

# DEPICTION & PAINTING

1950-2000

*A Theory and History of Art*

**GERRY BELL**

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# Content

## Part One – Theory

<b>Content</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Detailed Table of Contents for Part One</b>	<b>7-8</b>
1. The Problem with Pictures	9
2. Depiction Revised	23
3. Depiction Pursued: Five Issues	31
4. Expression and Style	45
5. Depiction and Art	55
6. Art History	64
7. Interpretation	72
8. Realisms	79
9. Painting	89
10. Summary	104

## Part Two – History

### Detailed Table of Contents for Part Two 109-111

11. Modernism and Abstraction	112
12. Modernism 1912-1950: ‘Simultaneous and Successive Depiction’	126
13. Late Modernism 1950-1960: ‘Reciprocal Depiction’	138
14. Post-Modernism and Pop Art: Painting Printing 1960-1970	150
15. Post- Modernism Continued: Painting Photography 1962-1978	164
16. The End of Post-Modernism: ‘Bad’ Painting, Neo-Expressionism and New Image Painting.	176
17. Abstraction in Late and Post-Modernism	189
18. ‘Expanded Materials’ in Late and Post-Modernism	204
19. Globalism 1985-2000	223
20. Conclusion	249
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>259-305</b>

# Introduction

The scope and method to this study are unusually broad. Scope extends from a review of theories of depiction, in art history, aesthetics, psychology and descriptive geometry, to related issues of style, expression, interpretation and painting, to their application in art criticism.

The aim is firstly to provide an adequate theory of depiction, one that holds for the full range of examples, then to demonstrate how the theory may overcome certain stylistic problems for the study of recent art. There is a danger obviously in stretching research too thinly, in providing only a superficial account of this range and confusing some traditional boundaries. This is set against the prospect of a more effective integration, a greater understanding of depiction and a more consistent and discriminating view of recent art history.

The study thus proceeds by careful and extensive reference, allows that the reader's expertise may not extend equally to all areas visited, explains basic principles on many, perhaps obvious points. It takes time to traverse the full breadth of topic, may seem unduly pedestrian on certain points. Indeed, theoretical issues may tax the reader anxious to embark upon simply a novel art history. The study falls readily enough into two parts, theory and history, but history cannot be read with profit before theory, nor theory fully appreciated without its application to history. The theoretical issues prompt a series of bold departures, although implications for history may not always be obvious. But assuredly, all are needed to build a theory of any strength or conviction, and the problems to be addressed require just this of theory. There is no point advocating a theory of lesser scope, no point reviewing art history supported by anything less.

The problems for recent art history concern firstly the concept of abstraction in depiction and its relation to competing and more concrete styles. Mistakes over the distinction between the picture plane and picture surface, about varieties of picture plane or schemes of projection and perspective and the role of painting in depiction

are carried through to problems with stylistics. The period of Modernism inflates to unmanageable proportions and then makes problems for the extent of Post-Modernism. While the study shares an interest in these periods with a great deal of recent scholarship, it is distinctive in this concentration upon stylistics.

Method of research is conspicuous where art history is more fully engaged. Research here regroups established works according to stylistic features derived from the theory of depiction. Method makes for new styles rather than the more usual elaboration on source for a given style. New styles are rarely offered as replacements for established ones, but rather as additional categories that ease and integrate the system of styles within and around the periods of Modernism and Post-Modernism.

Modernism and Post-Modernism are revised in duration and constitution. However, where new sub-styles are introduced and names coined, such as 'Overstyle' and 'Rerealism', they are placed in inverted commas throughout the text, acknowledging novelty. This also applies to terms introduced for special techniques or features such as 'layout', 'traction', 'interruption' and 'readily-made'. Following this emphasis upon stylistics, analysis of individual works here is primarily concerned with identifying salient features and demonstrating how they work or refer, rather than interpreting the fuller ramifications of source. In cases where a substantial body of interpretation exists for a given work or artist's style, standard publications are acknowledged in footnote, along with key agreements or disputes. Because of the amount of ground covered, descriptions are necessarily brief. Hopefully, rigour and clarity avoid any impression of flippancy.

Scope and method are thus granted latitude only to address vital issues and afford necessary revision. The work of Nelson Goodman proves an underestimated resource in this. Adopting and adapting his aesthetic for this purpose makes the study a very rare foray indeed. Where the study succeeds, a good many aspects are to be credited to his work, at least by the good mannered reader. And success is to be measured in both a more adequate theory of depiction and a more complete and coherent history for recent art. This is the test the study sets itself, that sanctions departures in scope and method and that the patient reader is finally asked to apply.

To note particulars of presentation, the study falls into twenty chapters and two parts. Chapters One to Ten are devoted to theory, Eleven to Twenty to history. A table for each part details the progression of chapters, relevant reading, artists and styles (see navigation bar). The many illustrations accompanying the text are provided by links in the PDF files or from a list on the illustrations page. This enables the illustrations to be found on-line, even as the relevant text hurries from any point on a page where an illustration might usefully be inserted. It also allows the text to use many more and often larger illustrations than might practically be inserted, many more than might be afforded in permission and copyright clearance. It is unfortunate that the illustrations cannot accompany the reader who wishes to read a printed copy, or off-line, but the reader is free to copy or print the illustrations. Hopefully this arrangement is not too inconvenient.

Part One			
THEORY			
Chapter	Title	Description	Main Reference
1	<i>The Problem with Pictures</i>	Brief history of competing theories of depiction, their application in art history and aesthetics, from Gombrich to the late nineties.	E.H. Gombrich, Nelson Goodman, Richard Wollheim, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Norman Bryson, W.J.T. Mitchell, Erwin Panofsky, Rosalind Krauss, James Elkins, Julian Bell.
Page 9			
2	<i>Depiction Revised</i>	A closer look at Nelson Goodman's theory of reference, a revision proposed.	Goodman, Gombrich, Mitchell
Page 23			
3	<i>Depiction Pursued</i>	Applies new theory to five key issues for depiction – depth, distortion, caricature, fiction and found or natural images	John Willats, J. J. Gibson, Goodman, Gombrich, David Marr et al, John M. Kennedy, Wollheim, Stephanie Ross
Page 31			
4	<i>Expression and Style</i>	Reconciles the new theory of depiction with Goodman's views of expression as metaphor, together with its relation to classification of style, or stylistics.	Goodman Wollheim, Gombrich, John Constable, Monroe Beardsley, W.K. Wimsatt, Arthur Danto,
Page 45			
5	<i>Depiction and Art</i>	The problem of beauty or excellence in depiction and art. Combining the proposed theory with Goodman's view of cognitive effectiveness.	Goodman, Catherine Z. Elgin, Gombrich, Wollheim, George A. Kelly.
Page 55			
6	<i>Art History</i>	The problem in Gombrich's historical approach to (and definition of) art, in particular concerning the twentieth century.	Gombrich, Goodman, Bell, David Carrier.
Page 64			

7	<b><i>Interpretation</i></b>	The problem of interpretation underpinning an historical definition of art. Radical relativist approaches to interpretation (and history). An irrealist method to history outlined.	Gombrich, Martin Heidegger, Jurgen Habermas, Joseph Margolis, E.D. Hirsch, Peter Caws, Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Hans Gadamer, James F. Harris, Harvey Siegel, Goodman
Page 72			
8	<b><i>Realisms</i></b>	A pluralistic view of stylistic realism, or realisms, demonstrated by analysis of the work of Pollock.	Gombrich, Goodman, Elgin, Mitchell, Jackson Pollock, Claude Cernuschi, Irving Sandler,
Page 79			
9	<b><i>Painting</i></b>	A pluralist view of painting. The crucial difference now between the work of sole and multiple instances in depiction and art. Then looks at formalist criticism based upon theories of painting, for the formulation of Modernism, as a period style.	Goodman, Wollheim, Walter Benjamin, Bell, Clement Greenberg, Immanuel Kant, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michael Fried, Thierry de Duve, William Rubin, Frank Stella, Donald Judd.
Page 89			
10	<b><i>Summary</i></b>	The contribution made to theory here, its place within Goodman's larger aesthetic, or irrealism.	
Page 104			





## 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*.<sup>1</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, (16<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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'.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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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<sup>2</sup> Goodman, *Languages of Art* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) Indianapolis, 1976. The second edition is used throughout, here. Richard Wollheim, *On Art and the Mind*, London, 1973, pp. 261-284.

<sup>3</sup> Gombrich, 1960, p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> 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'.<sup>5</sup>

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'.<sup>6</sup> 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,

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<sup>5</sup> Goodman, *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis, 1976, pp. 16-19.

<sup>6</sup> Gombrich, 1982, p. 281.

different pictures of an object then have a way of turning into pictures of different objects.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.’<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> A further requirement for relative repleteness of syntax

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<sup>7</sup> See treatment of invention, fiction and representation-as in Goodman, 1976, pp. 21-34

<sup>8</sup> Gombrich, 1982, pp. 279 - 297

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pp. 285-6

<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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

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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).

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

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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](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.<sup>14</sup>

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'.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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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<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> Critical theory here used in the sense given by The Frankfurt School of Marxist analysis.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, 1986, p.71 footnote 27.

<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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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<sup>18</sup> Bryson, 1983, pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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’.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> Nor is it constituted by the mere intersection of transoms 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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<sup>20</sup> Krauss, ‘The Originality of the Avant-Garde’ in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge/Mass./London, 1986, p.161.

<sup>21</sup> Krauss, ‘Grids’ in *Ibid.* p.9.

<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> His approach emphasised a psychological context, and the importance of intention in determining depictive

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<sup>23</sup> David Carrier, *Artwriting*, Amhurst, Mass., 1987.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 88.

<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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

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<sup>26</sup> Gombrich, 1960, p. 56, pp. 65-67.

<sup>27</sup> Wollheim, 1987, pp. 46-47, 72-75.

<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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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<sup>30</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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*).

<sup>31</sup> *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*.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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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<sup>32</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> *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.

## Depiction Revised

The problem for a theory of depiction has been shown to be the reconciliation of illusion and notation. Neither is adequate, since illusion commits us to a perceptual mistake, or delusion, which does not square with the facts of everyday experience with pictures, while notation commits us to a familiar principle of reference, but cannot explain how such a notation might operate. It can explain in what ways it must differ from writing, or descriptive notation, but amounts to no more than saying it is no longer notation. On one hand the proposal is for a resemblance relation between picture and object, and on the other for a reference relation. Both agree that sooner or later they need the other, but in acquiring them they also lose some of their explanation. The illusion theory takes depiction to be tamed or conventionalised illusions, while the notation theory takes depiction to be a scheme that cultivates resemblance. But is an illusion still an illusion if it is rule bound? Is a notation still a notation if it resembles its object? Seemingly, stubbornly, the relations of resemblance and reference refuse to merge, resemblance is a symmetrical or two-way relation, reference is asymmetrical or a one-way relation.

The task now is to look a little closer at Goodman's theory of reference to see if there is a way around this. Goodman proceeds from arguments about the nature of reference, based upon denotation, but denotation is not the only mode or route of reference to his theory. He admits exemplification as the relation between a sample and referent, or the way in which it points to only some of its properties.<sup>34</sup> For example a swatch of cloth exemplifies colour, weave, texture and pattern of a certain type or bolt of cloth, but not its size or shape, age or smell. The swatch has these other properties, but they are not referred to, or exemplified. Equally the bolt of cloth has properties that are not possessed or sampled by the swatch, such as its

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<sup>34</sup> Goodman, 1976, pp.52-57.

place and manner of storage. Exemplification is reference to only selected properties possessed by a sample.

Such reference might also be taken as a way of allowing resemblance. The sample and its referent share a symmetrical relation in selected respects, they share certain properties, and yet the sample refers to the type of cloth, while the cloth resembles in some respects, but does not refer to the sample. The fact that an exemplification refers only to some of those properties that it possesses, also suggest that it is reflexive or self-reference. One of Goodman's objections to taking pictures as resemblances is that representation, or reference cannot be reflexive, while resemblance can – 'An object resembles itself to the maximum degree but rarely represents itself' – yet in the case of exemplification it evidently can represent itself in selected respects.<sup>35</sup> This seems much closer to the requirements for depiction and suggests that depiction might more profitably be taken as a mode of exemplification rather than denotation.

The question then arises what is it that a picture exemplifies? What property does it share with its object and then sample or correctly display?<sup>36</sup> The property is simply two dimensions, or two-dimensionality. Two dimensions are of course contained within three dimensions in fact any number of two-dimensional planes may be constructed as slices within a three-dimensional volume. So we have a shared property between picture and object, if as yet a very general one. Does it hold for all depiction? Let us begin with the most basic pictures, for example, a single familiar object that might be produced by a pre-school, pre-historic or primitive artist, which is to say, they have basic skills in depiction, and in which is typically offered an outline or silhouette. Something like two dimensions is detected in the observation of distinct sides or single aspects of an object or in rudimentary relations between parts, in an overall profile or shape reliably identified or resembling an object. Such observations are useful because they are quick to make and easy to remember. They also make depiction easy to learn.

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<sup>35</sup> Goodman, 1976, p.4.

<sup>36</sup> Although a quirk of language, makes a picture's object, its *subject*, following Goodman, the term 'object' is maintained here for any 'subject' of a picture.



A basic picture also requires the picture surface exemplify, or find the means to display its two-dimensionality. For the surface is not only a two-dimensional plane of course, even in the case of a pristine sheet of the smoothest white paper – it is still a three dimensional object, with a thickness and texture of some kind, whereas a two-dimensional plane has no thickness, no surface or texture, merely space extended along two axes. The surface can however exemplify its two-dimensional plane through the use of distinctive markings or features that not only set it apart from other kinds of surface, but then also serve to distinguish other kinds of surfaces or objects, so that properties thus distinguished then also sample materially, or much as a swatch does, and crucially, may also be taken in combination with depiction. Equally, such markings may also form distinctive patterns or designs that need not be taken as a resemblance to an object, or strictly as depiction, yet nevertheless exemplify two-dimensional elements and relations, and are also accompanied by the sampling of three-dimensionality, in the kinds of markings and material used.

Line is the simplest and easiest means of translating perceived planes or shapes of objects into depiction because the two-sided nature of a line gives the inside and outside of a shape the same value – as space – in an outline of the shape. The articulation of the shape depends upon the width of the line, its extent or length, and its direction, up and down, left or right. This is two-dimensionality proper, even where the maker or user is unaware of the fact. Similarly, relations between more than one shape in a depiction share these same fundamental articulations. Once lines create shapes as outlines, we have two dimensions, and these are shared with, or truly resemble shapes detected in the sides or single aspects of an object. So we have resemblance, but do we have reference? The outline refers to an object's shape, while an object's shape does not refer to the outline, because the line is around the shape, rather than part of it, and is, like the exemplifying practices of a swatch, a means of displaying two dimensions upon a surface. Hence we have a one-way reference and a two-way resemblance, in certain selected respects. Line is obviously not the only means for displaying two dimensions upon a surface, but its simplicity and efficiency in these basic stages, make it the crucial example. Nor do outlines necessarily depict the shapes of an observed or three-dimensional object. Their formal or intrinsic properties as pattern or design may equally develop an

appreciation of two-dimensional ordering; suggest fictive versions of extant objects. While such activities are commonly overlooked in an account of depiction, at the expense of pursuing parallels with writing and description, an important part of the revision of depiction lies in re-aligning pictures with patterns.<sup>37</sup> This aspect also becomes important in the appreciation of abstract painting. But before explaining this, we need to look briefly at why this attention to two-dimensional judgements is important.

Firstly, the concept of three dimensions or depth can only be understood in contrast with two dimensions. So the reason two dimensions are so basic, is because the concept of three-dimensional space or depth is so basic. A ready objection may run that we understand three dimensions intuitively – in our ability to navigate to them, much as Gombrich urges a functional or behavioural definition for such understanding in a squirrel’s jumping abilities in ‘The Analysis Of Vision’ in *Art and Illusion*.<sup>38</sup> The difference is in definitions of understanding. The squirrel’s understanding of space and light is measured by the behaviourist as its ability to ‘navigate’ them, but to perform more elaborate functions, such as remember, compare, analyse, measure, construct and communicate, requires a more elaborate view of understanding, and in this case, a more elaborate understanding of space.

Discerning separate sides to an object, and the shapes associated with them, may seem an innocent task, but need hardly remain one. Such shapes not only simplify the tasks of remembering and recognising the object, by breaking it down into smaller tasks, but it also make more of the object – literally. It discerns more qualities or properties of the object and so furthers knowledge. Equally, appreciation of pattern, of measurement and proportion, axes of symmetry,

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<sup>37</sup> Pattern obviously deserves a far more extensive analysis than space permits. Gombrich carefully surveyed the history and literature of pattern in the underrated, *The Sense of Order*, London, Phaidon, 1979. Notable preceding publications include Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, London, 1856, Charles Blanc, *Art in Ornament and Dress*, Paris, 1886, Wilhelm Ostwald, *Die Welt der Form, Entwicklung und Ordnung der gesetzlichschönen Gebilde, gezeichnet und beschreiben von Wilhem Ostwald*, (4 Vols) Leipzig, 1922-25. Understandably mathematicians are drawn to questions of two-dimensional geometry, such as Andreas Speiser, *Theorie der Gruppen von endlicher Ordnung*, Berlin, 1923, and Herman Weyl in *Symmetry*, Princeton, N.J. 1952. Related mathematical insights, are explored in Martin Gardner, *The Ambidextrous Universe*, New York, 1964, Michael Holt, *Mathematics in Art*, London/New York, 1971, and more recently various *tiling* problems – complex patterns - are considered in Roger Penrose, *The Emperor’s New Mind*, Oxford/New York, 1990, pp. 168-181 and Penrose, *Shadows of the Mind*, Oxford/New York, 1994, pp. 29-33.

<sup>38</sup> Gombrich, 1960, p. 276.

variations and orientations of a motif, serve to further principles of organisation in perception and cognition. It is not so much that depiction permits opportunities unavailable to observers of an object directly, but rather that we make more opportunities, and more of the opportunities, with depiction. Contrary to Gombrich's model of the artist matching a picture to nature, in the manner of Constable or Cezanne, the appeal more typically is to the picture more removed. We do not have or need the opportunity to look over the artist's shoulder and compare picture with object to appreciate depiction. Rather we test the picture against our knowledge of such objects and pictures. Hence the crucial role of memory in basic depiction for the primitive, pre-historic or pre-school artist, the task is clearly not one of illusion, or even of matching a present object, but of organising and testing what is known and remembered of an object. In the simplest of examples, let us take a line drawing of a cat, (Figure A) in the manner favoured by children and created by conjoining the letters M O Q in ascending scale and descending sequence, thus:

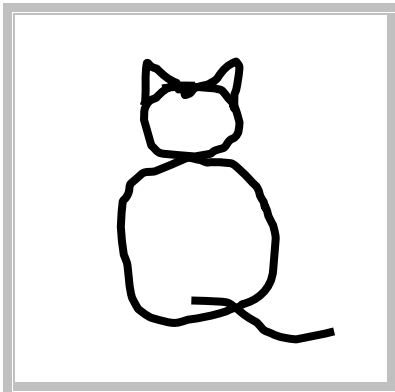


Figure A

Even in such a basic depiction, we can observe a surprising number of things about this cat, such as which way does its tail point? (Left or right?) Is the cat facing us, or does it sit with its back to us? How much wider is the cat's body than its head? Are its ears raised or lowered? Is it sitting or standing? Is it looking to the side or ahead? How tall are the ears compared with the head? In other words, any number of questions concerning measurements, placements, or plottings, across the two dimensional plane, or certain questions concerning the object's position or attitude toward the two dimensional plane, may be answered even in a basic line drawing. Clearly this is not so much a question of realism as of resemblance struck on stark linear or two-dimensional terms. There can be no confusing of the drawing with the actual presence of a cat.

Rather the drawing supplies answers to these questions on just the terms on which this resemblance is made. Indeed the power and pleasure of such basic pictures lies entirely in their appeal to memory and the understanding that guides resemblance.

Neither the primitive, pre-historic or pre-school picture-maker concern themselves with the presence of a model for this reason; two dimensions are easier to keep in the head than the eye. A basic picture is a way of testing this memory and prompting closer understanding. The understanding is of both the depicted object and the scheme or style of depiction. The thick and wobbling line used here samples a given tool upon a surface in contrast with surrounding text and scale of font, and an uncertain level of expertise. The sample sorts the depiction against the materials used, understands materials as well as depiction.

So a basic picture essentially maps or outlines a shape of an object. Indeed maps offer another good example of why two dimensions prove so useful. One is free to chart up and down, left and right, in any order, any direction or combination of directions. A map offers any number of routes, and allows one to comprehend the terrain across and between as well as along given routes. Depiction is thus bracketed with maps, diagrams, patterns and other two-dimensional schemas, because this multi-directional mapping stands in stark contrast with denotative or descriptive modes of reference. The difference arises because language and language-based references are committed to a temporal and one-directional ordering. Time may cease to be one-way in sub-atomic or macrocosmic physics, but for the sizeable stretch in between that is our main concern, it remains reliably one-way. Two dimensions of course exclude not only depth but also time, and depictions allow us to look at objects and scenes in more than one way or indeed more than one direction because of this. They may lack movement - without time - but a freeze frame, as is now so familiar, allows scrutiny of qualities unavailable in the flow of motion. A prompt objection may be that surely comic strips, film and television demonstrate that depiction and two-dimensionality need not exclude time. But the succession of images available in these examples remain fixed in a single sequence and even where they may be viewed in reverse, the sequence remains the same, we may reverse direction of a route in some circumstances, but we cannot re-route any given image in the sequence. Each image remains a given moment, and the value of the freeze frame lies precisely in what its route or motion has concealed. The point of two-dimensional perception and depiction is really to supplement a temporally ordered perception, with a spatial one, as a way to see out of time or around time, and something more of the world.

The distinction between time and space is by no means new to discussion of depiction. It is most notably identified with Lessing's famous essay on *The Laocoon*, and more recently has been the subject of an extended analysis by W. J. T. Mitchell.<sup>39</sup> Here the arrangement shares none of Lessing's critical or prescriptive principles concerning art, indeed, as will become clearer in later chapters, the position is quite the opposite, recognising a complementary function to the two modes. Mitchell is largely concerned with detecting ideological tendencies beneath Lessing's view, which need not concern us here, however it is worth noting that his attempt to demolish the time/space distinction, by claiming the difference between pictures and language as one of degree rather than kind, is one based upon a conception of pictures as a mode of denotation – after Goodman – and obviously rejected here.<sup>40</sup>

A new theory of depiction as a mode of exemplification, sampling two-dimensionality has now been outlined. The theory adheres to Goodman's framework of reference, and maintains the functions of exemplification and denotation. It accepts the syntactic and semantic analysis of notation, but finds analogue densities finally at odds with these terms, and of limited use in understanding depiction.<sup>41</sup> The revision is not that drastic in the larger scheme of things, as shall be shown. The new theory reconciles the requirements of a resemblance and a reference relation and avoids the commitment to an illusion in the recognition of two-dimensionality on a surface, and to a notation in its structure. An illusion may occur in as much as two-dimensions may be mistaken for three dimensions, but in general this is not the experience of looking at a picture, and part of the reason we have dwelt upon the simplest of line drawings is to emphasise this. A picture remains a reference or a representation, in as much as the

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<sup>39</sup> Mitchell, 'Space and Time: Lessing's Laocoon and the Politics of Genre' in *Iconology, Image, Text, Ideology*, Chicago/London, 1994, pp 95-115. G. E. Lessing, 'Laocoon' in *Laocoon, Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barnhelm*, London/New York, 1930.

<sup>40</sup> Mitchell, 1994, p.102. In passing, Mitchell's subsequent attempt to lump all artefacts together as 'spatio/temporal structures' seems less than useful, distinguishing neither between forms of art, objects or reference.

<sup>41</sup> Since depiction is so closely tied to two-dimensionality here, depiction used in discussion elsewhere, in sculpture, drama and literature for example, is consigned to loose talk. While sculpture is mainly concerned with three-dimensionality or material sampling, and so shares resemblance with depiction, in drama and literature depiction at best refers to a density or circumspection of reference, especially linked with depiction, and dealt with in Chapter Five.

surface is altered or marked in such a way as to exemplify its two-dimensional properties, but this system is not a notation, because of its multi-directional character.

But while this formulation allows for a distinction between patterns and pictures, the demarcation begs further attention. For example, simple symmetrical shapes such as a circle or a square are not generally understood as *a picture* of a circle or a square, but just as an instance or presentation rather than a representation. This is not to say that pictures cannot include a circle or square, or be *of* a circle or square in some further three-dimensional scene, or indeed use a circle or square to depict some three-dimensional object, only that a circle or square are often used for either purpose. The same outline may serve as either or both, a lesson in geometry or linear depiction. Just when a circle depicts a sphere or disc as opposed to merely instantiating a circle, is by no means clear-cut, but is largely a matter of scheme and style, even when schemes and styles allow ambiguity. But rather than pursue stylistic features directly, the next chapter tests this theory of depiction against more elaborate kinds of picture and issues raised by other theories. Implications to the reshuffle of reference within Goodman's theory are also to be traced along this path.

## Depiction Pursued

### Five Issues

This chapter looks at how the proposed theory of depiction handles more elaborate kinds of pictures and at the issues raised by other theories. First and foremost there is the issue of depth, and the controversy surrounding systems of projection and perspective. A second and related kind of picture is the distortion derived from an unusual lens, such as an anamorphic lens, which perhaps raises the question whether a surface's two-dimensional markings can adequately explain our recognition of such pictures. The third issue concerns caricature, which resembles its object paradoxically, by exaggerating features and relations. A fourth and surprisingly similar issue is that of fiction, and whether a depiction of a fictional entity such as a unicorn or Homer Simpson, can truly be said to resemble their objects? (When there truly are no objects for them to resemble). Finally there are those depictions found in an idle gaze at stains on a wall or in the shapes of foliage or clouds, and whether these are truly surfaces, adequately exemplified as two-dimensionality?

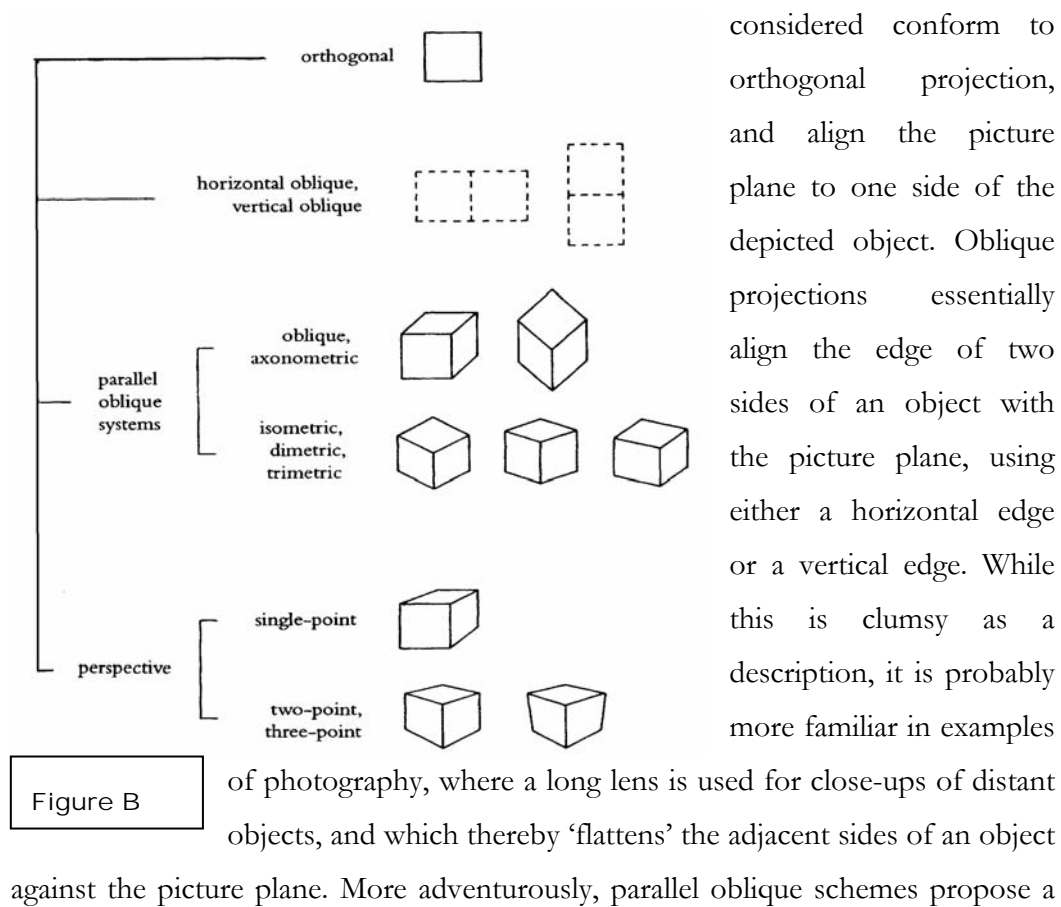
#### 1. Depth

So far we have looked at how two dimensions can be exemplified and depict one side or aspect of an object, and build a basic picture plane. Having established this basic two-dimensionality or picture plane, further developments are essentially concerned with how to accommodate more than one side of an object upon this plane, or conversely, construct two-dimensionality at more remote and sophisticated angles to the object. The move is ultimately to accommodate depth, or three-dimensionality; to map features not only in terms of up and down, left and right but back and forward. But where two dimensions are contained in three and

may be detected and displayed accordingly, three dimensions obviously do not 'go into' two. Depth must be treated differently.

John Willats has demonstrated how much of this development, both in children's pictures, and in the history of art, echoes the aims and methods of various schemes of descriptive geometry, and its elementary projections of orthogonal, oblique, and parallel oblique schemes, and various perspectives.<sup>42</sup> Willats rightly stresses the folly of seeing a 'recapitulation' or an evolutionary agenda in the comparison between children's pictorial competence and various stages of art history, and instead points to the distinct uses for various projections and perspectives, and the shifting requirements made of pictures throughout art history.

But before discussing kinds of depth, some elementary distinctions between projections and perspectives should be noted (Figure B). The basic pictures so far



<sup>42</sup> John Willats, *Art and Representation: New Principles in the Analysis of Pictures*, Princeton, N.J. 1997. *Figure B* is owed to this publication.



diagonal, or oblique angle to one or more adjoining sides, as distinct from simply a diagonal shape to a side, and now serves as basically a third axis, in between the vertical and horizontal axes of the picture plane. Again, this is a view available to long lens photography and something easily found in non-pictorial or plain perception. Parallel oblique projections thus register depth at an ascending angle for objects, while vertical or horizontal planes contained, remain constant in size or length to the picture plane.

Perspective supplies one or more vanishing points, according to a notional or not necessarily included, horizon. The difference between parallel oblique projections and perspectives is rather like the difference in photography between using long and wide lenses, for close and distant objects. In fact the wider the lens, the more vanishing points a scheme introduces, a very wide lens gives a 'fisheye' depiction, with vanishing points at every point on the perimeter of the necessarily circular picture plane. Yet we can still make sense of the picture, we can still 'see' in this way, even if it seems uncomfortable or unnatural. The issue of artifice and nature is returned to shortly. Here a little more of Willat's position needs to be appreciated.

While Willats is anxious to emphasise the varying uses for these schemes of depth and to some extent their co-existence, nevertheless his view of the development of pictorial depth, still places perspectives as the goal to which a picture 'faithful' to the principles of visual perception aspires. In this he adheres to the tradition that draws upon the work of the psychology of visual perception, particularly the work of J. J. Gibson, R. L. Gregory, Gregory's collaborations with Gombrich, and the fieldwork of John M. Kennedy.<sup>43</sup> It is a view of perception that rests upon an optical stimulus, or information transmitted by the rays of light, reflected from an object to the viewer, which then allows the viewer to perceive the object. In the case of depiction, the rays of light are called upon to carry two lots of information, firstly about the picture surface, and secondly about the object depicted. Gibson characterises this information as 'invariants' that separate out the distance, surfaces and contours of an object, from accidental effects of time or motion, for example. Yet Gibson's behavioural or evolutionist bias leads him to look for invariants on

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<sup>43</sup>James J Gibson, *The Perception Of The Visual World*, Boston, 1950, R. L. Gregory, *The Intelligent Eye*, London, 1970, E.H Gombrich and R.L. Gregory, *Illusion in Art and Nature*, London, 1973, John M. Kennedy, *The Psychology Of Picture Perception*, San Francisco, 1974.

only the crudest of 'environmental' bases, so that two-dimensionality for example, eludes him. Willats thus inherits a view of depiction as exchanging rules or conventions for depth with a more vivid experience or illusion, in keeping with a plain or natural perception.

Yet as shown, we see depth in any number ways and for any number of reasons. Not only are such ways familiar to the conventions of photography as well as drawing, but to our plain or non-pictorial experience. The eye's lens, like a camera's lenses, is variable, and if it has an invariant it is variation. The appeal to a native perception guided only by principles of surfaces, contours, occluding lines, planes and so forth, is no more than a behaviourist's makeover for the innocent eye, and in denial of a more than visual mind. To quote Goodman (ironically, in support of Gombrich):

The eye comes always ancient to its work, obsessed by its own past, and by old and new insinuations of the ear, nose, tongue, fingers heart and brain. It functions not as an instrument self-empowered and alone, but as a dutiful member of a complex and capricious organism. Not only how but what it sees is regulated by need and prejudice. It selects, rejects, organizes, discriminates, associates, classifies, analyses, constructs.<sup>44</sup>

Goodman's firm rejection of Gibson and Gombrich's view of perspective and the perception of depth fuelled a long-standing controversy between theorists deriving their views from principles of optics, and those deriving their views from symbol systems such as Erwin Panofsky or Meyer Schapiro, and opposing schools of psychology such as Arnheim, and Goodman, who combines both.<sup>45</sup> The argument is essentially over whether perception is natural or conventional, inherent or learned. In the earlier exchange noted between Gombrich and Goodman they find common ground in the acceptance that some conventions allow for others, or that conventions are built upon conventions, and therefore some seem comparatively natural, others artificial. But Goodman then asked where do we draw the line? And is it important?<sup>46</sup> Pursuing the most natural is a path of infinite regress.

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<sup>44</sup> Goodman, 1976, pp. 7-8.

<sup>45</sup> See for example the exchange in articles by Goodman, Gibson and Gombrich in *Leonardo*, 1971, No 4. See also Panofsky, 'Die Perspektive als symbolische Form' in *Aufsätze*, 1927, pp. 99-167. Schapiro, *Modern Art: 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, New York, 1978, pp. 185-211, Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1954.

<sup>46</sup> Gombrich, 1982, p. 284.

Clearly Willats was unimpressed by such relativism. Yet the problem cannot be ignored, and ultimately undermines much of his findings. For example, concerning the chapter on optical denotations where he claims ‘very few artists have, in fact, attempted to replicate the appearance of the optic array directly’ - there is a disturbing lack of awareness of the sheer futility of the suggestion.<sup>47</sup> Not only is there no way to replicate light with paint ‘directly’, but ‘the appearance’ of the optic array surely depends upon what is being looked for, and how, in Gombrich’s terms, what can be matched depends upon what can be made. The extensive studies by Gombrich concerning just this question, and concluding with just this answer, seem to have been lost on Willats, all the more curious since Gombrich is a much cited source as well as something of a mentor.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, summary of Seurat’s approach to painting as ‘an *artificial* pictorial effect that refers to the effects of light but does not *replicate them directly*’ (my italics) commits him to the twin follies of a belief in pictorial effects that are not ‘artificial’, and a belief that light might somehow be substituted with paint.<sup>49</sup>

Turning to the matter of depicting several related objects and to options available to projections and perspectives, the picture plane may firstly accommodate more than one object by extending laterally or vertically. In the case of the ancient Egyptians, lateral extension also introduces a reduced directionality to the picture, and a tentative step toward writing. Two-dimensional mapping or ‘topological’ relations as Willats terms them, also result in the ‘fold-out’ picture, identified by A. L. Nicholls and J. M. Kennedy in the work of young children, and by Willats in icons of the Byzantine and Orthodox churches.<sup>50</sup> Here, adjacent objects in a scene may be depicted from conflicting aspects – a house seen from in front, a field seen from above, but sharing an edge as an of axis upon which one might ‘fold’ the picture to create a three dimensional model.

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<sup>47</sup> Willats, 1997, p. 133.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. xii. See also Gombrich, 1960, pp. 313-314, ‘For if we have learned anything in the course of these chapters it is that representation is never a replica. The forms of art, ancient and modern, are not duplications of what the artist has in mind any more than they are duplications of what he sees in the outer world’.

<sup>49</sup> Willats, 1997, p. 145.

<sup>50</sup> Nicholls and Kennedy, ‘Drawing development from similarity of features to direction’ in *Child Development*: 63, 1992, pp. 227-241. Willats, 1997, pp. 194-199.

The fold-out picture may also be seen as a kind of collage or made up of a series of smaller pictures, each of a single object, and related to one other so that each shares a common axis and dimension, while their second, conflicting axis – it need not run at 90 degrees, need not be readily ‘foldable’ - constructs divergent versions of the picture plane. Depth or a third dimension here is understood in just these terms: as simply a realignment of each object/picture plane’s axes. Various kinds of multiple pictures arise, combining various projections and even perspectives, and some of these are dealt with as anomalies and some as plain ineptitude by Willats. The tradition of Persian and Indian miniatures offers many examples of depth and scale jumps that are often reminiscent of modern photo-collages, and while the use to which such a technique may be put is clear, predictably Willats concludes:

Thus, although individual parts of the scene look strongly three-dimensional, the eye cannot make sense of the space of the scene as a whole, and this destroys the illusion of a real three-dimensional scene and flattens the picture.<sup>51</sup>

Tactfully, one might reply that it depends on which mind the eye serves. More constructively, one might suggest that more than one look, or more than one perspective are also properties of vision, that we do not necessarily look only in one direction, or on one focal length, or from one position, in viewing a scene, let alone a picture.

Beyond the foldout or multiple pictures, there is the development of more integrated approaches to depth. The picture plane, while initially aligned with a single side of an object, introduces additional and unaligned sides (or parallel oblique projections) These are the elementary projections that emphasise one corner of an object – and promptly confound Gombrich’s famous axiom for the development of perspective, namely that it ‘rests on a simple and incontrovertible fact of experience, the fact that we cannot look around a corner’.<sup>52</sup> Projections progress to the alignment of axis or connecting edge of two adjacent sides, leaving both or more unaligned, and hence understood as receding in depth from the aligned edge. These are the isometric, diametric and trimetric oblique projections illustrated in Figure B. In each case the picture plane is gradually separated or

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<sup>51</sup> Willats, 1997, p. 228.

<sup>52</sup> Gombrich, 1960, p. 250.

distanced from a direct alignment with the object and becomes instead a ‘slice’ across a three-dimensional space or the traditionally understood ‘window’ frame before the object. In this there is general agreement with the findings of David Marr and associates, of a development from object-centred descriptions to view or scene-centred descriptions.<sup>53</sup>

The achievement of perspective, in this view, is precisely the realisation that a two-dimensional plane may be constructed anywhere within a three dimensional space, and that it need not align itself wholly or solely with solid objects, but instead locate itself in relation to an horizon and one or more vanishing points. It is this flexibility, rather than its illusionary properties, that play an important role in the dominance of perspective as a pictorial tradition. Vanishing points allow depth to be understood, not in terms of any one oblique plane or angle, but as all planes or edges aligned to a vanishing point and the picture plane. It allows for a greater integration of objects, in a number of interesting ways, but the point here is simply that horizon and vanishing points provide further means of constructing three dimensions from two.

## 2. Distortion

An argument made against a two-dimensional view of the picture surface, and in favour of an optical view of perception, concerns the recognition of distorted images, such as an anamorphic image, that can only be viewed correctly when the viewer stands to the side of the picture surface rather than in front of it. Kennedy claims that such depictions support the view that it is the optical information supplied by the surface, or the light rays reflected from it, that enable the perception of a depiction, rather than the surface ‘itself’, or the surface unviewed, or perhaps the surface understood as various markings viewed only from in front of the picture surface, and presumably in a ‘light-free’ environment.<sup>54</sup>

Taking the example of a photographic plate, he argues that it is the chemical’s structure rather than the chemical’s distribution on the picture surface that directs

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<sup>53</sup> Marr, ‘Representing visual information: a computational approach,’ in *Computer Vision*, A. R. Hanson and E. M. Riseman (eds.) New York, 1978, pp. 61-80 and Marr, *Vision: A Computational Investigation into the Human Representation and Processing of Visual Information*, San Francisco, 1982.

<sup>54</sup> Kennedy, 1974, p.36.

the light. But since the chemical's distribution is surely part of its structure, this distinction too fails to isolate the picture surface from the light reflected from it. 'Any theory that relies on descriptions of elements and their distribution on a surface is inconvenienced by anamorphics' he concludes, but no more inconvenienced than the viewer, of either the surface or its light isolated from each other.<sup>55</sup> The argument fails because it assumes the surface is to be described from only one angle - in front - while its light allows another option. But the description of the surface *is* the description of its reflected light. We view an anamorphic picture with light, whether we stand in front or to the side of a picture, only one view easily supplies us with a picture, but this viewing condition supplies us with the 'informative light' only because it issues from an 'informative' surface, or the surface rightly taken, or so sampled.

### 3. Caricature

The issue of caricature poses problems for a theory of depiction in as much it allows deliberate exaggeration or distortion of an object for comic effect, while still preserving the object's resemblance and identity. On the one hand we readily recognise the object, while on the other we are aware that it does not 'really' look this way. Apart from the surprise and humour that results, the issue draws forth several deeper questions concerning the resemblance we hold for an object, the expressive, and accidental qualities we allow it, the means by which these are brought about in depiction.

Gombrich and Wollheim make important contributions to the issue and Willats has also made some interesting suggestions concerning topological functions for caricature.<sup>56</sup> But here attention remains on certain converging interests of Gombrich and Wollheim.<sup>57</sup> Gombrich's treatment covers a broader range of caricature, dealing with both the caricature of certain persons as well as the whimsical creations of Walt Disney or James Thurber. He points firstly to the wholistic and complex nature of perceived likenesses in portraits, and faces in general, and to the difficulty of settling on a characteristic expression for an

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<sup>55</sup> Kennedy, 1974, p.36.

<sup>56</sup> Willats, 1997, p. 72.

<sup>57</sup> Gombrich, 1960, pp. 279-303. Wollheim, 1987, pp. 69-70.

individual, as well as a characteristic expression for general states of mind, such as happiness or despair (which can often look alike). For Gombrich this process amplifies his view of pictorial development, as one of schema and correction. A schema is a traditional means or format that is tested with some new aim or task, and if successful, is 'corrected' to include this aim, or is recognised as a new, in this case, funnier version of the tradition. With caricature the correction occurs not by trying to observe some new or different part of an object, but rather by deconstructing or toying with the means, and then testing to see if it still matches or resembles the object. For Gombrich the humorous side of this is bound up with dark psychological taboos concerning unconscious hostilities toward the object. But humour apart, this model also suggests the uneasy relation between expression and representation, between shifting properties attributed to an object, and their impact upon its identity.

For the moment it is enough to indicate how this issue leads directly to that of expression. Expression is addressed in the following essay. Wollheim's contribution finds its clearest account in *Painting as an Art*.<sup>58</sup> His view is bound up in a discussion of the kinds of things that can be painted and depicted generally. His categories for depictive content take the form of a cross-classification that runs along one axis from objects to events, and along the other from particulars to kinds. A particular object such as the portrait of *Madame Moitessier* by J. A. D. Ingres, is made up of kinds of particulars, so to speak, such as a portrait of a woman, a young person, a French citizen, born in the early nineteenth century, middle class, self-assured, and so on. One constructs the individual according to which kinds one knows and sees them belonging to - except in the case of caricatures - where a person may be depicted as belonging to an impossible kind, such as an animal or, in the example used by both Wollheim and Gombrich, the French emperor Louis Phillippe turning into a pear in *Les Poires* by Phillipon.

The idea of caricature as a misclassing has parallels with Gombrich's model of schema and correction and the experimental or testing nature of depiction, although Wollheim does not pursue its application outside of persons, to a dog in a Thurber or Disney cartoon, for example. What is important about Wollheim's formulation is

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<sup>58</sup> Wollheim, 1987, pp. 69-71.

its location within the categories outlined. Caricatures play with the misuse of kinds, but more earnest depiction relies upon the same ladders of kinds, rendering an object in degree of particularity. The difference between seeing a picture of a young woman and just seeing a young woman for example, is taken to lie in the greater particularity of the direct perception.<sup>59</sup> Yet the danger lies in offering an example purely by description, or without illustration, for the young woman hypothetically pictured, is surely located after a fashion, perhaps even to a time of day, and even when we do not learn the name and history of the young woman from the picture (a situation that may equally apply to direct perception), pictures of young women come in many kinds, from the formal portraits by Ingres, to the Madonnas of Raphael, the ballet students of Degas, the sun bathers of Renoir, and the housewives of Vermeer, for example. The particular proliferates in pictures as vigorously as in direct perception. Then again, while kinds are as common to pictures as to direct perception, yet they differ as much between direct perceptions as between pictures. So again, direct perception offers no clear model for depictive meaning. These issues are given a very different treatment by Goodman, but his discussion of caricature centres mainly on *representing-as*, as when a person is depicted *as* a pear, or vice versa, and will be considered under the following issue of fiction.

However, the philosopher Stephanie Ross has provided a useful discussion of caricature, in terms strikingly consonant with Goodman's theory.<sup>60</sup> She pointed firstly to the problem of establishing caricature as an exaggeration of distinctive, standard or truthful features of the object. No such features may be reliably identified. They depend upon too many conflicting interests, and kinds of pictures. Yet caricature remains a reliable category, we rarely revise what is and is not a caricature, even if acknowledging a grey area. Indeed, we can often judge a picture to be a caricature without fully identifying the object. She further argued that the practice of caricature does not require necessary and sufficient conditions, that not only can we recognise caricature on the basis of experience with pictures, take and treat them differently from other pictures, but also that our experience in these matters extends to direct perception and - crucially for Goodman's theory - to the

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<sup>59</sup> Wollheim, 1987, p. 71.

<sup>60</sup> Ross, 'Caricature' in *The Monist*, 58, 1974, pp. 284-293.



projection of predicates.<sup>61</sup> Predicates and projection will also be explained under the issue of fiction. In stressing the interdependence of pictures and direct perception in complex projection, Ross effectively denies Wollheim's distinction as well.

Yet Ross's account still leaves the problem of caricatures as pictures that are 'less realistic and which demand we see reality (which includes people *and* pictures) in terms of them'.<sup>62</sup> In other words, there is still the paradox of the unrealistic somehow accepted as realistic. To remedy this we can firstly distinguish caricature from other less realistic pictures, for example note that caricature typically does not just build a novel perspective, such as that of a fisheye lens, nor does it achieve the complexity of a portrait by Picasso or Goya, to use Ross's examples. So caricature is neither in the business of a comprehensive system of depth nor an especially complex version of the object. Rather, *how* it pictures is a matter of mere pastiche and parody, recognisable in itself, as noted. The ridicule is directed as much to the basics of drawing and portraiture as it is to its object, and because it is bound much more closely to norms of depiction it is both more superficial and amusing as well as more dependent upon a standard and familiar object. Thus we have pictures *about* realism, rather than realistic pictures, and objects that easily survive such minor versions. Finally, Ross rightly pointed to the parallels between metaphor and caricature. Not all caricature strictly functions as metaphor, but both 'inhabit a continuum with literal ways of depicting reality' and 'are vehicles for conciseness, novelty and economy of expression'. Differences between strict depictive metaphor, or allegory, and caricature come under greater scrutiny when the study looks to the history of painting in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

#### 4. Fiction

Like caricature, fiction involves the ability to deal in particulars and kinds, individuals and classes. Yet fiction asks a more pointed question of theories of depiction based upon resemblance, since there are no actual or existential objects for pictures of unicorns or Homer Simpson to resemble. Intuitively, one might suppose a resemblance to a kind of horse, with a horn on its forehead, or to a kind of middle-aged man, bald, sallow complexion, five o'clock shadow, pronounced

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<sup>61</sup> Ross, 1974, pp. 284-293.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* p. 291.

exophthalmia, will suffice. But where reference is understood as strictly to actual individual objects, they will not. For Goodman, pictures, like names, obtain predicates, and a nominalist ontology requires fictive pictures be taken firstly to depict or denote no actual or individual object, or as null-denotation.<sup>63</sup> A null-denotation is understood to reverse the direction of its reference, to point to (or place its predicate in) only a sort of picture. A *unicorn-picture* or a *Homer Simpson-picture*, are here the preferred nomenclature, taken as a more accurate indication of reference direction, rather than implying there is an actual object, or a predicate extended beyond the fictive picture.

Null denotation thus directs reference to the way we use or sort pictures, even at the expense of having a further or actual object. Expanding on sorts of pictures is not an idle exercise, as pictures of actual objects must all belong to sorts of pictures, must be an *x*-picture of a *y*-object, and sometimes a *y*-as-*x*-picture. A unicorn-picture or a Homer Simpson-picture go to organising the workings of pictures in the same way as class terms sort pictures of young women as young women-pictures, not that all pictures containing young women need be classed as young women-pictures, or that young women-pictures need contain only young women. Importantly, the sorting of pictures and objects does not in Goodman's view require prior definitions or acquaintance with rules. It proceeds by trial and error, practice and precedent, can learn sort of picture from object or vice versa, and complies with consensus. This urges the parallel with language acquisition, and the commitment to depiction taken as denotation. Yet Goodman's view also aligns fiction with fundamental processes of classification and construal, and fiction duly emerges a more dignified and vital activity.

How is this nominalist view of fiction reconciled within a view of depiction as exemplification?<sup>64</sup> If anything the view of depiction as exemplification makes it clearer that fictive or *null depiction* functions as a form of self-reference, requiring a two-way or resemblance relation. In exchanging null denotation for null depiction, the study exchanges the notion of a null yet converse denotation, for the two-way

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<sup>63</sup> Goodman, 1976, pp. 21-26.

<sup>64</sup> Although Goodman explicitly denies that exemplification may be fictive (Goodman, 1984, p. 60) this is taken here to apply to *material* exemplification, or exemplification of three-dimensional properties, rather than *depictive* exemplification.

reference of exemplification. The proposed theory therefore allows resemblance for fictive pictures, but only to sorts of pictures, through effective sample. Depiction may still be allied to predication. Nominalism is available even in the absence of denotation. However for ease of exposition the study remains Platonist and talk henceforth remains of properties rather than predicates.

## 5. Found Depiction

Natural objects may also exhibit depiction, such as the faces and figures found in stains on a wall, the moon, clouds or foliage. Their occurrence is generally taken as a contributing factor, to a greater or lesser extent, in the discovery or invention of depiction. Wollheim in particular places great emphasis upon them, and upon our natural ability to ‘see-in’ and find such depictions.<sup>65</sup> Gombrich devotes a chapter to their ability to provide suggestive ‘schemas’, which our projections can ‘correct’, and in this way serve as a source of inspiration for artists.<sup>66</sup> Neither view is disputed here; rather the opportunity is taken to point to something more these objects share with the perception of two dimensions.

It is an obvious but overlooked quality, and it is not always associated with a surface. It may arise amongst disparate objects seen in silhouette, or in a space between the shapes of clouds. What occurs is the perception of a certain irregularity and complexity of structure that taxes expectations or familiarity with certain objects or spaces. We are caught up in unexpected detail, and look for a simpler way of organising it. We see faces and figures because we have the most elaborate and elastic constructs for these objects, and they are equally mobile or organic objects as a result. They are wilfully misapplied in such depiction, as an experiment in obtaining a simpler or more familiar configuration. They need not be illusions. That depends how wilfully they are misapplied. It is unlikely, or extremely difficult to find a depiction of a microwave or a lawnmower for example, in stains or clouds, because our perceptions of these objects lack the elasticity to accommodate enough variation, and equally difficult to find such depictions in the plain perception of complex but regular objects such as an air conditioning grill or bookshelf.

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<sup>65</sup> Wollheim, 1987, pp. 48-51.

<sup>66</sup> Gombrich, 1960, pp. 154-169.

In explaining how a surface must exemplify two dimensions in order to function as depiction, the need to ensure that the markings on the surface stand out, or alert us to their special quality as a surface, has been noted. In fact they function in much the same way as the examples drawn from nature, in foiling perception of the picture surface, as other than exemplifying two dimensions. In nature we find depictions when we cannot find enough that is predictable and simple in our perceptions, and in culture we find depictions when we learn how to reorganise surfaces, in special ways.

### Conclusion

The proposed theory of depiction now stands consolidated by engagement with five key issues. The theory takes depth as variously constructed by schemes of projection and perspective, in projection by angle contrasted with axes of picture plane, in perspective by angles determined by nominated horizon and vanishing points. It ranges schemes according to integration of object with picture plane, to behind or beyond it. Expanding on schemes amounts to expanding on sorts of objects depicted and presents opportunities for caricature and fiction. Caricature is taken as in Gombrich and Wollheim, to be a testing of objects and pictures, and as in Ross, to be a practice that requires neither ready recognition nor resemblance for the object, nor fixed features to a scheme or style. Caricature is also interesting because it prompts the issue of expression, and with it draws depiction toward a theory of art. Similarly, fiction is taken as a further means of construction for schemes of picture and object, and available to Goodman's nominalist ontology, by null-depiction, rather than null-denotation. The issues of distortion and found depiction here allow us to distinguish between optic conditions and favoured or available schemes for depiction, their accidental occurrence and frail conformity. Having established this broader foundation for the proposed theory, it now turns to five further issues, in expression and style (together), art and its history (together) interpretation, realism and painting.

## 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.<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup> 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).

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<sup>67</sup> Goodman, 1976, pp. 68-84.

<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup> Gombrich takes expression to be depictive reference to the non-visual senses, or the invisible, to ideas and

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<sup>69</sup> Goodman, 1978, pp. 23-40.

<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup> 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

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<sup>71</sup> Osgood et al., *The Measurement of Meaning*, Urbana, 1957.

<sup>72</sup> Gombrich, 1960, pp. 325-326.

<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup> 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'.<sup>75</sup> This concerns the agent's awareness of accidental, unintended, overlooked or ignored aspects within a pictorial tradition or style and of their referential possibilities.<sup>76</sup> The agent's

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<sup>74</sup> Gombrich, 1960, p. 322.

<sup>75</sup> Wollheim, 1987, pp. 19-25.

<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup> 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

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<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> Indeed he considers at length an interesting objection to the view of expression as metaphor in relation to emotion.<sup>79</sup> 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?

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<sup>78</sup> Wollheim, 1987, p. 80.

<sup>79</sup> 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'.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup> Like

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<sup>80</sup> Goodman, 1976, p. 69.

<sup>81</sup> Wollheim, 1987, pp. 348-352.

<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup>

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.

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

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

## Depiction and Art

Discussion of expression and style has shown how expression broadens meaning and contributes to categories of style. Yet not all styles are of equal value, not all pictures have as much or as interesting meaning. Some are claimed as art, most are not. What further characteristic or condition of pictures qualifies as art? The traditional answer is beauty or excellence. The picture well made, or the perfect instance of its kind, squares with our everyday usage and intuitions. But since the preceding discussion of style assures that pictures come in kinds, there are then as many versions of beauty as there are styles for depiction. So beauty does not sufficiently qualify art. The question then becomes which styles are excellent or beautiful? Less traditionally, the answer is often that the property or predicate is irreducible to a single or stable essence without compromising its application and that beauty and excellence simply are what we make of the established collection in the name of art.<sup>85</sup> The question, more profitably, is how is art used? Or how are further pictures and styles added to it, and others ignored?

The answer here is sometimes given in terms of institutional influence, or according to the powers and politics of relevant institutions.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, other answers stress a vividness or impact upon underlying concerns, with visual perception for example, as in Gombrich's theory, or the psychology of personality, as in Wollheim,

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<sup>85</sup> A key strand to this argument derives from Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of a family or network of resemblances determining 'essence' or defining a concept, rather than a single or unitary chain. See for example Morris Weitz, 'Wittgenstein's Aesthetics' in *Language and Aesthetics*, Benjamin R. Tilghman, (ed.) Lawrence, Kansas, 1973.

<sup>86</sup> Institutional theories strictly admit all answers that allow art to be derived from its history. The answer proposed here, takes institutions as those bodies constituting an 'Artworld' as variously proposed by Arthur Danto. See Danto, 'The Artworld' in *Journal of Philosophy*, 61, 1964, p. 580, Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* Cambridge, Mass./London, 1981, Danto, 'The Artworld Revisited: Comedies of Similarity' in *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective*, New York, 1992. See also George Dickie, 'Defining Art', in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, July, 1969, p. 254, Dickie, *Aesthetics: an introduction*, Indianapolis, 1971, Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic*, Ithaca/New York, 1974.

or with effective understanding, as in Goodman. Art is thus tethered to wider issues, shapes and is shaped by them. We look back upon and organise the past with styles to strengthen our grasp of an issue, as much as we are guided by styles, and allow them to focus current issues. To say that we merely or meekly inherit styles is as misleading as to say we reinvent them just as we please. We do both in part, and art, excellence or beauty in depiction finally lies only in the persistence of the practice, in more art. Similarly, it is pointless to look to art beyond such issues or in ideal isolation. The point is rather to show in what ways art may be contrasted with or distinguished from them. Since this study pursues Goodman's theory, the aim is now to show how the proposed theory of depiction distinguishes a mode of understanding for art, how art maintains a dynamic or economy according to this understanding, and how, like Gombrich's theory, it accords a distinctive role to history.

To begin, it is useful to compare the function of a picture with that of a word, or between depiction and description. A picture in the proposed view exemplifies two dimensions, resembles those of objects and their spatial relations. But a picture is usually a freeze-frame, since schemes for establishing a passage of time within a single picture are rarely used. A description on the other hand derives from speech and retains a temporal dimension. Its reference to movement can even instantiate a causal direction. The apple fell to the ground, follows just such a course and cause. But this temporal structuring can also be over-selective and misleading. A picture is worth a thousand words according to some rates of exchange, simply because giving the right name to an object may in itself need a lot more explaining. For some people it is quicker to 'draw a picture'. A picture not only helps us to see a situation more clearly, by providing more information, but may also provide unexpected or overlooked aspects as well. In fact we can sometimes see things not only more fully or clearly, but also quite differently.

In the example (Figure C) the little girl may be described as pointing to a word, a sound, or a card, as being instructed or instructing. Her expression may be described as intent, or anxious or bored. She either looks away as she points, or after, or looks for direction before she points. She is an attentive six year old, the subject of an experiment in literacy, left handed, a product of the 1960s, of feminine





Fig. C

the word cat. But if we allow a description open contradiction, we also forfeit its coherence, and its point.<sup>88</sup> Instead multiple descriptions or

interpretations allow us to understand what the girl does in relation to the depiction. The fact that conflicting descriptions share the same picture points not so much to their inadequacy as descriptions – as not capturing the whole truth – but to a difference between pictures and words. No matter how elaborate a description becomes, how many ambiguities it can allow while still avoiding contradiction, it will still not amount to, or exhaust the meaning of the picture. Any description will simply make room for others. Quite simply a description cannot contain a depiction, nor can a depiction confine itself to a single description. This is not because the visual is non-verbal, on the contrary, as we have seen, the visual may contain any number of verbal labels, but rather because the visual belongs to a two-dimensional system, with four-directional extension but literally no time, and so no one place to start or stop a description. Like the earlier example of a map permitting endless routes between any two or more points, a picture's names and descriptions are no more than one route around the object. A depiction contains descriptions for

diligence, of English eccentricity, of winter gloom. All of these descriptions are supported by the depiction. What the little girl is doing is not something ineffable and beyond words, but rather is illuminated by them, even as they disagree<sup>87</sup>.

We understand the picture as containing not only ambiguities, or differences of emphasis, but distinct and contradictory descriptions: the girl points to the word cat, or she does not point to

<sup>87</sup> Figure C is reproduced courtesy of The Hulton Getty Picture Collection Limited.

<sup>88</sup> This argument derives from Catherine Z. Elgin, 'What Goodman Leaves Out', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol 25 No 1 Spring 1991, pp. 89-96. The argument there is for multiple right interpretations against Wollheim's proposed one right and deeply ambiguous interpretation. See Wollheim, 'The Core of Aesthetics' in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol 25 No 1 Spring, 1991, pp. 37-45.

the same reason that one direction is contained in four. Whatever label a picture takes as a starting point, it can only make a map of it rather than a route. Description is necessarily selective, and to describe a depiction it must offer a sequence in place of contiguity or translate four directions into one. No matter how extensive, a route can only run in one direction at a time, and no amount of extension or detail, allow it to run in four directions at one time, or in one place.

This difference between depiction and description is not so much a source of antipathy as partnership. There is no point in seeking a rigid demarcation or pursuing a purely visual realm, in the interests of art or otherwise. Rather the task of depiction involves co-operation on larger projects, to mutual advantage. The overlapping and coincidence of description, as noted, are what give a picture its richness or density of meaning. In this, the study accepts the general drift of Goodman's notational formulations. The ease with which a depiction accommodates descriptions, also allows for the shift between literal and metaphorical, or expressive meaning. In contrast with any one description, a depiction offers a way to cluster descriptions, in a way that a simple compilation into a bigger description cannot. A depiction achieves a fuller, but less focussed meaning, more is said, but less is stressed. This allows a depiction to complement a description, by indicating surrounding and non-obvious matters and versions, and in turn allows a description to single out and give salience to a given depicted object. This is what pictures are for, and their role suggests a definition for their excellence, beauty or art.

Excellence lies in the development of more and other densities of meaning. This arises through the specialisation of uses or diversification of pictures. Greater degrees of density are achieved in pictures performing more open-ended tasks. The emergence of such tasks is by and large the history of art, and such tasks are defined in terms of our understanding or cognition. Here there is also agreement with Goodman.<sup>89</sup> But understanding in Goodman is taken to be as much sensory and emotive as considered and conceptual. Putting things into words is not always possible or necessary, and description is not the only means of interpretation. What is discovered through art is felt as much in nerves and muscles as minds. It

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<sup>89</sup> Goodman, 1976, pp. 252-265. See also Goodman, 1984, pp. 135-138.

nonetheless urges and thrives on description, and its use through comparison and experiment with meanings furthers understanding. We have seen that pictures do this in relation to words, and now it is proposed that art does this in relation to understanding. The function has so far been identified in terms of the density of meaning. More particularly, it is achieved through a kind of scouting or exploring of a domain, a reconnaissance or circumspection.<sup>90</sup> When this function is given sufficient latitude it permits deeper more circumspect meaning, and may well become a thing of beauty and a joy forever. It need not be exclusively a matter of realism or idealism, fact or fiction, impression or expression, the literal or metaphorical. It is a function established in relation only to understanding and achieves this end through different means. In description for example, literature pursues fictive genres and poetic language as a way to expand upon the realms of description, but may equally augment this with pictures, calligraphic or other design aspects to text, music, performance, film or video.

Yet a circumspective function for depiction might seem to make classification of style difficult, if not counter-productive; to only thin the desired density by thus locating meaning more precisely. Circumspection obviously functions within constraints in this respect, while at the same time stylistic identities are notoriously labile and while style tethers meaning to a source, what is thus attributed is far less clear than to where it is attributed. Meaning remains controversial even where agreement exists about identity of source, for example to a Michelangelo or the Italian Renaissance, to a Manet or French Impressionism. But circumspection functions not only within stylistic constraints but also phases. Even the rough and ready sortings of style at a certain point, and for some at least, are settled enough to allow greater circumspection to others. Mostly, new or recent works receive the bulk of criticism and rely upon older and traditional styles for reference, if not conformity. Such attention reflects the attraction for beauty renewed or the challenge of further circumspection. In fact criticism reinforces and to some extent settles older styles in this way, by ostensibly forging new styles. Revision of older styles also occurs however, in the recognition of a Vermeer for example in the

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<sup>90</sup> The term circumspection appeals in part for the role it plays in George A. Kelly's theory of psychology. See Kelly, *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, Vol 1. New York, 1955, pp. 514-517.

nineteenth century, revising in a small way ideas about seventeenth century Dutch genre painting, or again, in the introduction of Mannerism, revising the transition from the Renaissance to Baroque. The point is simply that circumspection is variously maintained by a cycle of focus and dilation, by shifting attention from some styles or works to others and rebuilding them accordingly.

This is really only to amplify the position taken by Goodman in certain respects. Goodman advocates cognitive efficiency as a distinctive feature of art, although supplies only a list of typical symptoms for the requisite density or complexity of denotation.<sup>91</sup> He also allows that works and styles enjoy a fluctuating standard of beauty or excellence, or status within art. If cognitive efficiency no longer sounds much like beauty, it is partly because Goodman applies cognition to far more than thoughts and conceptual analysis, as indicated, and partly because beauty here is not always distinct from the flavour of the month or a passing fancy. Goodman takes an expanded view of cognition, if a somewhat deflated view of beauty. This reflects his priorities. The emphasis in this aesthetic is less upon canons or rankings, than their propagation, upon the wider process, and ‘beauty’ in all its phases. Where a work offers fresh insight into the object and mode of reference used, we experience its beauty, its tempting challenge to stylistic and other constructs. The challenge allows us to sense value or potential in the whole of the work. We sense it is full of sense for us. It is a bit like falling in love. But we tend to get over it. The more we learn from or use the work, the more we take it for granted, apply it elsewhere and discover shortcomings.

Goodman acknowledges just this dynamic, ‘A work may be successively offensive, fascinating, comfortable and boring. These are the vicissitudes of the vehicles and instruments of knowledge.’<sup>92</sup> But the lessons learned are not entirely forgotten with newer interests; rather the interests further the lessons. There is in this respect a history or tradition to beauty and its persistence fuses the issues of canons and cognition. In this Goodman perhaps underestimates the problem, when he argues:

To say that a work of art is good or even to say how good it is does not after all provide much information, does not tell us whether the work is

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<sup>91</sup> Goodman, 1976, pp. 252-265. See also Goodman, 1984, pp. 135-138.

<sup>92</sup> Goodman, 1976, pp. 259.

evocative, robust, vibrant, or exquisitely designed, still less what are its salient specific qualities of colour, shape or sound, moreover, works of art are not race-horses, and picking a winner is not the primary goal.<sup>93</sup>

Granted, picking a winner is not the end of the matter, but picking a winner is surely a step in the process. To rank a work thus is better seen as an exercise that singles out the work initially, alerts us to issues or features that now tantalise in some way. It is to respond to just the dense or circumspective nature of the work that resists other than a crude pre-emptive judgement. It is quite simply the experience of beauty at first sight. Yet to say what is good, typically involves pointing to features in which the work excels. It is to be drawn gradually into saying how it is good, to further comparisons and tests. It is perhaps to revise the judgement in disappointment. But either way, what starts out as blind ranking, ends up as a standard and style, just as what starts out as beauty ends up as a norm. In short, how good a work is, is part of what the work is, and as such ranking cannot be divorced from revelation. Yet ranking is plainly not enough, and to be fully effective as an understanding it must be transformed with time and care into a broader construction, applied to more works and styles, and assume a place in the canon.

In characterising art as a mode of understanding or knowledge, Goodman also undertakes a revision of the distinction between art and science. Both in *Languages of Art* and *Ways of Worldmaking* he argues against the traditional distinctions – between feeling and fact, intuition and inference, subjectivity and objectivity, truth and beauty. None are found adequate as a demarcation, science guesses, fancies and fudges the truth, finds the best fit by adjusting facts as well as framework. Art arrives at its best fits in matters of composition and resolution through similar trial and error and both appeal to broader, global considerations of ‘rightness’.<sup>94</sup> The difference Goodman proposes is between domains of reference. Since circumspection is here offered as characteristic of art, some further brief characterisation for science is perhaps appropriate. The function identified here is one of narrowed focus and sharpened frameworks. Let it be called concentration. If art wanders and wonders, science seizes and settles. As with art, reference may by a

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. pp. 261-262.

<sup>94</sup> Goodman, 1976, pp. 261-262. See also Goodman, 1978, pp. 106-7, pp. 138-140.

variety of modes. Science too has its samples, imaging, jargon and journals. The difference is the greater degree and integration of the system. Goodman identifies digital, articulate and attenuated characteristics in his analysis of denotation, and his discussion draws heavily upon notions of precision and measurement, and it is not surprising and wholly convincing that descriptive notation in these terms is strongly aligned with science.<sup>95</sup>

Defining art in contrast with science leads Goodman to briefly reflect on the historical dimension to art's cognitive function.<sup>96</sup> Science is no more objective than art since controversies and arguments rage within each; the prestige of science theories is subject to fluctuations just as evaluations of art works are. Yet earlier scientific theories may be rendered obsolete by later ones, and in so far as true, are recoverable in reverse derivation. Older works of art on the other hand are not, and are threatened by indifference rather than obsolescence. They continue to function as art even if unpopular or overlooked, as such are sometimes the source of inspiration for new works or unexpected departures. The reason for this difference Goodman can find no space for, but it can be supplied partly in an appeal to the nature of circumspection and the aim of dense meaning, which permits endless interpretation, and partly in an appeal to the nature of concentration, and the function of truth within science systems. Strict derivation itself requires a rigour of system more available to scientific practice. Art has neither need nor means for it.

The historical dimension introduces a further issue. On the one hand beauty is seen as transitory, the enthusiasm of the moment, subject to fashion and taste, while on the other it persists in all works, is in a sense a joy forever. The problem is not just a work's shift in ranking, but more interestingly, that a work may shift in rank, but retain its status as a work of art. A lowered ranking cannot be an expulsion. This is more a matter of logic than legislation. A ranking is based upon a body of works, or a canon, and to reduce this body would be to alter the basis upon which the ranking is made. It would be like sawing off the branch on which one is sitting. So acceptance as a work of art or inclusion in the canon is a one-way ticket, although

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<sup>95</sup> Goodman, 1976, pp. 148-164. See also Catherine Z. Elgin, *With Reference to Reference*, Indianapolis, 1983, p 120, and Elgin, 'Relocating Aesthetics: Goodman's Epistemic Turn', (pp 180-181), *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 47, 1993, pp. 171-186.

<sup>96</sup> Goodman, 1978, pp. 138 – 140. See especially footnote on page 140.

seat allocation may vary from time to time. Then again new works are recognised not only on the strength of novel rankings, but as often according to older ones, and for this reason art unlike science does not get just better and better, only bigger and bigger. Similarly, works rejected in such rankings hardly fail as pictures because of it; rather function within narrower circumspective constraints. Yet rejections may be reversed in a way acceptances cannot, as where a revision in ranking may allow a new density to a hitherto rejected work, for example in the appreciation of non-western works at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. All this is only to say that art digresses while science progresses. This difference serves to explain not only the lack of obsolescence in art, and the transient nature of its beauties, but its deep affiliation with history.

So far Goodman's theory of depiction has been traced, amended and pursued to his view of art. Art is taken as a function of cognitive effectiveness and amended here with a circumspective role in depiction. The very general terms of cognitive effectiveness also allow Goodman to consider the function apart from the standard objects and institutions of art. This is captured in his framing of the question *When Is Art?*<sup>97</sup> He resists an exclusively institutional view, and in fact proposes what he terms the implementation of this cognitive function, above and beyond institutional practices.<sup>98</sup> Yet as we have seen in matters of style and expression, and now concerning ranking and canons, the weight of tradition is considerable upon interpretation and understanding in depiction and art. Whether art's density or circumspective meaning is wholly a matter of history or vice versa need detain us no further than questions of nature versus convention. The point is that this deepening reliance upon history and its institutions now raises the question of just how this is undertaken.<sup>99</sup> How is an historical perspective maintained, and what is entailed in a history of art? The following chapter takes up this issue looking firstly to the popular model provided by Gombrich.

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<sup>97</sup> Goodman, 1978, pp. 57-70.

<sup>98</sup> Goodman, 1983, p. 145.

<sup>99</sup> The question is pursued in Stephanie Ross, 'On Goodman's Query' *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 19, 1981, pp. 375-87. She concludes Goodman's theory needs an institutional basis, although does not follow this to an historical method.

## Art History

As noted, Gombrich's *The Story of Art* all but exchanges art for history in excluding a definition for art, only to introduce depiction and reference as the proper object of study. It is appropriate to now look a little closer at this history. Treating art simply as the history of pictures, unfortunately does not give us the whole story on art or pictures. There are too many pictures for such a history, too much history for such pictures. Nor can a history get by trading on common usage of art to refer to merely pictures and at other times as beauty or excellence, and elsewhere as beauty and excellence only in pictures. The confusion costs pictures. Fine art is a necessary distinction, or art has a capital A for this reason. However in-keeping with current practice of abbreviation, it is enough here to no more than register this deep and mischievous ambiguity.

One does not abandon an essential unpredictability or loss of scope for art, in appealing to some further concept or framework for definition. In fact there is no real choice. Firstly, because history must be *of* something, the surprise and scope of art are meaningless if unmeasured *against* something. The question is only to what to appeal for a broader basis? Secondly, to assume that future works will in some way surpass whatever concept or definition one cares to propose is in truth to no longer be in the business of history or art, but prediction. Following Goodman, an appeal to art's cognitive efficiency is advocated, and questions of how and when styles change and variously maintain this efficiency now call for a history and method. By looking more closely to Gombrich's example a model is gauged, modifications suggested

The method to *The Story of Art* is actually presented in more detail in *Art and Illusion*, where it is bound up with a set of principles for pictorial representation and visual



perception.<sup>100</sup> The cornerstone to the method is the axiom that ‘making precedes matching’. This asserts that reference or symbolic relations follow from our conception of the world, that we make entities, before matching them in tasks of reference.<sup>101</sup> It may seem an obscure point of metaphysics, but as shall be shown, it does not remain one. Gombrich is at pains to refute notions of a platonic form or an a priori concept, guiding making, and argues instead for freely revised or elastic concepts. He offers the example of building a snowman, in which a man is seen as literally built of snow, rather than as an effigy or replica. His argument is that the man of snow is an entity first, and an effigy second. Common sense would tell us that what we have is firstly and really snow, in the form of a man, rather than firstly and really, a man, currently taking the form of snow. Or, if we drop the matter of snow and talk simply of making a human, then precedence of conception or making, before the matching of parents, looks a little silly.

But since this point is crucial to Gombrich’s method, it is worth dwelling upon a little. The argument fails because it proposes a resulting concept of a man of snow, in precisely the same way as it denies a guiding concept of a man in general. The argument is not strictly coherent. If there is no guiding concept in making, nor can there be a resulting concept to be matched to anything. This is because an elastic concept can only expand or contract in relation to some definition. To propose that we need a man of snow before we can have a concept of a man (or indeed snow) is to mistake man-ness for man. *Some* concept of a man, or man-ness, must be taken as a guiding concept, but this concept need not, and cannot be the platonic form, but nor need it imply only and always snow. Another way of putting this would be that snow may improve or alter our concepts of a man, but snow alone does not make a man. If the notion of replication is inconvenienced by notions of an antecedent concept of a man and of snow, equally construction is inconvenienced by the subsequent ‘form’ of the concepts - of a man and of snow. This is, as Gombrich rightly states, the ‘real’ issue.<sup>102</sup> But Plato is not to be out-manoeuvred quite so easily. For that we must perhaps trade a dualism of real and ideal or essence and accident, for a pluralism of worlds and versions. For the moment however it

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<sup>100</sup> Both in the preface and the concluding ‘Retrospect’, of *Art and Illusion*, Gombrich declares the essential unity of approach in the two books. See Gombrich, 1960, p. vii, pp. 330-332.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p. 80-98.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p. 85.

will suffice to point to the symmetry of the argument, and to conclude that making does not precede matching. They are neither consecutive nor alternating, but simultaneous and relative. It is a two-way process, and they are two ways of describing the same thing. In making an individual we expand our universal, in matching a universal, we detect an individual. It makes no sense to claim it as a one-sided affair, to insist on a priority, or that it can be wholly arbitrary. The process cannot be absolute either; no entity is established wholly devoid of, or in complete possession of, all of its properties, including relations. So there is always more at stake than an isolated snowman.

The aim here is not simply to rehearse metaphysics however, but rather to reject the argument Gombrich offers and more especially the ends it serves. These can be summarised in three points. It is firstly an argument for the development of reference from contingencies of concept, and their elastic use and custom. But the priority given to conception is here rejected; and instead reference and conception are taken to go hand in hand. Symbols are not second in the business of making the world, but partners. There is no making without matching, nor distinction or articulation without system and symbol. Even nothing has a name, or is a name for something. Secondly it is an argument for the primacy of the individual before the group. One can have some sympathy with Gombrich's totalitarian anxieties on this point, but they are unfounded.<sup>103</sup> Equally, one must deny the primacy of the group, whether material or transcendent. Both identities are elastic, relative and revisable and one cannot precede the other, or exist in isolation. In the matter of pictures and styles, no picture precedes a style or exists in isolation. The very term picture already places it as a certain type or style of artefact.

Thirdly, making and matching underlie Gombrich's distinction between schema and correction, and the belief that the artist and work can stand outside of tradition, in order to identify and correct the rules of a schema, according to the way we 'really' see things. But the 'correction' a revised schema can make is equally the latitude a tradition allows. Nor does it make a difference to claim that the 'discovery' is accidental or unintended, or achieved through blind trial and error. If the result is taken as more realistic or illusionistic, then a scale or set of rules is implied. The

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<sup>103</sup> Gombrich, 1960, pp. 16-17.

mistake here is in assuming that even the details of a style – its schemas - present themselves for scrutiny by the ambitious artist in such a way that would allow the rules or the conventions to be grasped. For this the tradition must somehow be frozen for a moment. But there are no such intervals in history. There are no static schemas, no entire catalogue of instances for the artist to consult. Each instance revises the nature of the schema, and at any time art has many, if any, competing schemas and applications. A work's 'corrections' are no more than its connections to other and older works. Hence schemas do not precede works, anymore than they proceed by correction. There is no realism for pictures outside of the tradition or the consensus to which to appeal, and there is no single and fixed form of it within the tradition, to be refined or distilled.

Gombrich's historical method in fact provides a story of realism that underlies his history of art. What is notable about the story is firstly the strength and optimism of its opening, in which the concept of art (with a capital A) is breezily tossed aside, in preference and deference to artists, and from where it can trade on art simply equating with pictures, and the gradual accumulation of realistic features through schema and correction. This is in stark contrast to the stalled and stumbling ending, with its fears for the death of art (even in 1950) its grim list of eight factors detailing where society has failed art, its scant and scattered handling of developments in the second half of the twentieth century and its general lack of appreciation or enthusiasm for the achievements there, its indifference now to the artists. It is in all respects, a sad ending. But one cannot help but reflect on the merits of the historical method, and to doubt the teller rather than the tale, when he can find no space for mention or reproduction of a Francis Bacon, a Willem de Kooning, a Mark Rothko, a Frank Stella, a Jasper Johns, a Robert Rauschenberg, a Andy Warhol, a Roy Lichtenstein, a Chuck Close, a Larry Poons, a Brice Marden, a Phillip Guston, a Sol Le Witt, a Gerhard Richter, a Anselm Kieffer, a Julian Schnabel, a Francesco Clemente, a Jonathan Lasker, a Lari Pittman, anything of the world of sculpture, of mixed and expanded media and installations, or even of Australian aboriginal painting.<sup>104</sup> To have lost some through the exigencies of space may be accepted as unfortunate, (although in a book running at over six hundred pages, one

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<sup>104</sup> This list is based upon the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Story of Art*, London, 1995, but grudging acknowledgement of Rauschenburg is found in an earlier essay, see Gombrich, 1982, pp. 31-33.

wonders how much pressure can there have been on one or two more pages?) To have lost most, may be regarded as regrettable, perhaps even rigorous, but to lose all, as Lady Bracknell might say, rather looks careless.<sup>105</sup> For Gombrich of course the selection is rigorous and merely excludes ‘specimens of taste and fashion’, unfortunately it also amounts to a devastating critique of his own taste.<sup>106</sup>

Yet Gombrich maintains his method is sound and it is art that has failed history. But do we have poor art, or do we have a poor art history? The whole point of *The Story of Art* is to allow an appreciation of art’s variety, to fail in an appreciation of the present, is to fail not just art, but also its history, forty years of it, at least. If one allows perhaps that the method succumbs in the end because there can be no short-term history, or a history of the present, and that history requires a longer perspective, one confronts a different problem. Since Gombrich’s story proposes that art simply is its history, then if history cannot pursue art to the present it is in effect to say there is no such thing as contemporary art. If there is no contemporary art, then can it be that art and its history are at an end? Yet if its history is finally at an end, then it can at least be defined! This would be cold comfort for aspiring artists, if it were true, but the fact is art can be defined without the necessity of an end, and such a definition is precisely what is required to direct an historical enquiry in the first place.

Gombrich’s story fails in the short term because he can no longer distinguish between fashions, tastes and traditions, schemers and schemas. Art becomes increasingly diverse and remote for the historian seeking the self-evident tradition and the given schema in need of correction. Yet it is not so much that they are no longer in use but rather that they never really were. Tradition on Gombrich’s terms is the product of his historical method and story, and is actually as much a historicist myth as the moods and spirits of the times he regards with some scepticism. Instead of an idealist myth of grand historical forces, we have a realist myth of minor and piecemeal insights of an absolute perception. But it too comes at a price. Firstly it is realism at the cost of art, and secondly it is realism at the cost of

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<sup>105</sup> There are of course more comprehensive histories of late twentieth century art, although none so directly concerned with the basis of depiction. Rival versions are considered in the closing chapters.

<sup>106</sup> Gombrich, 1995, p. 7.

history. It starts as realism as a goal for the correction of schemas or tradition, and then realism as the measure of expression in schemas. Gombrich allows that the process is relative, that realism cannot escape a medium and a style, but since corrections are the name of the game, sooner or later pictures will converge on realism. The terms vary with the tasks of a time and place, but successive corrections theoretically ought to accumulate into the one true realism.

Every generation discovered that there were still unsuspected “pockets of resistance”; strongholds of conventions which made artists apply forms they had learned rather than paint what they *really* saw.<sup>107</sup> (My italics)

The problem is not, as Gombrich concludes, that the Impressionists reached the end of the road, in their translation of supposed light values into colour, but that pictures keep ditching one schema in order to correct another. The one true realism keeps cancelling itself out. We can have volume at the cost of movement, light at the cost of depth, detail at the cost of simplicity, excitement at the cost of proportion, sentimentality at the cost of sobriety. The relativism and realism of the story are actually at odds. On the one hand Gombrich allows that there is no progress in art, since all correction is relative, but on the other, that there are genuine discoveries such as perspective or the localised colour values achieved by Constable, and that they represent a real advance for depiction. Something has to give. When art subsequently does without perspective or Constable’s localised chromatics or a good deal more, Gombrich can only conclude that it is doing without realism and that art is so much the worse for it.

Less realism is taken as a measure of more expression. For Gombrich this amounts to an increasing subjectivity and the twentieth century’s retreat into introspection. But expression’s correct schema, like realism’s, proves somewhat elusive and chimerical. For Gombrich it is the quest for just this spectre that charts painting’s dissolution throughout the twentieth century.<sup>108</sup> But while expression abandons Expressionism, the more concrete in depiction, and even the standard materials and techniques of painting, it also adopts geometric rigour, biomorphic forms, novel and compelling facture or gesture. Reference is never quite abandoned; we never

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<sup>107</sup> Gombrich, 1995, p. 561 (quoting from Gombrich, 1960, p.330).

<sup>108</sup> Much the same verdict is passed in Bell, 1999. Bell readily acknowledges the influence of Gombrich.

quite reach nothing, anymore than realism ever quite managed to accumulate everything under its steady corrections, and for the same reason. Each ‘correction’ or change supplants content, or supplies its own, and the business of reference, of resemblance – even of illusions - is actually maintained. But for Gombrich the relativism this implies threatens to unravel the whole basis of the story. The principle and the precedence of making before matching, of reality before reference, would then be hopelessly compromised. It is easier in the end to dismiss the whole period as decadent, superficial, neophyte and self-indulgent.<sup>109</sup>

The problem of course is not simply with the ending of *The Story of Art*, but with the story itself. To accept that the story is valid up until the twentieth century, for example, is to merely paper over the cracks.<sup>110</sup> The method does not hold for the twentieth century, not because the twentieth century is so utterly different, but because the principle of recognising a tradition in its constituent schemas disintegrates as it approaches the present, or once the historian is confronted with precisely the situation proposed for the artist throughout history. If the historian cannot detect it in the present, armed with a scrutiny of the past, why should one believe the artist does? Or how is it therefore adequate or acceptable to reconstruct such situations in the past?<sup>111</sup> The fact is the present has its artists, who are accepted and recognised, and there is no clear and cataclysmic break between the twentieth century and the preceding five thousand years or so. It is convenient to see the twentieth century as utterly different, but it is inconsistent if one is also to claim that art is an elastic concept, or only a matter of depiction and reference. The problem is really one of a diminishing hindsight.

At this point one needs to consider how an historical method is to interpret the past without tripping over its own terms. The problem is how a distinction is to be

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<sup>109</sup> Gombrich, 1995, pp. 612-618.

<sup>110</sup> David Carrier takes this position in his critique of art history narratives. See Carrier, *Artwriting*, Amherst/Penn., 1987 and Carrier, *Principles Of Art History Writing*, Philadelphia, 1991.

<sup>111</sup> Gombrich acknowledges the dilemma, in considering the objections raised by Andre Malraux in *Voices Of Silence*, (see Gombrich. 1960, p.54) and proposes to overcome it through ‘historical imagination’ but does not explain how this can identify the differing mental sets, and styles for pictorial notations, except *in relation* to their successors, that ‘confirm or deny’ their influence. His criticism of Malraux’s reluctant historicism is pursued in a later review of Malraux’s *The Metamorphosis of the Gods*, reprinted in Gombrich, *Reflections on the history of Art*, Richard Woodfield (ed.) Berkeley/London, 1987, pp. 218-220.

maintained between method or interpretation and history. Confusion of the two is considered the folly or fallacy of historicism, but history cannot do without interpretation, obviously. There is no way to isolate just the facts, and only those accepted as incontestable, are usually those of least interest. Method clearly makes interpretation for a history, rather than simply accompanies it. Before proceeding to an historical method consistent with Goodman's philosophy, the following chapter considers interpretation more generally.

## Interpretation

Attention to historical method encounters the problem of historicism, in separating method from matter. Historicism concerns the circular nature of an interpretation of the past in terms of the present, and the difficulty of drawing a line between the two. The tendency is to ascribe to history laws or forces that are really instruments of method rather than facts of the matter, and to unfairly extend the evidence in this way. But how or where to draw the line between facts and opinion or theory is notoriously difficult. It has led some theorists to radically relax the distinction, to propose that historical method need do no more than expand upon current social and cultural concerns, by way of weaving a coherent story from accepted facts, and to simply repeat the exercise when it no longer satisfies. In short it is a full and frank admission of historicism, and proposes rather that everything is to be taken historically or is open to reinterpretation in light of emerging or future facts and interests. The problem now is not one of reconciling history to the present, but of simply arguing for one story over another or of accepting multiple stories.

This is broadly speaking, the existential view, that gained currency in the work of Martin Heidegger and inspired the hermeneutical method of Hans-Georg Gadamer and others.<sup>112</sup> In hermeneutical interpretation there is no pretence that historical interpretation establishes ‘the whole and nothing but’ the truth in regard to what ‘really’ happened, or what past intentions may have ‘really’ been. Truth is now taken as relative to current concerns. The hermeneuticist rather constructs a persuasive argument, or simply a good story in support of such concerns, through selection of accepted facts or texts. Citation is then paramount, argument reduced to links from one text to another. But links often struggle between extending one text and inviting another, must seesaw between method and matter. Then there is the

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<sup>112</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being And Time*, (1927) Oxford, 1962. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London/ New York, 1975.



problem that the facts or texts themselves may still be disputed, that varying interpretations can share nothing, but simply amount to further texts, all trading in degrees of consensus.<sup>113</sup> For a theorist such as E. D. Hirsch Jr for example, intention is an indispensable part of interpretation, but is taken as almost a platonic ideal, it guides a story, even as it recedes from it.<sup>114</sup>

In contrast with the existential immersion in history, structuralism offers a kind of isolation from it. For the structuralist, the problem is not one of drawing a line between history and the present, but between history and the field of study. Briefly, structuralism derives from Ferdinand de Saussure's studies in linguistics, their broader application to the social sciences, generally referred to as semiotics, and less prominently, from group theory in mathematics, and its application to symbolic studies in the work of Ernst Cassirer, and to physics in the work of Sir Arthur Eddington.<sup>115</sup> Structuralist analysis is a closed or strict system of elements, uses functions and rules to explain the production and permutation of an object or issue. Typically structuralism emphasises synchronic relations between elements, at the expense of diachronic or historical development. The rules of the system permit certain changes and these changes simply amount to the object or topic, rather than requiring history to explain how one arrives at the set of changes or elements. The problem here is that relations are reductive and tend to subsume variations under a general rule of change. Structures tend to overwhelm their objects and history. Structuralism finds application in art history in the work of Louis Marin and Hubert Damisch for example, and Gombrich's emphasis upon schema and correction is sometimes viewed as structuralist.<sup>116</sup> But structuralism is noted here mainly for its sharp contrast with existential approaches.

Post-structuralist theorists reject the emphasis upon change as a given and the reductive tendency that ultimately finds all structures an echo of the structure of the

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<sup>113</sup> For moderate hermeneutic approaches see Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* Boston, 1971 and more recently, Joseph Margolis, *Interpretation Radical but not Unruly*, Berkeley/London, 1995.

<sup>114</sup> See for example, E. D. Hirsch Jr, *The Aims of Interpretation*, Chicago, 1976.

<sup>115</sup> For a general survey and history of structuralism see Peter Caws, *Structuralism: The Art of the Intelligible*, Atlantic Highlands, N.J. 1988. Also, Goodman acknowledges the influence of Cassirer in both *Ways of Worldmaking* and *Languages of Art*.

<sup>116</sup> See for example, Mitchell, 1994, p. 342.

mind, as Claude Levi-Strauss famously speculated (somewhat after Kant).<sup>117</sup> They draw upon Heidegger, and Nietzsche, and adopt a sweeping relativism of metaphysics as well as Freudian notions of the Id and Libido in constructing language and The Subject. For theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, or Jean Baudrillard no one story or grand narrative will do, interpretations cannot even argue for common ground, for they pursue knowledge on different terms.<sup>118</sup> In other words, their relativism rules out any commensurability or points of agreement between interpretations. Understanding and knowledge are consequently taken as a matter of influence, of institutions and power in some versions.<sup>119</sup> For Derrida, the text or work is to be ‘deconstructed’, by playing upon the ambiguities or ‘differences’ in syntactic construction, and generating ‘slippages’. Interpretation becomes a kind of whimsical improvisation on the rules of grammar. Again the results tend to seesaw, now between poetry and academic discourse. But the radical relativism adopted in many of these theories draws grave objections concerning a lack of consistency or coherence.

A claim such as Gadamer’s “all knowledge is historically conditioned” is by definition ahistorical or an open contradiction.<sup>120</sup> To place history outside the rest of the body of knowledge is only to beg the question how such a statement can then be claimed, or known? In the case of intention conceived ideally, the question arises where does the interpreter draw the line? In what ways is the text or style real or ideal? From where do we start to construct the notional, nominal author’s intentions? The implied duality brings in its train a distinguished body of philosophical debate. If grammatical construction is to provide a starting point, then why are not its constructions also taken to orchestrate ambiguity, or slippage as well? Poetry would seem to trade precisely in this aspect of language. Fitting deconstruction to construction in this way begins to look a little too constructive. Lyotard’s rejection of a ‘metanarrative’ tying together the world then leaves the

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<sup>117</sup> Levi-Strauss, ‘Reponse a quelques questions’, *Esprit*, n.s. 11, 1963, pp. 596-627.

<sup>118</sup> See for example, Derrida *Writing and Difference*, (Paris, 1967) Chicago/London, 1978, Lyotard, *The Post Modern Condition*, (Paris, 1979) Minnesota, 1984, and Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, (Paris, 1984) New York, 1987.

<sup>119</sup> For a seminal post-structuralist analysis of power and knowledge see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (Paris, 1969) London, 1972. Foucault is often also taken as a structuralist, particularly in France.

<sup>120</sup> Gadamer, 1975, p. 483.

constitution of narrative disturbing open; no narrative is then humble or small enough not to contain others. Similar objections are levelled at Goodman's 'constructional' philosophy, but while Goodman shares many of these convictions for relativism and pluralism, one of the reasons for adopting his aesthetic is its ability to meet such objections more successfully than has elsewhere been demonstrated.

So far this aspect to Goodman's theory has only been glimpsed in his rejection of synonymy and intention concerning stylistics. This is a suitable point at which to appreciate it more fully. Synonymy of styles amounts to versions of a shared content or object, as ways of depicting the same thing. But reconciling versions thus also reduces content – takes all differences as only a matter of style. In Goodman's view where versions share too little or reduce content too much for ease or purpose, in finding the common denominator, we do better to treat versions not as sharing a common content or world, but as simply making different content, ultimately dealing in different worlds. Then again, when too many worlds make the going confusing, we do better to find some shared versions and simplify matters. This is Goodman's pluralism and it is distinctive for its 'irrealist' attitude; that switches back and forth between versions and worlds. Before considering an historical method consistent with this view, some measure must be taken of objections to irrealism.<sup>121</sup>

The objection is mainly that two sets of rules or two levels of rule are confused or inconsistent within the theory, on one level there are rules for relativism of all terms, while on a second level there is the term of rightness as an absolute, governing relativism, and holding for all worlds. On one level the theory claims an incommensurability of worlds, while on a second, it tacitly acknowledges a commensurate world-scale in rightness, by which worlds are organised and navigated. If rightness is absolute, then the worlds made are according to one rule, and amount to one world, if rightness is taken as relative on the other hand, then there can be no rightness or rule for all worlds, nor reason to advocate them.

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<sup>121</sup> See for example, Harvey Siegel, *Relativism Refuted: A Critique of Contemporary Epistemological Relativism*, Dordrecht, 1987, pp. 153-154. See also interesting commentary in James F. Harris, *Against Relativity*, La Salle, Illinois, 1992.

A short defence is that the objection itself makes the mistake of demanding an absolute relativism of rightness and pluralism of worlds that makes no sense. To assume there is rightness beyond worlds is to ask for rightness of nothing. To want worlds not measured by worlds, or as worlds, is simply not to want worlds. A longer defence is that Goodman allows that varieties of rightness arise supplementing truth, in tests for truth, in categories necessary to truth but as often are indifferent to it and beyond declaration or proposition (and so truth) to fair or right sampling and depiction.<sup>122</sup> Controversially, Goodman claims that both truth and beauty are subordinate to rightness or are only some of the ways or parts of rightness that go to deciding what makes a world. So rightness assumes an unusual prominence in Goodman's philosophy, certainly.

The point is to appreciate that versions are right or wrong (even when not necessarily true or false, beautiful or ugly) in establishing reference to a diverse world or some world in a diverse universe. Whether one accepts diverse right versions of a single world or diverse worlds is not that important to irrealism. The one world common to all right versions reduces itself to nothing; all right worlds only make some versions of others. Goodman wittily concludes that 'the philosopher, like the philanderer, is always finding himself stuck with none or too many'.<sup>123</sup> The oscillation between versions and worlds equally rejects monism and dualism. 'The realist will resist the conclusion that there is no world; the idealist will resist the conclusion that all conflicting versions describe different worlds.'<sup>124</sup> Irrealist pluralism is thus effectively constrained by nihilism and requires no conflicting or double standard.

To return to the issue of interpretation, it might seem the pluralist is content to accept all interpretation as simply describing different works in different worlds, that there can be no right or wrong interpretation. For the irrealist this is not the case. Interpretations share an identified work or object, are right in so far as validly derived from identification or the facts of the matter, are necessarily plural in disputing implications for a given identity. In this regard pluralism of interpretation is obviously less controversial than pluralism of worlds. It is commonplace, after all,

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<sup>122</sup> Goodman, 1978, pp. 109-140.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p.119.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

to accept that interpretations are necessarily various. Wrong interpretation may incorrectly identify a work or object, or falsely derive implications. For example Michelangelo's *David* may be interpreted as a giant nudist bully, but the interpretation is wrong because scale and the biblical character of David are misidentified, and custom of undress does not follow from Old Testament Judah and Israel.<sup>125</sup> If right, the interpretation is not of *David*, if of *David*, the interpretation is wrong. In accepting that many interpretations may be right, the irrealist does not accept that any and every interpretation is right, or that rightness imposes no criteria for interpretation. Plural right interpretation also complements the proposed theory of art, where circumspective meaning requires just this diversity. To simply allow each interpretation a separate work, would defeat the purpose of art; reduce interpretation to identification.

Yet plural right interpretation is not quite trivial either. Right interpretations trace broader implications for work or object in a variety of directions, and if implications are valid then are counted as right but do not necessarily agree with each other or add up to the one big right interpretation. Michelangelo's *David* may rightly be interpreted as a) a personification of the civic spirit of Florence, b) a revival of classical heroism, c) an ideal male physique, d) a subversion of Christian piety and modesty, for example. Yet Florence is hardly personified by an ideal male physique or subversion of Christian principles; a classical hero surely deserves an ideal physique, but is uncomfortable personifying a devoutly Christian city, the ideal physique is compromised by the tasks of a teenage shepherd and the skills of a slingshot. Combined, all look variously wrong although are only one such combination in any case, while each alone seems right up to a point. Some combine certainly, might usefully simplify the clutch of interpretations, some compromise may allow others combination, then again the cost of compromise may rob interpretations of too much; mean less, if more consistently. So the irrealist, as indicated, juggles too many against too few in preserving rightness.

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<sup>125</sup> Actually, the relevant Biblical text (1 Samuel 17) mentions David's possession of a cloak and pouch at least, in which he carries five smooth stones for his slingshot, after discarding the armour and weapons offered by King Saul. The all-nude combat stance perhaps owes more to Greek traditions, taken up below, but neither source sanctions codes of undress for casual intimidation.

Also, plural right interpretation does more than maintain a singular identification at its source. Identity is as much decided by rival interpretation as decides them. The irrealist thus uses methods to make matter, adjusts each for rightness. Beyond this, irrealism makes no conditions for any one right history. Still, the historian is perhaps confronted with a different set of priorities for 'what really happened' where a) many versions are equally right but b) wrong versions are still to be avoided and while c) better versions are still to be had, even though d) there is no best version (or none is better than all). Not all or any right versions will do. Only the most comprehensive or efficient are preferred, yet some right implications do not easily combine with others, lessen effectiveness in so doing. The irrealist historian is torn between methods, must balance improvement of past versions against introduction of merely different versions. The irrealist historian's method - in as much as it allows just one - trades between better and different versions.

Art historical interpretation comes with more baggage. The artwork is not only identified by a source but also style. Stylistics rests upon a theory of reference and the irrealist art historian here appeals to a taxonomy of exemplification. Such structure obviously suggests structuralism in its fixed or absolute terms yet the structure here does not subsume too great a variety of features or applications under a general rule, nor eliminates diachronic differences in favour of synchronic ones. On the contrary, stylistics here has drawn further distinctions between the expressive and the stated, the literal and metaphorical, depictive and material exemplification. Breadth and nuance of meaning only gain from this stylistic structure. Diachronic or historical change is gauged by variations on these routes of reference, on what history does *with* them, rather than what it does *to* them. For, to historicize them thus would be to rob art history of any stable measure or meaning, to fall into an absolute historicism that, as indicated earlier, is not strictly coherent.

An art historical method thus emerges for irrealism. Contrasts with other radical approaches to interpretation have pointed to dangers in too much relativism or the folly of absolute relativism. The study now compares an irrealist approach with that of a realist, in the following chapter looks at what story or stories of art an irrealist might tell.

## Realisms

In Chapter Six *The Story of Art* was considered as a realist history and to have suffered in its account of later twentieth century art, largely as a consequence of its method. This now provides a convenient comparison. Earlier, the exchange between Gombrich and Goodman was noted, concerning the issue of nature versus convention in which Goodman urged further relativism to Gombrich's views.<sup>126</sup> In fact Goodman's approval of Gombrich's work registers in a number of his books.<sup>127</sup> The suggestion here is really to implement the kind of relativism Goodman advocated and Gombrich tentatively supported, and from which an account of later twentieth century art in particular may benefit.

The preceding chapter has shown how pluralism of interpretation is distinct from metaphysical pluralism of worlds. Similarly, realism may be limited to matters of style, taken as plural or realisms, without implying metaphysical pluralism.<sup>128</sup> For Goodman, stylistic realisms arise in three ways, in ease of use, through habit or preference, in novelty or revelation, and in the factual contrasted with the fictional.<sup>129</sup> Realism is thus relative to scheme or style of depiction, to object and system, rather than optics or illusion. Objections may run that the comfortable or preferred are not always realistic. Standard line illustrations for scientific or educational use tend to typify and simplify object, exclude the particular, incidental and so some realism. Then again, photographs used for personal identification, on files and passports for example, are almost never preferred by or comfortable for at least the bearer, and remote and strange objects such as the surface of the moon or Mars often prompt surprising scale and depth ambiguities, even in the most detailed

<sup>126</sup> Gombrich, 1982, p.284.

<sup>127</sup> Goodman 1976, Goodman, 1978, Goodman, 1984 and Goodman and Elgin, *Reconceptions In Philosophy*, London, 1988.

<sup>128</sup> The distinction between metaphysical and stylistic realism adopted here is made in Elgin, 'What Goodman Leaves Out' *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 25, No 1, Spring, 1991, pp. 89-95.

<sup>129</sup> Goodman, 1984, pp. 126-130.

and 'realistic' of photographs. But in any case, to claim novelty as immediately or ultimately a matter of realism is also to succumb to the aesthetic of the realist.

The so-called realism of a Caravaggio or a Courbet for example, was greeted as a revolt in standards of person and theme or iconography. It was not a revelation how much more realistically persons were depicted, but that such flawed or humble people were depicted in or with such controversial roles or attitudes. Such people were hardly a revelation and realism is not to be confused with mere poverty or modesty. The chiaroscuro of Caravaggio or the coarse facture of Courbet may gain in expressive range for the exercise but neither contributes to nor originates from mere realism or lowliness. Much the same holds for the reception of Impressionism, which was no more understood immediately than as only a more realistic approach to light values or Parisian pastimes, which were then hardly taken as more realistic than other kinds. Equally, the contemporaneous adoption of 'oriental' spatial schemes (oblique or parallel oblique projections) and striking asymmetrical framing or composition, while refreshing, hardly replaced just perspectives, or just replaced anything for very long. Even the work of Michelangelo remained deeply controversial in his day, not because of newly acquired accuracy in musculature, but because of his fixation on a supposed ideal nude at the expense of sacred themes and sentiment. Realism and revelation had very little to do with it. Then again, the striking realism of a Vermeer, in integration of tonal values for surface or texture in perspective, and something akin to a photographic depth of focus, went unnoticed in his lifetime and for some considerable time thereafter. Moreover, the proposed theory of art as dense or circumspective meaning argues against just this easy recognition or decisive revelation and is at least as much supported by history on this score as realist accounts. So novelty has no more to do with realism than idealism, as much to do with confusion and challenge as revelation.

Yet Goodman is surely right that either the old or new may be accorded more realistic, the factual or fictional realistic or not and that the routes of realism are many and varied. But in as much as realism is recognised as a relation of scheme to object and system, some further explanation is perhaps owed. Derivation is suggested. In Chapter Five the difference between art and science was touched upon. Art organises works by styles and while older works cannot be conversely



derived from later ones in the way that improvement in scientific theories accommodates – in so far as theories are true – nevertheless, some derivations for schemes or styles, objects and themes are traced, often to distinguish new ones, and amount in fact to the measures of realism. To the extent that a scheme or style contains another, may conversely derive a lesser one from its elements, a scheme is more realistic. Or, where a scheme contains others but is not contained by them, it is realistic. The commonsense appeal to realism in depiction comes to just this.

A simple line illustration may be taken as less realistic than one equal in all other respects but including tonal values (that is, values of light); greater range of tonal values allows more realism, while colour in greater range improves on tone and line. In as much as object permits this expansion of scheme or scheme admits this expansion of object, the fuller colour scheme is the more realistic, allows converse derivation of tone and line; cannot be derived from them. A similar argument may be made for the converse derivation of projections from perspective, along the lines indicated in chapter three, and thus for the greater realism of perspective. Where successive schemes add to information of the same object, realism amounts to a measure of greater information or accuracy for object. Gombrich argues against truth assigned to depiction generally, only to concede that portraiture of person or place is correct (or true) where scheme correctly understood provides ‘no false information’.<sup>130</sup> Realism as a measure of accuracy is confidently rejected by Goodman with the example of two pictures of supposed equal information, one of reversed perspective and colour, the other normal and so more realistic by familiarity or ease of information rather than accuracy.<sup>131</sup> But again, the hypothetical comparison bears closer scrutiny.

To introduce a scheme of colour and perspective reversal is also to stress a new alignment of the two. The reversal of one does not follow from the reversal of the other. The scheme therefore draws attention to unusual alignments of shape and distance to colour, is difficult to understand not just because of rarity of scheme, but because other information to the normal scheme is ignored or concealed in the reversal. For example treatment of surfaces, textures or contour (sharp or soft) even

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<sup>130</sup> Gombrich, 1960, p. 78.

<sup>131</sup> Goodman, 1976, pp. 35-36.

tonal contrasts for a given part or object, are confused in colour and perspective reversal and crucial symmetries and other alignments to vanishing points are replaced.<sup>132</sup> So an appeal to the same information between schemes does not quite hold, although information in the reversed scheme is nonetheless accurate, and in as much as object is actual or factual, both schemes are realistic. In as much as aspects revealed in the reversed scheme are at the expense of more or more useful aspects in the normal scheme, the reversed scheme is less realistic. To argue that familiarity with the reversed scheme can accommodate the lost or concealed information can as easily argue that the normal scheme will no longer then offer this information (would strictly, no longer be the normal scheme) but rather, an equally confusing contrast, or for simply a reversal of information from respective schemes or of just names for schemes. Difference between schemes maintains difference in information.

However the illustration also shows that accuracy of object now depends on more than one scheme, accuracy of scheme depend either on versions of object or different objects. Realism of scheme cannot thus be measured along a single derivation. Realism and derivation for scheme and object are multiple, allow conflicting schemes for the same object, (as in the normal and reversed examples) or versions of the same object for the same scheme (say, colour and perspective alignment). In so far as derivation is maintained for scheme and object, realism obtains. But as such, realism now becomes necessary yet antithetical to art; faces science and stricter uses as easily as the more circumspect and looser organisation of art. Realism, in so far as it is consistent in derivation, supplies the bottom line for art.<sup>133</sup> Yet information preserved or extended between schemes or styles cannot be complete anymore than synonymy may be absolute. Moreover, information derived between styles still confronts the difference between fact and fiction, sense and

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<sup>132</sup> Similar if simpler reversals obtained either by mirrors or mere inversions of pictures are a common source of comparison for painters, as a way of detecting subtle imbalances or discrepancies to a painting, either in traditional genres, especially portraiture, as well as in abstract work. The abstract works of De Kooning for example were made by working the painting from all four sides and corners, usually when upright, in order to take into account just these differences to the information or composition. The familiar practice of backing away, squinting with tilted head is another way of making similar comparisons.

<sup>133</sup> Under this formulation the line between science and art obviously blurs somewhat, according to strictness and range of derivation for depiction, but does not disturb the basic distinction between digression and progression, indeed better explains the shifts in status of say, antiquated medical or engineering illustrations, where improvements to accuracy may allow new appreciation of the (now less realistic) scheme.

nonsense and begs questions of the difference between fact and category. Pictures of unicorns and Homer Simpson or any young woman and a typical tiger may be realistic as pictures but not as information, as often are neither, or unrealistic as pictures but realistic as information. Derivation to and from fictive and class terms is thus also required of realism, and the irrealist here appeals to Goodman's nominalism.<sup>134</sup>

Very briefly, class and fictive pictures do not depict universal and fictitious objects. As indicated in Chapter Three, they actually depict only a sort of picture, and serve to collect or sort pictures of actual objects, or individuals, so that any such collection contains a unique ordering of individuals, is an 'individual' collection, identified by just one and the same name. Goodman's nominalist construction thus builds only with individuals, only to individuals. Class and fictive pictures basically point to such sortings. The difference between class and fictive pictures lies in the truth or accuracy of the sorting. The typical tiger preserves just key features to all pictures of (actual) tigers, is at least 'nothing but the truth' in sorting relevant schemes and object. The unicorn on the other hand is literally false as a sorting of schemes for horses and horns, although may highlight the realistic scheme in interesting ways in so doing; offer striking (and true or right) metaphor for mutation, anomaly or the unexpected. Sorts of pictures, factual and fictive, denoted by hyphenation as 'tiger-pictures' or 'unicorn-pictures' for example, thus shape the organisation of pictures, their objects and realism. Realism (and idealism) of scheme is tested or tempered by the fictive, while effective factual sorting extends actual object. Realism thus derives from both under this nominalist ontology, but again by no single or fixed route.

Realism, in short, might be called a style with too many variations; conversely, a style, variation with not enough realism. How many realisms to rightly allow among styles, like how many styles to allow an art history, or indeed how much history to allow styles or realisms, depends upon a theory of depiction, given styles and how the history is focussed or framed. No history accommodates all styles; some styles exclude others. Period styles do not apply everywhere nor regional or national styles

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<sup>134</sup> A full nominalist treatment for depiction, maintaining individuality to construction, is the work of another study. For details see Goodman, 1976, pp. 21-26, and Goodman, 1984, pp. 48-53.



















































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































