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The Problem with Pictures

The problem with pictures is in how we make sense of them, how we recognise them and the kinds of meanings found there. There are a number of conflicting explanations and disagreements are longstanding, widespread and deep-seated. Explanations quickly appeal to fundamental ideas about our understanding of the world, its organisation and customs. In particular, pictures are bound up with the concept of art, its history and criticism, and to pursue an understanding of these, we must take a position on pictures. In art history the explanation of pictures is sought in terms of their tradition and influence. Tradition is variously described in terms of a context, as the history of a culture, or in terms of a concept, as the history of depiction or pictorial properties. Neither extreme is tenable. To explain everything in terms of context, is to drain the concept of a picture of all meaning, to result in all history and no art, while to explain everything in terms of the concept of a picture, is to drain its context of meaning, and result in all art and no history. So the problem lies in deciding how much is internal to a picture, usually termed its formal or technical properties, and how much is external, the influence of time and place.

In recent times discussion generally takes as its starting point the work of E. H. Gombrich. By tracing a number of influential reactions to his work, we can appreciate firstly how the problem is compounded, how disagreements over the nature of pictures add to disagreements over art and its history, and secondly how the problem persists, how even as recent efforts enlist other disciplines to explain pictures and art, these versions no longer describe the same objects of earlier study. In truth, they are no longer versions that resolve the problem with pictures, but rather new problems that urge their substitution. Gombrich's contribution extends from the very popular introductory history, *The Story of Art*, to detailed studies in the psychology of visual perception and the development of pictorial style, advanced

initially in *Art and Illusion*, and later in *The Image And the Eye*.[1] Taken together, they present a view of art as the advance of pictorial sophistication, through experiments with novel applications and techniques, towards a mode that more fully matches the experience of visual perception. This emphasis upon matching a picture to the experience of looking at an object, led many readers to assume that Gombrich took pictures to be in essence illusions; that delude the viewer in some way into believing in the presence of the object, rather than just a picture of the object. Indeed the very title of *Art and Illusion* hints at such a stance. It is an over-simplification to be sure, but points to a real and unwelcome consequence in appealing to principles of visual perception. It also obscures the view of art that accompanies this view of pictures.

The Story of Art famously opens with the axiom 'There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists.' From this, Gombrich argues that the concept or definition of art covers all objects so classified only retrospectively, that the concept properly can only be understood as an historical sequence or chain, each link continually revising the concept. It is, above all, a powerful argument for the history of art. But if art is simply the history of artists, it begs the question how the activity of artists is to be described? For Gombrich the activity is simply the advance of representation. Representation need not be narrowly understood as pictorial representation of course, but the focus of Gombrich's history is upon the plastic arts, and gives pride of place to depiction and painting. This commitment to an advance in depiction introduces a second feature of his view of the history of art. It is the idea that developments in pictures are progressive and absolute, have a history beyond any one culture or version of art. The development of the western pictorial tradition is seen as discoveries concerning the nature of visual perception, confirmed by optics and geometry. Pictures using systems of perspective for example, are seen as coming closer to showing an object the way we 'naturally', or 'really' see it.

For the moment it is enough to see how Gombrich's view of depiction relates to his view of art history. But it is with *Art and Illusion* and its more substantive arguments for the development of pictures that a critical dialogue arises. Reactions to his view

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[1] Gombrich, *The Story of Art,* (16th ed) Oxford/London, 1995, Gombrich, *Art And Illusion,* Oxford, 1960, Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye,* Oxford/New York, 1982.

of pictures, did not initially pursue its relation to art, but concerned themselves rather with the explanation of pictures as illusions. Two of the most searching critiques arose in the work of the philosophers Nelson Goodman and Richard Wollheim.[2] Both rejected the behaviouristic view of perception, and the naturalism it derives from principles of optics, both rejected the idea of an illusion, fostered by marks upon a surface, as a picture. But they did so for different reasons.

Wollheim pointed to the inconsistency in Gombrich's view of perception. On the one hand Gombrich asserts that seeing is bound up with knowing, that all perception is interpretation, but on the other, that it is nevertheless possible to depict according to what we 'really see'.[3] Yet to claim that there is some particular thing that we really see is precisely to distinguish between what is really there, and how it is interpreted. Wollheim also took issue with the view that perception operates according to a process of schema and correction. Initial schemas in perception cannot be corrected as a pictorial schema is corrected, by comparing it with an equivalent perception in real life. An initial perception can only be refuted or verified by subsequent perceptions. This crucial difference between plain perception and pictures weakens the argument for an underlying process of schema and correction. Wollheim's objections to the idea of pictures as illusions centre on Gombrich's discussion of the famous rabbit/duck ambiguous drawing.[4] He argued that the drawing presented two distinct interpretations, a surface and an image, which Gombrich mistakes for being mutually exclusive. For Wollheim, the interpretations are compatible yet distinct, to see the rabbit or the duck, is not to deny that they are a certain configuration of ink on paper, or a surface. The matter of an illusion arises only in the exceptional circumstances of a trompe l'oeil picture, usually a mural integrated within an architectural setting, which cannot be detected from certain angles.

Goodman's response was more sweeping, and came as part of his own theory in *Languages of Art*. He began by rejecting not only the idea of illusion in pictures, but

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[2] Goodman, *Languages of Art* (2nd ed) Indianapolis, 1976. The second edition is used throughout, here. Richard Wollheim, *On Art and the Mind*, London, 1973, pp. 261-284.
[3] Gombrich, 1960, p. 278.
[4] Ibid.4. Versions of this drawing have a long history in discussions on visual perception, both in the experiments of perceptual psychologists, such as Norma V. Scheidemann, *Experiments in General Psychology*, Chicago, 1939, p. 67, fig 21, and in the work of philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, 1953, p.194.

of any likeness or resemblance as the means by which a picture represents an object. He advanced two powerful arguments to this end. Firstly not all resemblances are representations: two apples may resemble one another but do not therefore represent one another. Resemblance is a two-way or symmetrical relation: each apple equally resembles the other. Representation, on the other hand, is a one-way or asymmetrical relation, a picture represents an apple, but an apple does not represent a picture of one. Secondly, not all pictures are resemblances. A picture of a fictional beast such as a unicorn does not resemble anything, literally. At best it complies with preceding descriptions or pictures. Moreover, pictures resemble other pictures as much if not more than they resemble any of their objects, yet usually represent objects not other pictures. Goodman declared that pictures represent or refer, not because they resemble but because they denote, are properly a mode of notation. But while he rejected resemblance as necessary or sufficient condition for depiction he allowed that it arises between picture and object as a result of custom or familiarity. He thus allowed for realism and illusion, but insisted they are relative to notation, context and custom. While Goodman also found much to commend in the relativism of Gombrich's account of schema and correction, he pointedly rejected the idea that the rules of perspective are faithfully derived from the laws of optics, and provided a set of damaging counter-examples, succinctly concluding: 'Briefly, the behaviour of light sanctions neither our usual nor any other way of rendering space; and perspective provides no absolute or independent standard of fidelity'.[5]

A measure of the impact of Goodman's arguments is found in Gombrich's subsequent book, *The Image and the Eye*. Here Gombrich abandoned arguments for perspective derived from the geometry of light, and proposed more modestly, an 'eyewitness principle'.[6] But Goodman also pointed to a more disturbing relativism in schema and correction or making and matching. Gombrich's position was that what we match or use pictures for, depends on what we make, but the process is in the long run an accumulative one, so that by matching one thing and then another, bit by bit we make the picture perfect match, an illusion. The prospect to which Goodman pointed is that while different matches depend on different makes,

[5] Goodman, *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis, 1976, pp. 16-19.
[6] Gombrich, 1982, p. 281.

different pictures of an object then have a way of turning into pictures of different objects.[7] The matches never quite add up, the makes are never just re-makes.

In the essay *Image and Code: Scope and Limits of Conventionalism in Pictorial Representation* Gombrich sought to defend the view of naturalism in pictures and to reconcile it with the need for conventions.[8] It takes pictorial rules or conventions as versions of perception, hence versions of illusion, versions of an object. It was notable also for inclusion of a response from Goodman, who managed to seek common ground while insisting that the distinction between nature and convention was also relative. Gombrich appealed to a behaviouristic view of image recognition amongst animals and insects, and to its instinctual basis. 'We are programmed to be more easily triggered by some configurations than by others.'[9] The argument can establish resemblance as a necessary and 'natural' relation for substitution, but not representation. Birds and fish may be deceived by a representation, but it does not therefore function as a representation or reference. Distinction between resemblance, substitution and reference may be elastic, or graded, as Gombrich argued in 'Pygmalion's Power' in *Art and Illusion*, but if the distinction between nature and convention is relative, as Goodman declared and Gombrich conceded, then reference still remains less natural, or more conventional. The lack of birds and fish enrolling in art classes might cinch this point. So there was no comfort there for Gombrich, no strict accuracy in labelling of Goodman as a conventionalist.

But while the case for pictures as an illusion cannot co-opt representation to resemblance, cannot draw support from the geometry of light, nor a biological disposition to perspective, and finally cannot resist conventions, the case for pictures as denotation, also has problems. Goodman's ideas for a depictive notation stretch the concepts of syntax and semantics into dense analogues, in order to explain why pictures can acquire resemblance, while notations such as writing cannot. In fact the combined dense analogues do little more than dissolve the concept of notation.[10] A further requirement for relative repleteness of syntax

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[7] See treatment of invention, fiction and representation-as in Goodman, 1976, pp. 21-34

[8] Gombrich, 1982, pp. 279 - 297

[9] Ibid. pp. 285-6

[10] There is acknowledgement that such density is the antithesis of notation. See Goodman, 1976, p.160. Goodman divides reference into denotation and exemplification with denotation then divided into description and depiction. Descriptive notation includes writing, mathematical and

assumes elements of one scheme of depiction may be always included within another, so that for example what is depicted in a simple line diagram, such as a floor plan, may be more fully depicted with the inclusion of tone or shading, colour and perspective.[11] But aspects of line cannot always be accommodated with aspects of tone without altering their constituent character, in fact shifting emphasis where line coincides with shade or contrasts with light, just as tone cannot be accommodated with all colours without losing key integrities of grey, and the same holds for volume, scale, projection and perspective. Thus the concept of repleteness of depictive syntax and of pictures as a mode of denotation - but without a notation - also proves something of a stumbling block.

Similarly, analysis of pictures in terms borrowed from structural linguistics, or as semiotics, struggle to detect the requisite syntax. The initial studies of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco for example, although hardly responding to Gombrich, ultimately rely upon an 'iconic' or resemblance relation; cannot reconcile it anymore effectively with reference nor adequately distinguish or explain 'plastic' qualities to depictive meaning.[12] Strictly, semiotics extends only iconographic and iconological analysis here. Following controversies between schools argue for various ranges of depiction as the proper domain of study and against the narrowness of mere linguistic transcription of depictive meaning, but do not otherwise advance the problem.[13] Later developments, grouped as post-structuralism, tend to reject a unitary code to semiotics and a fixed ideology supporting objects. Such approaches gradually disengage from the problem with pictures and its application to art history; in fact prefer to straddle disciplines, generally in the cause of social or cultural analysis. However, in the late seventies and early eighties a number of

musical systems, slides toward depiction with analogue scales and dance notation for instance. Analogue density of syntax and semantics no more than collapses notation, may perhaps organise notations usefully, as in James Elkins, *The Domain of Images*, Ithaca/London, 1999, but can only say in ways depiction is not notation (and therefore denotation).

[11] The example of a floor plan is not used by Goodman, but is consistent with the argument for repleteness. See Goodman, 1976, p.230.

[12] See Barthes, 'Rhétorique de l´image', in *Communications*, 4, 1964, pp. 40-51, Barthes, *Elements of semiology,* (1967) London, 1969, and Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics,* (1976) Bloomington, 1980.

[13] For a detailed history of semiotic studies in the period see Göran Sonesson, *Pictorial concepts: Inquiries into the semiotic heritage and its relevance for the analysis of the visual world*. Lund, Sweden, 1989 and introductory essay, 'Pictorial semiotics' online at http://filserver.arthist.lu.se/kultsem/encyclo/pictorial_semiotics.html (03). Also, controversy surrounding the paraphrasing of depictive meaning, here, interestingly parallels arguments for the 'heresy of paraphrase' in poetry. See for example, Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, Chapel Hill, N.C. 1967.

writers in the English-speaking world began to reflect these concerns while addressing art history more exclusively. The work of W.J.T. Mitchell, Norman Bryson and Rosalind E. Krauss, to name only three of the more prominent exponents, variously revisited the distinction between depiction and denotation.[14]

Mitchell's work is the more general, surveys a history of writing about pictures as a way of noting the difference between writing and depiction, considers concepts of depiction and underlying ideologies from this. However, given the attention paid to the contributions of Goodman and Gombrich, the work is of more interest to aesthetics and art history, and given the equivocation in matters of ideology, of less interest to the roving commission of 'critical theory'.[15] Goodman's theory is scrutinised for historical and ideological tendencies (recklessly aligning a metaphorical iconoclasm in Goodman's frequent reversals of orthodoxy with the literal iconoclasm of the Reformation and Puritanism) and curiously takes Goodman's reference schemes as canonical to Modernism.[16] Gombrich's position is taken as drawing a line between nature and convention or artifice in depiction. Yet the historical and ideological dimension to Gombrich's position, its implicit definition of art, goes unexamined. Mitchell's own position comes to little more than an affirmation of the value of writing about depiction, a predictable preference for writing (even in matters of pornography) and later treatments favour either the combination of text and depiction in works, as in Blake's illuminated manuscripts or the works of Robert Morris, or no more than glosses critics such as Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried and Rosalind E. Krauss on the nature of abstraction in depiction.[17]

Bryson's work also commences with a critique of Gombrich and concludes that resemblance and illusion are incompatible with the ambiguities and interpretation available to a sign or denotation. But this is assumed rather than argued. At the

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[14] Key publications for each are: W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image Text Ideology*, Chicago/London, 1986, Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, New Haven/London, 1983, Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge/Mass./London, 1986. Krauss's influence also extends through her co-editorship of the journal *October*, featuring an array of prominent critics including Annette Michelson, Douglas Crimp, Yves-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster.
[15] Critical theory here used in the sense given by The Frankfurt School of Marxist analysis.
[16] Mitchell, 1986, p.71 footnote 27.
[17] Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, Chicago/London, 1994, 111-180, pp. 213-280.

same time he rejects any simple structuralist analysis of iconography as too static and lacking the continual interaction with the world. The system or structure is thus understood as in a constant state of flux. Just what state of incompleteness may be taken as acceptable or useful to the dynamic sign system is unclear.[18] Rejecting a resemblance relation for depiction, Bryson persists with the application of syntax and proposes a detail of parsing and tense, in 'deixis' as the basis of depiction. But since the rest of syntax and semantics has proven ineffective in earlier semiotic studies, not surprisingly, this term taken in isolation hardly fares any better.

'Deixis' is taken as the rhetoric of a narrator, of terms indicating presence of a speaker in a discourse, and so a bodily or physical aspect as well as an explicit temporal dimension. In depiction this translates as a distinction between 'The Gaze' where deixis is absent, together with bodily and sequential reference, and 'The Glance', where deixis is present, through details of material indicating how long and in what way the depiction was made. The distinction thus attempts to account for the 'plastic' qualities that troubled early semioticians, and roughly parallels the 'indexic' aspect to signs proposed by C. S. Peirce, but without Peirce's overlapping and ancillary categories, relinquishes much in the way of traditional iconography and stylistics.[19] The necessary distinctions to materials and techniques are far from convincing in the array of examples provided because they assume a given identity to object depicted, and distinctions by which bodily signs are assigned materials or techniques equally beg greater scrutiny, (bodily signs surely admit subtle, minute and time-consuming gestures as well as bold, brief and grand ones, just as 'Gazes' grade into 'Glances') There is then the question of just how these distinctions are preserved any easier than preceding semiotics in the aforementioned constant flux? Finally, if most painting operates according to 'The Gaze' rather than 'The Glance' as would seem to be the argument, the distinction is rendered somewhat trivial, while if 'The Gaze' only indicates ideological issues of sexuality and power, as Bryson seems to suggest, then depictive meaning simply collapses into ideology. But surely neither ideology nor depiction is served by such crude reduction.

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[18] Bryson, 1983, pp. xiii-xiv.
[19] For Peirce on semiotics see 'Speculative Grammar' 'Letters to Lady Welby' and 'Existential Graphs' in C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Boston, 1931.

Drastic reduction of depictive meaning to ideological ends is also a feature of the work of Krauss at this time. Famously, she argued for grids as the basis of abstraction in depiction and painting, for their rigour and constraint as the ultimate test of originality or invention, and for such originality as the basis of Modernism and a capitalist ideology. [20] The post structuralist influence here is in the rejection of pure or neutral 'formal' means to depiction, in their relentless assimilation by iconography, and the ultimate disclosure of a stark ideological function. The promotion of grids is also seen as fundamental to depiction in resisting commentary or language. For Krauss it represents Modernism's 'will to silence' and the isolation of the visual arts in 'a realm of exclusive visuality'. [21] This is not to say that less is written or said about abstract works, or that less abstract works encourage commentary any more, but rather how fundamental the gulf between the verbal and visual is for an understanding of depiction, and how much more obvious this becomes with abstract work and its commentary.

However this sweeping thesis is unconvincing on a number of counts. There is firstly the laxity with which the term 'grid' is applied to various examples in order to place them at the centre of abstraction. Contrary to her claim, the 'grid' does not appear in Cubism for example – this is one myth Krauss actually encourages.[22] Nor is it constituted by the mere intersection of transom and mullions in the windows depicted within the examples by Friedrich and Redon, as claimed, and what metaphors they may provoke there are hardly inherited by any subsequent use of windows, glass, quadrilaterals, parallel or intersecting lines or in fact grids in depiction. Moreover, actual grids when present in paintings are neither dominant nor essential in abstraction. More importantly, abstraction does not directly inherit the content of more concrete depiction. Each formulation of the grid, or other

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[20] Krauss, 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde' in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge/Mass./London, 1986, p.161.

[21] Krauss, 'Grids' in Ibid. p.9.

[22] A grid surely requires a consistency to parallel lines and intersecting angles that Cubist works simply do not possess. Lines, while mostly straight in Cubist works are neither always co-extensive with the picture area, of uniform intervals, thickness or indeed parallel. They do not therefore constitute a 'grid' as it is commonly understood. The same holds for cited works by Malevich, Late Mondrian, Reinhardt and Albers. The grid more accurately arises in Modernism around 1918, through the influence of experimental psychology and in particular the study of colour. See for example John Gage, *Colour and Culture*, London/New York, 1993, p. 258. Mondrian introduces the grid in a series of works titled *Composition with Grid* between 1918 and 1919, in a style usually described as De Stijl or Neo-Plasticism, quite distinct from Cubism, while Klee notably uses it in various works throughout the twenties and early thirties.

arrangements of only straight lines, revises content by its formal terms. No claim for sheer or absolute originality in materials or techniques arises in abstraction for this reason; materials are no more than revised by various abstraction. Therefore Modernism places no higher premium upon originality than preceding periods, and originality in and of itself offers no distinctive character to the ideology of a period.

Nevertheless this view has been influential in shaping a history of abstraction and Modernism, and is important here as an example of how the problem persists, even for an approach that hurries to ideology. It shows that the concerns of a broader social history cannot quite ignore the problem with pictures – even very abstract pictures – in advancing interpretations, without fatally compromising explanation. Iconography must recognise formal features to a picture if it is to exploit its content, and formal features depend upon a theory of depiction. There can be no 'all history and no art' if the objective is still to address art.

Mitchell, Bryson and Krauss all look to denotation to explain depiction, if not as a distantly related system then as an opposing one, feeding off or complementing depiction. Against this scrutiny of reference, the problem of depiction is also pursued in support of resemblance. The philosopher and art critic David Carrier considered at length Gombrich's position in relation to the art history that accompanies it. Carrier surveyed a history of art history method in *Artwriting* and concluded that differences lay in conceptions of a picture and confusions arising from its 'conventional' basis.[23] He defended Gombrich's naturalism, rejected semiotic theories, lumping together Bryson and Goodman for example, but could offer no compelling account of realism upon which to base such a defence, and curiously interpreted *The Story of Art* as announcing an end to depiction and art with Cubism.[24]

Resemblance was also at the heart of Wollheim's *Painting as an Art*, which included criticisms of Gombrich and Goodman, as well as social and cultural approaches, and offered new views on pictures and art.[25] His approach emphasised a psychological context, and the importance of intention in determining depictive

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[23] David Carrier, *Artwriting,* Amhurst, Mass., 1987.
[24] Ibid. p. 88.
[25] Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, London/New York, 1987.

meaning. It deftly avoided the notorious intentional fallacy by insisting upon a standard of correctness for pictorial representation, the details of which are reviewed in Chapter Four. It is enough here to indicate the emphasis upon psychology. Intention runs counter to Goodman's theory, under which the rules of notation determine meaning, but is accommodated within Gombrich's theory, as the means of distinguishing between skill and will, between what the maker achieved and what was attempted.[26] It might be thought that a theory grounded in illusion would have no need of such 'conventions', but as seen, conventions have a way of seeping into the matter.

As noted, Wollheim was critical of illusion, and sought to reconcile the perception of a picture as surface and image. He referred to this as 'two-foldness' and argued that we see the picture as an image, on a surface.[27] But what is meant by the surface apart from the image is uncertain. If only the markings of the image comprise this surface, then we cannot see these at the same time as the image, since they *are* the image under one description, the markings under another. In truth Wollheim's is a resemblance theory, adopting a psychological disposition to 'see-in' and find such images in a surface, as a necessary condition to depiction, and where in accordance with the intention, sufficient. It avoids the implausibility of illusion but begs the question in what way the surface is seen as resembling an object. Goodman, by contrast, consolidated his position with subsequent books, *Ways of Worldmaking,* stressing firstly the pluralism of his approach, and its application to stylistics, *Of Mind and Other Matters* refining notation and realism and *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences* with Catherine Z. Elgin, expanding on multiplicity of reference and exemplification, but all three books argued against intention in determining depictive meaning.[28]

Two further contributions are of note, *The Domain of Images* by James Elkins and *What Is Painting?* by Julian Bell.[29] Elkins, while essentially hostile to *Languages of Art*,

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[26] Gombrich, 1960, p. 56, pp. 65-67.
[27] Wollheim, 1987, pp. 46-47, 72-75.
[28] Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis, 1978, Goodman, *Of Mind and Other Matters*, Cambridge/Mass./London, 1984 and Nelson Goodman and Catherine Z. Elgin, *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences*, London, 1988. Catherine Z. Elgin, *With Reference To Reference*, Indianapolis, 1983, offers an extensional rather than nominalist theory of meaning.
[29] James Elkins, *The Domain of Images*, Ithaca/London, 1999, Julian Bell, *What is Painting?* London/New York, 1999.

applied Goodman's ideas of pictorial notation to examples that combine writing and decorative or abstract elements with depiction in various ways.[30] He assumed this to be a misuse of the theory, (when the theory accounts for the full spectrum of notation, of which depiction occupies one end) and assumed that even though the theory is incoherent as an account of depiction, this presented no impediment to its application to the rest of the notational spectrum. But this is rather like using a compass, knowing it cannot find true north, but expecting to navigate by the other directions. Elkins supplemented Goodman's views with a more traditional view of pictures as resemblances - although curiously the view is drawn from Wittgenstein rather than Gombrich, and proposed a two-level model of depiction, one for resemblance to objects and relations, the other for rules of interpretation. But this no more than registers the difference between nature and artifice again.

However Elkins also usefully pointed to flaws in Goodman's argument for repleteness in the cited but unillustrated example of matching curves for a finance graph and a drawing of a wave by Hokusai.[31] Not only is it hard to find examples from these sources that suitably match curves, (although a complete match is not vital to Goodman's point) but Goodman's argument that all of the (hypothetical) Hokusai drawing's properties contribute to its meaning, while only the two dimensional co-ordinates of the graph count as its meaning, rather confuses the issue. Crucially, matters of the thickness of line or texture of paper, may express, or exemplify, but do not depict the wave. The wave is not depicted as having a widening black line riding on its crest, for example. Expression and exemplification are taken as modes of reference distinct from depiction under Goodman's theory, although all three may be present and combined under various schemes. The mistake is in confusing repleteness of reference, which combines depiction, expression and exemplification, with mere repleteness of depiction, which perhaps might amount to the conformity or acceptance of an object under a given scheme, to its realism in effect. What is otherwise notable in Elkins' efforts is the determination to find an integration of writing with pictures and decoration, if not

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[30] For hostility to *Languages of Art* see Elkins, 1999, p.66. While not a history of art, *The Domain of Images* does include examples of twentieth century abstraction and so is of interest here. Elkins engages more directly with 20th century art in *What Happened to Art Criticism?* London & Chicago, 2003 (a prelude to a longer study, planned as *Success and Failure in Twentieth Century Painting*).

[31] Ibid. p.70.

as notation, then in some way to say how resemblance relates to these forms of reference, to the beauty and effectiveness of decoration and design.

 Julian Bell's book on the other hand came with the assistance and endorsement of Gombrich but a similar hostility to *Languages of Art*.[32] It ostensibly dealt with pictorial representation and Modernism, but rapidly sketched along themes of psychology, philosophy, history and economics, leaped back and forth from ancient to contemporary art, obscure to familiar works. His grave suspicions about the nature of expression have much in common with both *The Story of Art* and *Art and Illusion*. Discussion of the Gombrich - Goodman exchange commenced by considering a realist seascape by William Wylie.[33] Not only did Bell come firmly down on the side of Gombrich in finding the illusion of the sea compelling ('we gaze at the picture and sniff the imaginary brine') but immediately linked this to the case against iconography, (and by implication, semiotics) and an appeal once more to a native substitution or illusion as the basis of depiction. Yet the distinction between substitution and depiction goes unacknowledged, and the use of such a concept in a brief account of Goodman's notational approach, all but renders it incoherent. What is conspicuous in the book is the slender basis provided by Gombrich's views for an adequate account of the art of the twentieth century. Tellingly, Bell had nothing to say about the closing chapters to *The Story of Art*, with their extended criticism of contemporary art and society, and while Bell can at least accommodate artists such as Stella, Guston and Richter, his story echoed Gombrich's as one of dissipation and failure.

What is clear from this review of the problem with pictures is the continuing stalemate presented by the Gombrich – Goodman exchange, of resemblance versus reference. Discussion is still brought back to the claims of illusion fostered through substitution and inherited by depiction and amounting to a conventional or rule bound 'illusion'. But is such a claim coherent, much less plausible? Against this, there are Goodman's arguments that resemblance is symmetrical, and therefore an

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[32] Gombrich's endorsement appears on the front cover, Bell credits Gombrich's assistance in the acknowledgements. Bell's hostility toward *Languages of Art* registers in the description of its 'suave insensitivity'. See Bell, 1999, p. 239. His later publication *Mirror of the World*, London, New York 2007 looks to a more global history, significantly traces broad humanist themes rather than stylistic issues.
[33] Ibid. pp. 225-230.

object ought to represent a picture as much as a picture represents an object, or that pictures resemble other pictures more than their objects, yet they refer to their objects more than other pictures. Or, that there are pictures for which there are strictly no objects for them to resemble, such as pictures of unicorns. Yet for all this, if pictures denote in order to refer, they apparently do so without a notation. The following chapter therefore returns to the issue of resemblance versus reference, to see if something has not been overlooked or unexplored. Since Bell has performed this service for Gombrich, this study does as much for Goodman.