on expectations. Being shown Figures 3 and 4, most viewers will arguably have a tendency to see the absence of the cannonballs on the road in Figure 4—at least after some time of scrutinising the images—and not the absence of the Twin Towers. And this tendency of viewers, I suggest, suffices to make it right to see that absence in the photograph.

Figure 3. Fenton, Roger. *Valley of The Shadow of Death*.

Figure 4. Fenton, Roger. *Valley of The Shadow of Death*.

iii. Concluding Remarks

A natural way to think of photography is as a way of *capturing* things and their appearances. This idea is what guides (2-DP) with its talk of dependence between images and the factual and perspectival properties of objects. Some "things"—"negative things" like shadows and the absence of the Twin Towers—seem more difficult to capture by photographic means, due to their privative nature—or at any rate, this is so if causal theorists of photography are right. Shadows are negative things since they would seem to be constituted by an absence of light. But, as Roberto Casati points out, they still have a "thingy" character,[48] and this makes it possible for images to depend on their factual and perspectival properties (that is, they meet (ii) of (2-DP)), but their privative nature makes it unclear whether they can cause anything, and, in particular, photographic images. If they cannot, their ancestors—their blockers—will have to do that job, or so I have suggested. Absences of objects—like the missing towers—seem trickier to account for on the two-dimensional account of photography I have defended. They have no factual or perspectival properties on which an image can depend, and if one absence has caused an image, so, it seems, have many others as well. I have suggested that the sense in which a photograph seems to be an image of a certain absence (rather than other absences) can be accounted for in terms of what it is right to see in a photograph. In a way, this treatment of the problem, it should be admitted, does not really address the issue of whether there can be *photographs of* (mere) absences, for it does not treat the problem in terms of what photographs really are, nor how they acquire their content, but rather with reference to how we may use photographs, and to expectations of viewers. This may or may not be seen as a failure of the account, but if it is, then perhaps the lack of a positive answer here will prompt further inquiries into this elusive problem—in which case, we would seem to have some evidence of how lacks and omissions can have effects, after all.[49]

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[48] Casati, "The Structure of Shadows," p. 103.
[49] [Acknowledgements]