

Expression and Style

The issue of expression arose in considering caricature and the issue of style arose in Chapter Two concerning classification and practice of exemplification. This chapter traces important links between the two, looks firstly at their treatment under Goodman's theory and shows how depiction taken as exemplification now requires some further distinction to accommodate expression, but remains consistent with Goodman's views on reference and stylistics. The position is then contrasted with those of Gombrich and Wollheim.

What is expressive and usually amusing in caricature is the latitude or variation granted the object and its sort of picture. But even caricatures vary in degree of expressiveness as well as in what is expressed, and expression is not only or even mostly by caricature. Expression in reference is commonly understood as a matter of how as opposed to what is stated. Obviously not all reference or statements are counted equally or especially expressive, rather expression registers only where means or ends offer surprising or novel variation. What is expressed *in* a statement sometimes amounts to the ways it departs from standard accounts, identifies a novel aspect or point of view to an issue or object. But expression more typically is a matter of how rather than what is stated, depends upon tone of voice, rhetoric and other performance in utterance, upon vocabulary and syntax in writing and especially figures of speech, sometimes upon typeface, layout and design, and in depiction upon especially materials and technique.

In *Languages of Art* analysis of expression begins with descriptive notation or writing, and focuses upon figures of speech, their range of elements or 'schemata', their realm of application and importantly their occasional re-application or transfer of

range and or realm.⁶⁷ Irony for example is understood as reversed schemata, whereby range of elements is applied to the same realm in reverse order, so that a misfortune becomes 'a fine thing' or a windfall 'tough luck'. A similar revision of range might explain caricature, whereby proportion, modelling, and facial expression for example, still obtain the same realm but revise ordering of elements. But Goodman does not suggest this. Where transference is of both range and realm, figures essentially function as metaphor, but Goodman also demonstrates that the model of transfer holds for simile, euphemism, personification, synecdoche, antonomasia, litotes, hyperbole and meiosis, under and over use thereof. Expression is now seen as relative to familiarity or usage of range or realm for schemata. Talk of schemata recalls Gombrich's schema and correction, and Goodman's discussion of 'ping and pong' in synaesthetic transfers readily acknowledges the precedent.⁶⁸ However, Goodman also departs from Gombrich in allowing an intimate relation between expression and exemplification in depiction.

This now calls for some adjustment to the proposed theory, where depiction is already taken as a mode of exemplification. It requires a further distinction between the exemplification of two-dimensionality and three, or what shall now be termed *material* exemplification. In Chapter Two it was noted that in exemplifying two-dimensionality a surface was distinctively reconfigured or marked so as to effectively display the sample, and that the material or three-dimensional aspects to this reconfiguration in turn may offer additional or attendant sample. Sampling becomes two-faced or double-edged in this way. It is this distinction between material exemplification and depiction that now corresponds to Goodman's discussion of expression for exemplification and depiction. Material exemplification may offer literal or metaphorical sample to accompany depiction, which in turn may offer literal or metaphorical realms, in allegory or realism and blends. However, Goodman's emphasis is upon transfer of material samples in expression, such as the literally grey picture that is metaphorically - expressively - bleak or lonely, (in as much as it claims a novel but effective realm).

⁶⁷ Goodman, 1976, pp. 68-84.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.76.

But the point is also that depiction is often accompanied by the sampling of literal material properties for themselves, not just of colour or line but also of facture or technique, size, scale or detail, expense or rarity of materials, framing and even location (for murals) amongst others, and that any or some contribute to the meaning of a picture, to how and what a picture samples. Yet to say that a picture *expresses* say, a roughness or whiteness, is also to suggest perhaps that it is not itself, or literally, rough or white. For this reason expression is reserved for transfers of material samples. Transfers however are not necessarily to emotional realms, to sadness or joy, say, but as often and also to synaesthetic realms indicated above, to sounds or tastes, to qualities like slipperiness or bulkiness, even for the literally small, dry and solid picture. Finally, Goodman has less to say about metaphor *within* depiction, of allegorical or personified pictures for example, and whether these necessarily count as expressive. Although it is clear from the conditions for effective transfer that where the realm is obvious or familiar, such as in an illustration to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, or of a woman as justice or liberty, that expression and transfer are less prominent than mere statement. So expression requires prominence or exemplification of novel transfer, rather than just instantiation, and this holds for transfer in material exemplification as well, although perhaps less rigorously.

Expression thus expands upon depictive meaning through metaphor and the proposed distinction here between depictive and material exemplification explains how meaning is variously combined and subtly interacts. In Chapter One criticism of Goodman's example of a picture of a wave by Hokusai corresponding to a finance graph drew attention to the difference between literal depiction and expressive qualities attributed to the outline. The relation between them is now clear and preserves Goodman's distinctions between meanings, for taking a stricter view of depiction.

Meaning arises along roughly three routes, through structure, of literal materials, through sentiment, of metaphor or expressive transfer, and through statement, of depiction. All and only such reference is taken to constitute stylistic features for a picture, to locate it according to typical occurrence of such features for a source, as artist, time, place, school, trend, region, nation or period. Source need not be supplied by every category for a style and every category need not share a scale for

time or place. A source may be as broad as the pre-historic period or as narrow as the artist's blue period, as sweeping as western; or European style, through to national, regional and more local styles.

Furthermore the style or combination of reference features for one source is rarely the same as those for another, so that for example, school or regional style may favour structure over statement; or the artist's individual style favour sentiment over statement, or various weighting and combinations. Goodman's views on style are expanded in *Ways of Worldmaking*, where style and stylistics are seen as an indispensable tool to understanding depiction.⁶⁹ Art history and criticism are seen as exchanging ends for means in regard to style. The historian attributes a picture to a style through document and research while the critic appraises what the picture's inclusion means to the style, and the style to the picture, drawing on broader considerations of biography, politics, geography, economics, psychology, and other disciplines. Beyond this, interesting and unexpected features are frequently discovered through mixing styles, even jumbling pictures with other objects and reference, but this is only to contrast with established styles. Again Goodman urges that no definitive list of features need be drawn up for a style to be effective; that is something simply to be worked at and usually grasped without fully analysing its elements. As with the issue of fiction, the test is rather in our sureness and understanding of pictures, in our ability to maintain subtle distinctions between them. We profit from the challenge and find the complex and elusive style rewarding, the quick and simple mere mannerism. Appreciation of style is an integral aspect of our sensitivity and understanding of depiction and anticipates the issue of art.

It is instructive at this point to compare Goodman's views with those of Gombrich and Wollheim. Goodman pointedly contrasts his rejection of intention and synonymy for example, with Gombrich's views while Wollheim's later formulations are equally explicit in their rejection of Goodman.⁷⁰ Gombrich takes expression to be depictive reference to the non-visual senses, or the invisible, to ideas and

⁶⁹ Goodman, 1978, pp. 23-40.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 23. The footnote to this page identifies a Gombrich entry in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 15, p. 353, but the account offered in Gombrich, 1960, pp. 304-329, serves as the source for discussion here. See also Wollheim, 1987, pp. 25-40.

sentiments. It extends his position on depiction in tracing a smooth progression of ‘equivalences’ or a synonymous translation between pictorial features and such non-visible objects. But there can be no appeal to an illusion, or a natural perception with such expression. Instead Gombrich turns to elementary polarities, to Roman Jakobson’s game of ‘ping’ and ‘pong’ as well as Charles E. Osgood’s semantic experiments to propose a structure through which to establish synonymy.⁷¹ Such schema - or schemata - allow a tradition of the plain Doric column contrasted with the ornate Corinthian column, for example, to express modesty opposed to extravagance, and later variations to build expression through related motifs, so that they may then express say, rustic purity versus worldly compromise.

Hence expression in Gombrich’s theory, while similarly suggesting metaphor, is essentially concerned with allegory and versions of schema, and largely ignores material exemplification. Expression is again linked to style, in the schema preserving these traditional polarities and by synonymy of styles. Synonymy takes styles as versions of a shared object or theme, or draws a hard line between how and what, manner and matter. Synonymy allows expression to deal with metaphoric variation to such shared objects or themes, but the formulation is not so much misguided as stunted. Gombrich’s example of the individual style of John Constable is telling in this respect. Constable is seen as achieving stylistic distinction in the pastoral genre, of introducing a certain atmosphere – ‘lights, dews, breezes’ – previously unavailable, but inserted through a shrewd mixture of rebellion and compromise.⁷² On the one hand it discovers a new perceptual truth, on the other it no more than refines colour schema for tradition. But the account then struggles with the success enjoyed by Constable’s sketches, and an argument is made for the superiority of the finished works, on the basis of their greater adherence to tradition. Preference for the sketches is dismissed as a superficial indulgence of ‘the beholder’s share’ or of pandering to mere suggestiveness in perception and pictures.⁷³ Yet Gombrich’s whole theory of depiction as illusion rests on just such suggestiveness. The real issue here is the inability to accept facture or the handling of materials as expressive features. In fact preference for the sketches rests mainly

⁷¹ Osgood et al., *The Measurement of Meaning*, Urbana, 1957.

⁷² Gombrich, 1960, pp. 325-326.

⁷³ Earlier, in the chapter ‘The Image in the Clouds’, Gombrich similarly parades his prejudice against the ‘manieroso’ in painting, finding such suggestiveness only for the informed – “It is always flattering to feel ‘in the know’”, Gombrich, 1960, pp. 166-167.

on the perceived expressiveness of the looser handling. Matters as general and transitory as a breezy atmosphere are not to be caught in a close attention to foliage or texture, or the careful polish of tonalities, but in a more global impression, and not just in terms of objects depicted, but also of formal properties of facture and viscosity of paint, of literal or material sampling. Breeziness in Constable's manner of painting helps him sketch breeziness in nature.

The example underlines the problem of style taken as synonymy. Gombrich is reluctant to accept the sketch because it abandons detail and finish in the interest of wholistic features, and more generally allows that the objects might have properties or appearances particular to a style. This weakens the synonymy of pictures to objects, styles to pictures, expression to styles. The same holds for the view that Constable's landscapes restate the pastoral tradition, which in turn restates classical sentiments of modesty and rustic truth. It is to take a somewhat static view of the matter. Accepting Constable as part of the pastoral tradition means revising some of the things that style identifies, so a plea for Constable's conformity in matters of finish rather pre-empts the issue, if accommodation is to be a two-way affair. Gombrich similarly berates Romanticism for its concentration upon novelty and invention at the expense of tradition, but his stern historian's focus upon the constancy of tradition is just as much a mistake.⁷⁴ Tradition is traditionally open to negotiation. The fact is, manner affects matter, how a picture is made affects what a picture makes, and vice versa. Strict synonymy sells style and expression short. Expression is not simply what a metaphor transfers from the depicted object, or to where, nor the right schema for a remote realm, but also in the material sampled along with depiction, transfers to and from it.

In *Painting as an Art*, Wollheim proposed not only a theory of pictorial meaning, but also its development within painting and its status as art. He offered a model of pictorial meaning developed through a process of 'thematization'.⁷⁵ This concerns the agent's awareness of accidental, unintended, overlooked or ignored aspects within a pictorial tradition or style and of their referential possibilities.⁷⁶ The agent's

⁷⁴ Gombrich, 1960, p. 322.

⁷⁵ Wollheim, 1987, pp. 19-25.

⁷⁶ The term agent rather than artist is maintained here as in Wollheim, in deference to his distinction between artists and other makers of pictures.

efforts to harness or incorporate them are termed the thematisation of pictorial features. This is also taken as a model for the development of individual or personal style. A personal style is taken as a necessary condition of art. Wollheim's focus upon the individual is of a piece with his psychological approach and the role of intention in establishing pictorial meaning. It is also of a piece with idealism, as shall be demonstrated.

The familiar objections to intention are met here firstly where the intention is not taken narrowly, as an explicit statement, but rather as all the thoughts, memories and feelings that occur during production of a picture, and that 'cause' the agent to depict in a certain way.⁷⁷ Secondly, intention is only fulfilled if the spectator is able to derive this from the experience of looking at the picture – it is not enough, in other words, to know about the intentions and just to associate them with the picture. It must be visible in the picture, in a way acceptable to the spectator. The question is, having met these requirements, are we still talking about intention? An intention that is so attenuated as to embrace all thoughts, memories and feelings that influence or cause the agent to depict in a certain way looks uncomfortably like mere consciousness. Attempting to demarcate which mental events actually made and did not make a difference to the picture only begs the question what sort of difference counts? Different when? How? If the picture looks different as the agent anticipates dinner, has this advanced the picture? The only way to tell is from the finished picture, and all that can be told from the finished picture is all that led to its being finished. There is no separating some moments from the rest in the causal chain.

Then there is the question of the fulfilment of the intentions, and whether it can, strictly speaking, still be considered an intention after fulfilment; at which time we have a deed. Wollheim refers to the fulfilled intention of the agent in a picture as the description under which the picture is so taken, much as a deed might be taken as the description under which the agent acted, or the agent's own description of the deed. The assumption is that each deed or object may be described in a variety

⁷⁷ For the 'formalist' argument against mere intention see Monroe Beardsley and W.K. Wimsatt, 'The Intentional Fallacy', *Sewanee Review*, 54, 1946, pp. 3-23. See also Monroe Beardsley and Hubert M. Schueller (eds.) *Aesthetic Inquiry: Essays in Art criticism and the Philosophy of Art*, Belmont/California, 1967.

of ways, and in fact must be further described in some way, to be intelligible, and that the agent has in mind just the one comprehensive description. In other words the deed or object in-itself is vague, ineffable or meaningless. Yet the deed or object under a particular description has a way of extending that description all the way to the describer, in the quest for further particularity. Ultimately matter is exchanged for mind. This is the idealist basis to Wollheim's views, and it underwrites his commitment to psychology and personal style. Wollheim sees the fulfilled intentions being modified, and tested by the agent through playing the role of the spectator, imagining how the picture will be taken and whether the desired description of the picture can be seen. But if there are roles for what can and cannot be seen in the picture, then there are rules, and if there are rules then intention is overruled. When what the agent means only matters when they play by the rules or roles, then it is the rules we look to for meaning. Wollheim's formulation is at best a Pyrrhic victory for intention.

Wollheim's view of expression, like his view of depiction, draws on the natural inclinations of the spectator to project onto a suitable surface. His view of expression is exclusively in terms of emotion, rejecting Gombrich's examples of synesthesia, and Goodman's transfers of literal properties by metaphor.⁷⁸ Indeed he considers at length an interesting objection to the view of expression as metaphor in relation to emotion.⁷⁹ It concerns the transfer of an emotion such as sadness, through metaphor, to a picture of a landscape, to take the simplest of examples. The landscape expresses sadness, or is metaphorically a sad landscape. The objection is that a landscape cannot be sad in the same way a person is sad, unless the metaphor is of the landscape as a sad person, which is then a different matter. The sadness must therefore be of an abstracted or idealized kind, in order to 'double-up' as Wollheim terms it, for both literal and metaphorical applications. What is literally sad is a feeling, and what is metaphorically sad is a landscape, but how is a landscape to be taken as sad, unless as a person? And if both feeling and landscape are sad in the same sense, are they both then literal or metaphorical?

⁷⁸ Wollheim, 1987, p. 80.

⁷⁹ Ibid. pp. 84-85.

In reply one might start by citing Goodman's description of a metaphor as 'an affair between a predicate with a past and an object that yields while protesting'.⁸⁰ A metaphor does not always apply smoothly and easily to its object. The idea is to find or make a way in which they match or make new sense. To apply sadness to a landscape is to take sadness as a place, for a person, or within a person. The disjuncture is obvious, yet intriguing. To fret about its disembodied or idealistic nature is to confuse its literal and metaphorical applications, or to look for one application that holds for both literal and metaphorical instances. What is shared by literal sadness and metaphorical sadness is not the ultimate in sadness, but a label and a practice, in one instance applied literally, and in the other literally misapplied. What rough and ready success this misapplication may have, no more establishes a transcendent sadness than the strict compliance of further literal applications. A metaphor makes up sadness, as much as it makes out sadness. It should also be added that much of Wollheim's attention to this issue is directed toward defending the concept of expressive projection, by which a subject projects onto a suitable scene certain uncomfortable feelings, and in so doing is rid of them. The subject experiences the scene as sad, for example, although this does not make the subject feel sad. Just what the subject's response is to this sudden transformation in surroundings or picture, coinciding as it does with an abrupt swing in mood, is unclear, as is the nature of the place or picture prior to projection, and indeed of the subject's grasp of such matters.

Yet expressive projection also extends to literal or material properties for a depiction in *Painting as an Art*, and may find bodily metaphors, as for example in the abstract paintings of de Kooning and with at least a nod to the work of Rothko.⁸¹ The theory thus offers a broader range to expression than that of Gombrich, while at the same time narrowing the realm for metaphor. Apart from this however, abstraction in Wollheim's version is dismissed as decorative, and the literal materials of the picture are denied a stylistic function shorn of psychological metaphor. He can therefore offer neither a strictly musical metaphor to a painting by Piet Mondrian for example, as Gombrich does; nor admit to the literal or formal properties of a print by Josef Albers or Patrick Heron, as Goodman does.⁸² Like

⁸⁰ Goodman, 1976, p. 69.

⁸¹ Wollheim, 1987, pp. 348-352.

⁸² Gombrich, 1960, pp. 311-312, Goodman, 1978, p. 33.

Gombrich, his theory sells stylistics short, and is finally less useful in regard to twentieth century art, a shortcoming noted elsewhere.⁸³ His account of style and the concept of thematisation are interesting for the contrast to Gombrich's version of making and matching, - Wollheim's version is pointedly ahistorical and deeply self-absorbed, a myth of 'Ur-painting' – while the parallels between thematisation and exemplification are equally intriguing. Thematisation might well be seen as the transfer of exemplification to a psychological realm.

The comparisons show how traditional concerns with synonymy and intention variously shape expressive and other stylistic meaning, make for preference amongst structure, sentiment and statement, priority to certain works and styles. Of course other stylistic priorities may be derived from synonymy and intention and stylistic priorities are not only to be derived from synonymy and intention, so the point is firstly that stylistic resources are wider than allowed by Gombrich or Wollheim and that other formulations tend to deny some part of stylistic features. It also shows how a theory of depiction is carried over into issues of art history and criticism. In laying aside synonymy and intention, Goodman's theory allows all three levels to style and so a broader range of meaning and more adequate stylistics, one that reflects various practices of criticism and history and offers greater integration.⁸⁴

This gain however entails other commitments, although these need not be addressed immediately. Goodman offers no sustained interpretation or history of art, and it remains to be seen what difference an application of his stylistics makes, but the theory is clearly drawn to art. Indeed all three theories draw art into discussion of expression and style, as examples have indicated. Clearly pictures alone do not constitute art, and expression and style are not sufficient condition, although the sense is that they advance the cause considerably. The following chapter duly addresses the issue of depiction and art.

⁸³ Arthur Danto, 'Art's Infancy' in *London Review Of Books*, 1993, April 22, pp. 17-18.

⁸⁴ Goodman acknowledges that theory no more than keeps pace with practice in this respect. Goodman, 1978, p.24.