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NELSON GOODMAN

# LANGUAGES OF ART

AN APPROACH  
TO A THEORY OF SYMBOLS

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## OF PICTURES

tness. While “exemplifies ra-  
says only “exemplifies some  
onal”, the context usually tells  
what label is in question. When  
dness to a Frenchman, or Socra-  
y to Plato, the predicates are  
ones. In talk among English-  
ting a house, a sample of red-  
perhaps some or all of a few  
ably with “red” in such discus-  
es exemplifies rationality to me,  
he exemplifies a Greek word I  
ying he exemplifies “risible”? I  
quest to be more specific about  
ified, or I may rest with what  
statement that Socrates exampli-  
with “rational”. If I choose the  
ttled to complain about the in-  
In short, we can be as specific  
out what is exemplified, but we  
pecificity and maximum gener-

is exemplified is abstract. Now  
ification as obtaining between  
r instance, between the sample  
on of a predicate. Such a label  
indeed be 'abstract' in having  
singular label may equally well  
denotes. And a label, whether  
null denotation, may of course  
rence in domain' discussed ear-

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lier thus reduces to this: while anything may be denoted, only labels may be exemplified.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. Samples and Labels

Treating all exemplification as fundamentally of labels raises, however, the question whether exemplification is indeed entirely dependent upon language. Does exemplification emerge only as language develops? Are only words exemplified? Are there no samples of anything unnamed? The general answer is that not all labels are predicates; predicates are labels from linguistic systems. Symbols from other systems—gestural, pictorial, diagrammatic, etc.—may be exemplified and otherwise function much as predicates of a language. Such nonlinguistic systems, some of them developed before the advent or acquisition of language, are in constant use. Exemplification of an unnamed property usually amounts to exemplification of a non-verbal symbol for which we have no corresponding word or description.

Yet the orientation that distinguishes exemplification from denotation does seem to derive from the organization of language even where nonverbal symbols are involved. In ordinary language, the reference of "man" to Churchill, and of "word" to "man," is unequivocally denotative; while if

8 If (as in SA, Part III) such abstract entities as qualia are recognized, these—although not labels—may indeed be exemplified by their instances, which are concrete wholes containing these qualia. But explanation of other properties would still have to be explained as above in terms of exemplification of predicates; and simplicity of exposition for our present purposes seems best served by treating all exemplification in this one way.

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Churchill symbolizes "man", and "man" symbolizes "word", the reference is unequivocally exemplification. With pictures, although they are nonverbal, orientation of referential relationships is provided by established correlations with language. A picture that represents Churchill, like a predicate that applies to him, denotes him. And reference by a picture to one of its colors often amounts to exemplification of a predicate of ordinary language. Such parallels and points of contact with language are enough to set the direction.

Where there are no such ties to language, and symbols and referents are nonverbal, the distinction in direction between denotation and exemplification is sometimes determinable from formal features. If a diagram of reference is such that all its arrows are single-headed, exemplification is absent; for we know that exemplification implies the converse of denotation. Where double-headed arrows occur, we may be able to tell in which direction denotation runs. For example, if the elements (nodes of the diagram) are antecedently distinguished into two categories, *A* and *B*, and every single-headed arrow runs from an *A* to a *B*, then reference from an *A* to a *B* here is always denotation, reference from a *B* to an *A* exemplification. This general idea can be refined and elaborated to operate in some more complicated cases; but in others the distinction between denotation and exemplification may lose significance. It is pertinent only where there are two dominant opposing directions.

Labeling seems to be free in a way that sampling is not. I can let anything denote red things, but I cannot let any-

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thing that is not red be a sample of redness. Is exemplification, then, more intrinsic, less arbitrary, than denotation? The difference amounts to this: for a word, say, to denote red things requires nothing more than letting it refer to them; but for my green sweater to exemplify a predicate, letting the sweater refer to that predicate is not enough. The sweater must also be denoted by that predicate; that is, I must also let the predicate refer to the sweater. The constraint upon exemplification as compared with denotation derives from the status of exemplification as a subrelation of the converse of denotation, from the fact that denotation implies reference between two elements in one direction while exemplification implies reference between the two in both directions. Exemplification is restricted only insofar as the denotation of the label in question is regarded as having been antecedently fixed.

Matters are further complicated by symbols that refer to themselves. A symbol that denotes itself also exemplifies itself, is both denoted and exemplified by itself. "Word" is thus related to itself, and so are "short" and "polysyllabic", but not "long" or "monosyllabic". "Long" is a sample of "short", "monosyllabic" denotes short words, and "short" both exemplifies and denotes short words.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Self-reference is a rather mind-twisting matter. The following theorems are noted here for guidance:

(a) If *x* exemplifies *y*, then *y* denotes *x*.

(b) *x* and *y* denote each other if and only if they exemplify each other.

(c) *x* exemplifies *x* if and only if *x* denotes *x*.

(d) If *x* exemplifies and is coextensive with *y*, then *x* denotes and exemplifies *x*.

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If I ask the color of your house, you may say "red", or you may show me a red paint-chip, or you may write "red" in red ink. You may, that is, respond with a predicate, with a sample, or with a combined predicate and sample. In this last case what you write, taken as a predicate, is interchangeable with any inscription spelled the same way, but taken as a color-sample is interchangeable rather with anything of the same color. The distinction illustrated here becomes important in the translation of poetry or other literature. Original and translation will of course differ in some properties; but so do any two inscriptions of the same word, or even any two red inscriptions of "red". The goal is maximal preservation of what the original exemplifies as well as of what it says. Translation of a staccato by a legato text may do greater violence than some discrepancies in denotation. (See section 9 below.)

We are accustomed to taking inscriptions as labels rather than as color-samples, paint-chips as color-samples rather than as labels. But inscriptions may function also as color-samples, as we have just seen and as they do in a disconcerting way when we have to cope, in the frontispiece to this chapter, with several intermixed and differently colored occurrences of "red", "yellow", "blue", and "green".<sup>10</sup> And color-chips may also be used as labels.

<sup>10</sup> The interference resulting from the double functioning of such symbols has been investigated experimentally by several psychologists. See J. R. Stroop, "Studies of Interference in Serial Verbal Reactions", *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, vol. 18 (1935), pp. 643-661, and A. R. Jensen and W. D. Rohwer, Jr., "The Stroop Color-Word Test: A Review", *Acta Psychologica*, vol. 25 (1966), pp. 36-93. I am indebted to Paul Kolars for calling my attention to this material.

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Each may denote everything of its own color, and will then both exemplify and be the label exemplified<sup>11</sup>; or each may denote only but not all things of its own color, say the buttons in a box; or each may denote things, such as nails of a certain size, regardless of their color.<sup>12</sup>

A gesture, too, may denote or exemplify or both. Nods of agreement or dissent, salutes, bows, pointings, serve as labels. A negative nod, for instance, applies to without normally being among things disapproved. An orchestra conductor's gestures denote sounds to be produced but are not themselves sounds. They may indeed have and even exemplify some properties—say of speed or cadence—of the music, but the gestures are not among their own denotata. The same is true of such activities in response to music as foot- and finger-tappings, head-bobbings, and various other minor motions. That these are called forth by the music, while the conductor's gestures call it forth,

<sup>11</sup> Likewise a sound, in onomatopoeia, may be used to denote sounds having properties it exemplifies. The variability of exemplification is amusingly attested here by some linguistic curiosities: it seems that French dogs bark "gnaf-gnaf" rather than "bow-wow"; that German cats purr "schnurr-schnurr", French cats "ron-ron"; that in Germany a bell goes "bim-bam" rather than "ding-dong", and in France a drip-drip is a plouf-plouf.

<sup>12</sup> That a label is self-exemplifying implies no resemblance to other denotata beyond sharing that predicate. "Material object" denotes itself but is very unlike Windsor Castle. Nor does likeness of a predicate to its denotata imply self-exemplification; for obviously we may use an element to denote those other than itself that resemble it to any degree. Incidentally, though, in judging the similarity of two things we tend to weigh a predicate they exemplify more heavily than one that merely denotes them; for an exemplified predicate is referred to, and thus gains prominence.

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does not affect their status as labels; for labels may be used to record or to prescribe—"strawberry", "raspberry", "lemon", and "lime" may tell us what is in or what to put in the several containers.

Why, though, do these negligible activities become so significant when related to music? Their significance is simply that of labels applied in analyzing, organizing, and registering what we hear. *Contra* theories of empathy,<sup>13</sup> these labels need not themselves have any particular properties in common with the music. Psychologists and linguists have stressed the ubiquitous participation of action in perception in general, the early and extensive use of gestural, sensorimotor, or enactive symbols, and the role of such symbols in cognitive development.<sup>14</sup> For Jaques-

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Theodor Lipps, *Raumästhetik und Geometrisch-Optische Täuschungen* (Leipzig, J. A. Barth, 1897), translated by H. S. Langfeld in *The Aesthetic Attitude* (New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., Inc., 1920), pp. 6-7: "The column seems to brace itself and raise itself, that is to say, to proceed in the way in which I do when I pull myself together and raise myself, or remain thus tense and erect, in opposition to the natural inertness of my body. It is impossible for me to be aware of the column without this activity seeming to exist directly in the column of which I am aware."

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Burton L. White and Richard Held, "Plasticity of Sensorimotor Development in the Human Infant", in *The Causes of Behavior*, ed. J. F. Rosenblith and W. Allinsmith (2nd ed., Boston, Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966), pp. 60-70, and the earlier articles there cited; Ray L. Birdwhistell, "Communication without Words", prepared in 1964 for publication in "L'Adventure Humaine", and the articles there cited; Jean Piaget, *The Origins of Intelligence in Children* (New York, International University Press, Inc., 1952), e.g., pp. 185ff, 385; and Jerome S. Bruner, *Studies in Cognitive Growth* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1966), pp. 12-21. I cannot accept

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Dalcroze, the use of these activities for grasping music is a fundamental factor in musical education.<sup>15</sup>

The gymnastics instructor, unlike the orchestra conductor, gives samples. His demonstrations exemplify the requisite properties of the actions to be performed by his class, whereas his oral instructions prescribe rather than show what is to be done. The proper response to his knee-bend is a knee-bend; the proper response to his shout "lower" (even if in a high voice) is not to shout "lower" but to bend deeper. Nevertheless, since the demonstrations are part of the instruction, are accompanied by and may be replaced by verbal directions, and have no already established denotation, they may—like any sample not otherwise committed as to denotation—also be taken as denoting what the predicates they exemplify denote, and are then labels exemplifying themselves.

The action of a mime, on the other hand, is not usually among the actions it denotes. He does not climb ladders or wash windows but rather portrays, represents, denotes,

Bruner's trichotomy of symbols into the enactive, the iconic, and the symbolic, since the latter two categories seem to me ill-defined and ill-motivated. A classification of symbols as enactive, visual, auditory, etc., may be useful for some purposes of developmental psychology; but for our purposes here these distinctions cut across what seem to me more consequential differences among modes of reference.

<sup>15</sup> He understands very clearly and takes full advantage of the uses of muscular movements as elements of teachable symbol systems implementing the comprehension and retention of music. See especially *The Eurhythmics of Jaques-Dalcroze* (Boston, Small, Maynard, & Co., 1918), articles by P. B. Ingham (pp. 43-53) and E. Ingham (pp. 54-60).

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ladder-climblings and window-washings by what he does. His miming may indeed exemplify activities involved in climbing or window-washing, as a picture may exemplify the color of a house it represents; but the picture is not a house, and the miming is not a climbing. The mime's walks, of course, may exemplify walking as well as denoting walks, just as "short" exemplifies shortness as well as denoting short words; but such self-denoting and self-exemplifying symbols are in the minority in pantomime as in English and in painting. The word "bird" or a picture of a bird, not being itself a bird, exemplifies no label denoting all and only birds; and a miming of a flight, not being a flight, exemplifies no label denoting all and only flights. A word or picture or pantomime does not often exemplify any label coextensive with it.

Some elements of the dance are primarily denotative, versions of the descriptive gestures of daily life (e.g., bowings, beckonings) or of ritual (e.g., signs of benediction, Hindu hand-postures).<sup>16</sup> But other movements, especially in the modern dance, primarily exemplify rather than denote. What they exemplify, however, are not standard or familiar activities, but rather rhythms and dynamic shapes. The exemplified patterns and properties may

<sup>16</sup> The dancer's act of benediction, like its replicas on the stage and in the church, denotes what is blessed. That the addressee of the dancer's gesture is not thereby among the blessed means only that the dancer, like the novelist, is making fictive use of a denoting symbol. But of course a gesture may, like the word "centaur", be denotative in character even though it denotes nothing. See further the last two paragraphs of this section.

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reorganize experience, relating actions not usually associated or distinguishing others not usually differentiated, thus enriching allusion or sharpening discrimination. To regard these movements as illustrating verbal descriptions would of course be absurd; seldom can the just wording be found.<sup>17</sup> Rather, the label a movement exemplifies may be itself; such a movement, having no antecedent denotation, takes on the duties of a label denoting certain actions including itself. Here, as often elsewhere in the arts, the vocabulary evolves along with what it is used to convey.

Although exemplification is reference running from denotatum back to label, by no means every case of reference is a case of denotation or exemplification. An element may come to serve as a symbol for an element related to it in almost any way. Sometimes the underlying relationship is not referential, as when the symbol is the cause or effect of (and so sometimes called the sign of), or is just to the left of, or is similar to, what it denotes. In other cases reference runs along a chain of relationships, some or all of them referential. Thus one of two things may refer to the other via predicates exemplified; or one of two predicates refer to the other via things denoted. Some familiar types of symbolization can be distinguished in terms of such underlying relationships or chains; but no nonreferential relationship, and no chain, even (since reference is non-transitive) where each element refers to the next, is sufficient by itself to establish reference by its first element to

<sup>17</sup> See further VI,2.

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over, works of art are not race-horses, and picking a winner is not the primary goal. Rather than judgments of particular characteristics being mere means toward an ultimate appraisal, judgments of aesthetic value are often means toward discovering such characteristics. If a connoisseur tells me that one of two Cycladic idols that seem to me almost indistinguishable is much finer than the other, this inspires me to look for and may help me find the significant differences between the two. Estimates of excellence are among the minor aids to insight. Judging the excellence of works of art or the goodness of people is not the best way of understanding them. And a criterion of aesthetic merit is no more the major aim of aesthetics than a criterion of virtue is the major aim of psychology.

In short, conceiving of aesthetic experience as a form of understanding results both in resolving and in devaluing the question of aesthetic value.

### 7. Art and the Understanding

In saying that aesthetic experience is cognitive experience distinguished by the dominance of certain symbolic characteristics and judged by standards of cognitive efficacy, have I overlooked the sharpest contrast: that in science, unlike art, the ultimate test is truth? Do not the two domains differ most drastically in that truth means all for the one, nothing for the other?

Despite rife doctrine, truth by itself matters very little in science. We can generate volumes of dependable truths at will so long as we are unconcerned with their impor-

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tance; the multiplication tables are inexhaustible, and empirical truths abound. Scientific hypotheses, however true, are worthless unless they meet minimal demands of scope or specificity imposed by our inquiry, unless they effect some telling analysis or synthesis, unless they raise or answer significant questions. Truth is not enough; it is at most a necessary condition. But even this concedes too much; the noblest scientific laws are seldom quite true. Minor discrepancies are overridden in the interest of breadth or power or simplicity.<sup>12</sup> Science denies its data as the statesman denies his constituents—within the limits of prudence.

Yet neither is truth one among competing criteria involved in the rating of scientific hypotheses. Given any assemblage of evidence, countless alternative hypotheses conform to it. We cannot choose among them on grounds of truth; for we have no direct access to their truth. Rather, we judge them by such features as their simplicity and strength. These criteria are not supplemental to truth but applied hopefully as a means for arriving at the nearest approximation to truth that is compatible with our other interests.

Does this leave us with the cardinal residual difference that truth—though not enough, not necessary, and not a touchstone for choosing among hypotheses—is nevertheless a consideration relevant in science but not in art? Even so meek a formulation suggests too strong a contrast.

<sup>12</sup> See my "Science and Simplicity" in *Philosophy of Science Today*, ed. S. Morgenbesser (New York, Basic Books, Inc., 1967), pp. 68-78.

Truth of a hypothesis after all is a matter of fit—fit with a body of theory, and fit of hypothesis and theory to the data at hand and the facts to be encountered. And as Philipp Frank liked to remind us, goodness of fit takes a two-way adjustment—of theory to facts and of facts to theory—with the double aim of comfort and a new look. But such fitness, such aptness in conforming to and reforming our knowledge and our world, is equally relevant for the aesthetic symbol. Truth and its aesthetic counterpart amount to appropriateness under different names. If we speak of hypotheses but not of works of art as true, that is because we reserve the terms "true" and "false" for symbols in sentential form. I do not say this difference is negligible, but it is specific rather than generic, a difference in field of application rather than in formula, and marks no schism between the scientific and the aesthetic.

None of this is directed toward obliterating the distinction between art and science. Declarations of indissoluble unity—whether of the sciences, the arts, the arts and sciences together, or of mankind—tend anyway to focus attention upon the differences. What I am stressing is that the affinities here are deeper, and the significant differentia other, than is often supposed. The difference between art and science is not that between feeling and fact, intuition and inference, delight and deliberation, synthesis and analysis, sensation and cerebration, concreteness and abstraction, passion and action, immediacy and immediacy, or truth and beauty, but rather a difference in domination of certain specific characteristics of symbols.

The implications of this reconception may go beyond philosophy. We hear a good deal about how the aptitudes and training needed for the arts and for the sciences contrast or even conflict with one another. Earnest and elaborate efforts to devise and test means of finding and fostering aesthetic abilities are always being initiated. But none of this talk or these trials can come to much without an adequate conceptual framework for designing crucial experiments and interpreting their results. Once the arts and sciences are seen to involve working with—inventing, applying, reading, transforming, manipulating—symbol systems that agree and differ in certain specific ways, we can perhaps undertake pointed psychological investigation of how the pertinent skills inhibit or enhance one another; and the outcome might well call for changes in educational technology. Our preliminary study suggests, for example, that some processes requisite for a science are less akin to each other than to some requisite for an art. But let us forego foregone conclusions. Firm and usable results are as far off as badly needed; and the time has come in this field for the false truism and the plangent platitude to give way to the elementary experiment and the hesitant hypothesis.

Whatever consequences might eventually be forthcoming for psychology or education would in any case count as by-products of the theoretical inquiry begun here. My aim has been to take some steps toward a systematic study of symbols and symbol systems and the ways they function in our perceptions and actions and arts and sciences, and thus in the creation and comprehension of our worlds.



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# WAYS of WORLDMAKING

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The nearest analogy to language in this respect can be found in music. The relationship between a score and its performance, although a semantic relationship between symbol and compliant rather than a syntactic relationship between replicas in different media, is as determinate as that between a written and a spoken word. Thus, much as we may quote speech in writing by enclosing the written correlate in quotation marks, so may we quote musical sound on paper by putting the score in quotation marks. And a picture showing a sheet of score is to this extent quoting also the sounded music. Again, if John says "It went like this" and then hums the opening of Beethoven's Fifth, he might be regarded as in effect quoting the score as well as the sound.

#### 6. Reflection

The question concerning the quotation of gestures, raised at the end of my opening paragraph, I leave to the reader's reflection.

My goal in this chapter has not been to find in or force upon nonlinguistic systems strict analogies with quotation in languages. There was no hope or need for such strict analogies. Rather, I have undertaken a comparative study of quotation and its nearest analogues. As ways of combining and constructing symbols, these are among the instruments for world-making.

## IV

### When Is Art?

#### 1. The Pure in Art

If attempts to answer the question "What is art?" characteristically end in frustration and confusion, perhaps—as so often in philosophy—the question is the wrong one. A reconception of the problem, together with application of some results of a study of the theory of symbols, may help to clarify such moot matters as the role of symbolism in art and the status as art of the 'found object' and so-called 'conceptual art'.

One remarkable view of the relation of symbols to works of art is illustrated in an incident bitingly reported by Mary McCarthy:<sup>1</sup>

Seven years ago, when I taught in a progressive college, I had a pretty girl student in one of my classes who wanted to be a short-story writer. She was not studying with me, but she knew that I sometimes wrote short stories, and one day, breathless and glowing, she came up to me in the hall, to tell me that she had just written a story that her writing teacher, a Mr. Converse, was terribly excited about. "He thinks it's wonderful," she said, "and he's going to help me fix it up for publication."

I asked what the story was about; the girl was a rather simple being who loved clothes and dates. Her answer had a deprecating tone. It was about a girl (herself) and some sailors she had met on the train. But then her face, which had looked perturbed for a moment, gladdened.

<sup>1</sup> "Settling the Colonel's Hash", *Harper's Magazine*, 1954; reprinted in *On the Contrary* (Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1961), p. 225.

"Mr. Converse is going over it with me and we're going to put in the symbols."

Today the bright-eyed art student will more likely be told, with equal subtlety, to keep out the symbols; but the underlying assumption is the same: that symbols, whether enhancements or distractions, are extrinsic to the work itself. A kindred notion seems to be reflected in what we take to be symbolic art. We think first of such works as Bosch's *Garden of Delight* or Goya's *Caprichos* or the Unicorn tapestries or Dali's drooping watches, and then perhaps of religious paintings, the more mystical the better. What is remarkable here is less the association of the symbolic with the esoteric or unearthly than the classification of works as symbolic upon the basis of their having symbols as their subject matter—that is, upon the basis of their depicting rather than of being symbols. This leaves as nonsymbolic art not only works that depict nothing but also portraits, still-lives, and landscapes where the subjects are rendered in a straightforward way without arcane allusions and do not themselves stand as symbols.

On the other hand, when we choose works for classification as nonsymbolic, as art without symbols, we confine ourselves to works without subjects; for example, to purely abstract or decorative or formal paintings or buildings or musical compositions. Works that represent anything, no matter what and no matter how prosaically, are excluded; for to represent is surely to refer, to stand for, to symbolize. Every representational work is a symbol; and art without symbols is restricted to art without subject.

That representational works are symbolic according to one usage and nonsymbolic according to another matters little so long as we do not confuse the two usages. What matters very

much, though, according to many contemporary artists and critics, is to isolate the work of art as such from whatever it symbolizes or refers to in any way. Let me set forth in quotation marks, since I am offering it for consideration without now expressing any opinion of it, a composite statement of a currently much advocated program or policy or point of view:

"What a picture symbolizes is external to it, and extraneous to the picture as a work of art. Its subject if it has one, its references—subtle or obvious—by means of symbols from some more or less well-recognized vocabulary, have nothing to do with its aesthetic or artistic significance or character. Whatever a picture refers to or stands for in any way, overt or occult, lies outside it. What really counts is not any such relationship to something else, not what the picture symbolizes, but what it is in itself—what its own intrinsic qualities are. Moreover, the more a picture focuses attention on what it symbolizes, the more we are distracted from its own properties. Accordingly, any symbolization by a picture is not only irrelevant but disturbing. Really pure art shuns all symbolization, refers to nothing, and is to be taken for just what it is, for its inherent character, not for anything it is associated with by some such remote relation as symbolization."

Such a manifesto packs punch. The counsel to concentrate on the intrinsic rather than the extrinsic, the insistence that a work of art is what it is rather than what it symbolizes, and the conclusion that pure art dispenses with external reference of all kinds have the solid sound of straight thinking, and promise to extricate art from smothering thickets of interpretation and commentary.

## 2. A Dilemma

But a dilemma confronts us here. If we accept this doctrine of the formalist or purist, we seem to be saying that the content of such works as the *Garden of Delight* and the *Caprichos* doesn't

really matter and might better be left out. If we reject the doctrine, we seem to be holding that what counts is not just what a work is but lots of things it isn't. In the one case we seem to be advocating lobotomy on many great works; in the other we seem to be condoning impurity in art, emphasizing the extraneous.

The best course, I think, is to recognize the purist position as all right and all wrong. But how can that be? Let's begin by agreeing that what is extraneous is extraneous. But is what a symbol symbolizes always external to it? Certainly not for symbols of all kinds. Consider the symbols:

- (a) "this string of words", which stands for itself;
- (b) "word", which applies to itself among other words;
- (c) "short", which applies to itself and some other words and many other things; and
- (d) "having seven syllables", which has seven syllables.

Obviously what some symbols symbolize does not lie entirely outside the symbols. The cases cited are, of course, quite special ones, and the analogues among pictures—that is, pictures that are pictures of themselves or include themselves in what they depict can perhaps be set aside as too rare and idiosyncratic to carry any weight. Let's agree for the present that what a work represents, except in a few cases like these, is external to it and extraneous.

Does this mean that any work that represents nothing meets the purist's demands? Not at all. In the first place, some surely symbolic works such as Bosch's paintings of weird monsters, or the tapestry of a unicorn, represent nothing; for there are no such monsters or demons or unicorns anywhere but in such pictures or in verbal descriptions. To say that the tapestry 'represents a unicorn' amounts only to saying that it is a

unicorn-picture, not that there is any animal, or anything at all that it portrays.<sup>2</sup> These works, even though there is nothing they represent, hardly satisfy the purist. Perhaps, though, this is just another philosopher's quibble; and I won't press the point. Let's agree that such pictures, though they represent nothing, are representational in character, hence symbolic and so not 'pure'. All the same, we must note in passing that their being representational involves no representation of anything outside them, so that the purist's objection to them cannot be on that ground. His case will have to be modified in one way or another, with some sacrifice of simplicity and force.

In the second place, not only representational works are symbolic. An abstract painting that represents nothing and is not representational at all may express, and so symbolize, a feeling or other quality, or an emotion or idea.<sup>3</sup> Just because expression is a way of symbolizing something outside the painting—which does not itself sense, feel or think—the purist rejects abstract expressionist as well as representational works.

For a work to be an instance of 'pure' art, of art without symbols, it must on this view neither represent nor express nor even be representational or expressive. But is that enough? Granted, such a work does not stand for anything outside it; all it has are its own properties. But of course if we put it that way, all the properties any picture or anything else has—even such a property as that of representing a given person—are properties of the picture, not properties outside it.

<sup>2</sup> See further "On Likeness of Meaning" (1949) and "On Some Differences about Meaning" (1953), *PP*, pp. 221–238; also *LA*, pp. 21–26.

<sup>3</sup> Motion, for instance, as well as emotion may be expressed in a black and white picture; for example, see the pictures in II:4 above. Also see the discussion of expression in *LA*, pp. 85–95.

The predictable response is that the important distinction among the several properties a work may have lies between its internal or intrinsic and its external or extrinsic properties; that while all are indeed its own properties, some of them obviously relate the picture to other things; and that a nonrepresentational, nonexpressive work has only internal properties.

This plainly doesn't work; for under any even faintly plausible classification of properties into internal and external, any picture or anything else has properties of both kinds. That a picture is in the Metropolitan Museum, that it was painted in Duluth, that it is younger than Methuselah, would hardly be called internal properties. Getting rid of representation and expression does not give us something free of such external or extraneous properties.

Furthermore, the very distinction between internal and external properties is a notoriously muddled one. Presumably the colors and shapes in a picture must be considered internal; but if an external property is one that relates the picture or object to something else, then colors and shapes obviously must be counted as external; for the color or shape of an object not only may be shared by other objects but also relates the object to others having the same or different colors or shapes.

Sometimes, the terms "internal" and "intrinsic" are dropped in favor of "formal". But the formal in this context cannot be a matter of shape alone. It must include color, and if color, what else? Texture? Size? Material? Of course, we may at will enumerate properties that are to be called formal; but the 'at will' gives the case away. The rationale, the justification, evaporates. The properties left out as nonformal can no longer be characterized as all and only those that relate the picture to something outside it. So we are still faced with the question what if any *principle* is involved—the question how the proper-

ties that matter in a nonrepresentational, nonexpressive painting are distinguished from the rest.

I think there is an answer to the question; but to approach it, we'll have to drop all this high-sounding talk of art and philosophy, and come down to earth with a thud.

### 3. Samples

Consider again an ordinary swatch of textile in a tailor's or upholsterer's sample book. It is unlikely to be a work of art or to picture or express anything. It's simply a sample—a simple sample. But what is it a sample of? Texture, color, weave, thickness, fiber content...; the whole point of this sample, we are tempted to say, is that it was cut from a bolt and has all the same properties as the rest of the material. But that would be too hasty.

Let me tell you two stories—or one story with two parts. Mrs. Mary Tricias studied such a sample book, made her selection, and ordered from her favorite textile shop enough material for her overstuffed chair and sofa—insisting that it be exactly like the sample. When the bundle came she opened it eagerly and was dismayed when several hundred 2" x 3" pieces with zigzag edges exactly like the sample fluttered to the floor. When she called the shop, protesting loudly, the proprietor replied, injured and weary, "But Mrs. Tricias, you said the material must be exactly like the sample. When it arrived from the factory yesterday, I kept my assistants here half the night cutting it up to match the sample."

This incident was nearly forgotten some months later, when Mrs. Tricias, having sewed the pieces together and covered her furniture, decided to have a party. She went to the local bakery, selected a chocolate cupcake from those on display and ordered enough for fifty guests, to be delivered two weeks later. Just as

the guests were beginning to arrive, a truck drove up with a single huge cake. The lady running the bake-shop was utterly discouraged by the complaint. "But Mrs. Tricias, you have no idea how much trouble we went to. My husband runs the textile shop and he warned me that your order would have to be in one piece."

The moral of this story is not simply that you can't win, but that a sample is a sample of some of its properties but not others. The swatch is a sample of texture, color, etc. but not of size or shape. The cupcake is a sample of color, texture, size, and shape, but still not of all its properties. Mrs. Tricias would have complained even more loudly if what was delivered to her was like the sample in having been baked on that same day two weeks earlier.

Now in general which of its properties is a sample a sample of? Not all its properties; for then the sample would be a sample of nothing but itself. And not its 'formal' or 'internal' or, indeed, any one specifiable set of properties. The kind of property sampled differs from case to case: the cupcake but not the swatch is a sample of size and shape; a specimen of ore may be a sample of what was mined at a given time and place. Moreover, the sampled properties vary widely with context and circumstance. Although the swatch is normally a sample of its texture, etc. but not of its shape or size, if I show it to you in answer to the question "What is an upholsterer's sample?" it then functions not as a sample of the material but as a sample of an upholsterer's sample, so that its size and shape are now among the properties it is a sample of.

In sum, the point is that a sample is a sample of—or *exemplifies*—only some of its properties, and that the properties to which it bears this relationship of exemplification<sup>4</sup> vary with circum-

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of exemplification, see *LA*, pp. 52–67.

stances and can only be distinguished as those properties that it serves, under the given circumstances, as a sample of. Being a sample of or exemplifying is a relationship something like that of being a friend; my friends are not distinguished by any single identifiable property or cluster of properties, but only by standing, for a period of time, in the relationship of friendship with me.

The implications for our problem concerning works of art may now be apparent. The properties that count in a purist painting are those that the picture makes manifest, selects, focuses upon, exhibits, heightens in our consciousness—those that it shows forth—in short, those properties that it does not merely possess but *exemplifies*, stands as a sample of.

If I am right about this, then even the purist's purest painting symbolizes. It exemplifies certain of its properties. But to exemplify is surely to symbolize—exemplification no less than representation or expression is a form of reference. A work of art, however free of representation and expression, is still a symbol even though what it symbolizes be not things or people or feelings but certain patterns of shape, color, texture that it shows forth.

What, then, of the purist's initial pronouncement that I said facetiously is all right and all wrong? It is all right in saying that what is extraneous is extraneous, in pointing out that what a picture represents often matters very little, in arguing that neither representation nor expression is required of a work, and in stressing the importance of so-called intrinsic or internal or 'formal' properties. But the statement is all wrong in assuming that representation and expression are the only symbolic functions that paintings may perform, in supposing that what a symbol symbolizes is always outside it, and in insisting that what counts in a painting is the mere possession rather than the exemplification of certain properties.

Whoever looks for art without symbols, then, will find none—if all the ways that works symbolize are taken into account. Art without representation or expression or exemplification—yes; art without all three—no.

To point out that purist art consists simply in the avoidance of certain kinds of symbolization is not to condemn it but only to uncover the fallacy in the usual manifestos advocating purist art to the exclusion of all other kinds. I am not debating the relative virtues of different schools or types or ways of painting. What seems to me more important is that recognition of the symbolic function of even purist painting gives us a clue to the perennial problem of when we do and when we don't have a work of art.

The literature of aesthetics is littered with desperate attempts to answer the question "What is art?" This question, often hopelessly confused with the question "What is good art?", is acute in the case of found art—the stone picked out of the driveway and exhibited in a museum—and is further aggravated by the promotion of so-called environmental and conceptual art. Is a smashed automobile fender in an art gallery a work of art? What of something that is not even an object, and not exhibited in any gallery or museum—for example, the digging and filling-in of a hole in Central Park as prescribed by Oldenburg? If these are works of art, then are all stones in the driveway and all objects and occurrences works of art? If not, what distinguishes what is from what is not a work of art? That an artist calls it a work of art? That it is exhibited in a museum or gallery? No such answer carries any conviction.

As I remarked at the outset, part of the trouble lies in asking the wrong question—in failing to recognize that a thing may function as a work of art at some times and not at others. In crucial cases, the real question is not "What objects are (permanently) works of art?" but "When is an object a work of

art?"—or more briefly, as in my title, "When is art?"

My answer is that just as an object may be a symbol—for instance, a sample—at certain times and under certain circumstances and not at others, so an object may be a work of art at some times and not at others. Indeed, just by virtue of functioning as a symbol in a certain way does an object become, while so functioning, a work of art. The stone is normally no work of art while in the driveway, but may be so when on display in an art museum. In the driveway, it usually performs no symbolic function. In the art museum, it exemplifies certain of its properties—e.g., properties of shape, color, texture. The hole-digging and filling functions as a work insofar as our attention is directed to it as an exemplifying symbol. On the other hand, a Rembrandt painting may cease to function as a work of art when used to replace a broken window or as a blanket.

Now, of course, to function as a symbol in some way or other is not in itself to function as a work of art. Our swatch, when serving as a sample, does not then and thereby become a work of art. Things function as works of art only when their symbolic functioning has certain characteristics. Our stone in a museum of geology takes on symbolic functions as a sample of the stones of a given period, origin, or composition, but it is not then functioning as a work of art.

The question just what characteristics distinguish or are indicative of the symbolizing that constitutes functioning as a work of art calls for careful study in the light of a general theory of symbols. That is more than I can undertake here, but I venture the tentative thought that there are five symptoms of the aesthetic:<sup>5</sup> (1) syntactic density, where the finest differences in certain respects constitute a difference between

<sup>5</sup> See *LA*, pp. 252–255 and the earlier passages there alluded to. The fifth symptom has been added above as the result of conversations with Professors Paul Hernadi and Alan Nagel of the University of Iowa.

symbols—for example, an ungraduated mercury thermometer as contrasted with an electronic digital-read-out instrument; (2) semantic density, where symbols are provided for things distinguished by the finest differences in certain respects—for example, not only the ungraduated thermometer again but also ordinary English, though it is not syntactically dense; (3) relative repleteness, where comparatively many aspects of a symbol are significant—for example, a single-line drawing of a mountain by Hokusai where every feature of shape, line, thickness, etc. counts, in contrast with perhaps the same line as a chart of daily stockmarket averages, where all that counts is the height of the line above the base; (4) exemplification, where a symbol, whether or not it denotes, symbolizes by serving as a sample of properties it literally or metaphorically possesses; and finally (5) multiple and complex reference, where a symbol performs several integrated and interacting referential functions,<sup>6</sup> some direct and some mediated through other symbols.

These symptoms provide no definition, much less a full-blooded description or a celebration. Presence or absence of one or more of them does not qualify or disqualify anything as aesthetic; nor does the extent to which these features are present measure the extent to which an object or experience is aesthetic.<sup>7</sup> Symptoms, after all, are but clues; the patient may have the symptoms without the disease, or the disease without the symptoms. And even for these five symptoms to come somewhere near being disjunctively necessary and conjunctively (as a syndrome) sufficient might well call for some redrawing of the

<sup>6</sup> This excludes ordinary ambiguity, where a term has two or more quite independent denotations at quite different times and in quite different contexts.

<sup>7</sup> That poetry, for example, which is not syntactically dense, is less art or less likely to be art than painting that exhibits all four symptoms thus does not at all follow. Some aesthetic symbols may have fewer of the symptoms than some nonaesthetic symbols. This is sometimes misunderstood.

vague and vagrant borderlines of the aesthetic. Still, notice that these properties tend to focus attention on the symbol rather than, or at least along with, what it refers to. Where we can never determine precisely just which symbol of a system we have or whether we have the same one on a second occasion, where the referent is so elusive that properly fitting a symbol to it requires endless care, where more rather than fewer features of the symbol count, where the symbol is an instance of properties it symbolizes and may perform many interrelated simple and complex referential functions, we cannot merely look through the symbol to what it refers to as we do in obeying traffic lights or reading scientific texts, but must attend constantly to the symbol itself as in seeing paintings or reading poetry. This emphasis upon the nontransparency of a work of art, upon the primacy of the work over what it refers to, far from involving denial or disregard of symbolic functions, derives from certain characteristics of a work as a symbol.<sup>8</sup>

Quite apart from specifying the particular characteristics differentiating aesthetic from other symbolization, the answer to the question "When is art?" thus seems to me clearly to be in terms of symbolic function. Perhaps to say that an object is art when and only when it so functions is to overstate the case or to speak elliptically. The Rembrandt painting remains a work of art, as it remains a painting, while functioning only as a blanket; and the stone from the driveway may not strictly become art by functioning as art.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, a chair remains a chair even if never sat on, and a packing case remains a packing case even if

<sup>8</sup> This is another version of the dictum that the purist is all right and all wrong.

<sup>9</sup> Just as what is not red may look or be said to be red at certain times, so what is not art may function as or be said to be art at certain times. That an object functions as art at a given time, that it has the status of art at that time, and that it is art at that time may all be taken as saying the same thing—so long as we take none of these as ascribing to the object any stable status.



never used except for sitting on. To say what art does is not to say what art is; but I submit that the former is the matter of primary and peculiar concern. The further question of defining stable property in terms of ephemeral function—the what in terms of the when—is not confined to the arts but is quite general, and is the same for defining chairs as for defining objects of art. The parade of instant and inadequate answers is also much the same: that whether an object is art—or a chair—depends upon intent or upon whether it sometimes or usually or always or exclusively functions as such. Because all this tends to obscure more special and significant questions concerning art, I have turned my attention from what art is to what art does.

A salient feature of symbolization, I have urged, is that it may come and go. An object may symbolize different things at different times, and nothing at other times. An inert or purely utilitarian object may come to function as art, and a work of art may come to function as an inert or purely utilitarian object. Perhaps, rather than art being long and life short, both are transient.

The bearing that this inquiry into the nature of works of art has upon the overall undertaking of this book should by now have become quite clear. How an object or event functions as a work explains how, through certain modes of reference, what so functions may contribute to a vision of—and to the making of—a world.

## V

### A Puzzle about Perception

#### 1. Seeing beyond Being

Once in awhile, someone asks me rather petulantly "Can't you see what's before you?" Well, yes and no. I see people, chairs, papers, and books that are before me, and also colors, shapes, and patterns that are before me. But do I see the molecules, electrons, and infrared light that are also before me? And do I see this state, or the United States, or the universe? I see only parts of the latter comprehensive entities, indeed, but then I also see only parts of the people, chairs, etc. And if I see a book, and it is a mess of molecules, then do I not see a mess of molecules? But, on the other hand, can I see a mess of molecules without seeing any of them? If I cannot be said to see a mess of molecules because "mess of molecules" is a sophisticated way of describing what I see, not arrived at by any simple look, then how could I be said to see a magnet or a poisonous mushroom? Suppose someone asks whether I saw the football coach at my lecture, and I say "No". But he was there in the audience and I surely saw everyone in the audience. Although I saw him, I say I didn't, because I didn't know that the man at the right end of the eighth row center was the football coach.

Already we are in danger of losing ourselves in an all-too-familiar tangle of not-too-clear questions. You will be glad to hear, and I am even gladder to say, that I shall not be dealing

# The Philosophy of Nelson Goodman

*Selected Essays*

Series Editor

Catherine Z. Elgin

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maintains, multiple, divergent interpretations of the same work may be correct. So from the fact that critics disagree it does not follow that at least one of them is wrong. Nor does it follow that both are right. Only such interpretations as make maximally good sense of the work's symbolic functions are correct. Goodman's pluralism consists in the recognition that multiple interpretations may do so.

Goodman's cognitive stance may seem to anesthetize art, depriving it of its emotional impact. It does not. Rather than denying the significance of the feelings works of art evoke, Goodman reassesses that significance. In the arts, he maintains, emotions function cognitively. They afford avenues of epistemic access to factors we might otherwise miss. Emotional sensitivity, like perceptual sensitivity, enables us to discern subtle but important properties, patterns, and relations. And once we have discerned them in works of art, we are equipped to find them elsewhere. Our cognitive range expands.

Not surprisingly, many aspects of Goodman's philosophy of art have aroused opposition. The construal of expression as a mode of reference, the contention that linear perspective is as conventional as other modes of representation, the argument that resemblance is irrelevant to depiction are among the issues that have enlivened recent discussions in aesthetics. The papers in this volume concern Goodman's radical revision of aesthetics. Many take issue with aspects of his position. Others support it. Taken together they show how Goodman's work has reshaped and reinvigorated the philosophy of art and established unsuspected connections to epistemology, the philosophy of language, and the philosophy of science.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), p. 69.

# RELOCATING AESTHETICS

## Goodman's Epistemic Turn

Catherine Z. ELGIN

Long a denizen of the realm of value theory, aesthetics emigrates, at Nelson Goodman's invitation, to epistemology. The arts function cognitively, Goodman insists. The job of aesthetics is to explain how. Such a contention would be capricious, if epistemology were construed as the theory of knowledge. The arts are rarely repositories of justified true beliefs. But knowledge, Goodman and I contend, is an unworthy cognitive objective. Far better to set our sights on understanding. And far better for epistemology to treat understanding as the focus of its concern [R, 163] ('). In making a place for aesthetics in epistemology, Goodman thus reconceives epistemology as well as aesthetics. In so doing, he revitalizes both.

To understand a portrait, a partita, or a pas de deux, Goodman believes, is not to consider it beautiful, appreciate it, ascertain what its author intended by it, or have a so-called 'aesthetic experience' of it. Rather, to understand it is to interpret it correctly — to recognize what it symbolizes and how it fits with or reacts against other world versions and visions [WW, 109-140]. Understanding works of art is not a matter of passive absorption, but of active intellectual engagement with symbols whose syntactic and semantic features are often elusive.

(1) The following abbreviations will be used throughout the text to refer to Nelson Goodman's works: LA, for *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976; MM, for *Mind and Other Matters*, Cambridge: Harvard, 1984; PP, for *Problems and Projects*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1972; R, for *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences* (written with Catherine Z. Elgin), Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988; WW, for *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978.

No more than in science is correct interpretation in the arts assured. Thinking you understand a symbol does not make it so.

Understanding a symbol may be difficult, for there are multiple modes of reference. Two are basic: denotation and exemplification. A symbol denotes what it applies to: a name denotes its bearer; a predicate, the objects in its extension. Goodman extends this familiar construal to accommodate nonverbal symbols. A portrait denotes its subject; a general picture, the members of the class it characterizes. Thus Manet's portrait of Berthe Morisot denotes Morisot, and a picture of a mallard in a bird watcher's guide denotes the members of the class of mallards. Depiction, according to Goodman, is pictorial denotation [LA, 3-6].

Fictive symbols are denoting symbols. But they lack denotations. They derive their significance, Goodman urges, from certain terms that denote them. 'Maggie-description' denotes the names and descriptions in *The Mill on the Floss* that conspire to fix Maggie Tulliver's fictive identity. 'Unicorn-picture' denotes the portions of paintings, drawings, and tapestries that determine the constitution of the fictive kind, *unicorn*. 'Ideal-gas-description' denotes the words and equations that determine the character of the fictive ideal gas [LA, 21-26].

Abstract art does not even pretend to denote. Nor typically does architecture or instrumental music. Dance, too, frequently eschews denotation. Such works refer in other ways — often by means of exemplification. I. M. Pei's addition to the Louvre is a case in point. Because it both is a pyramid and presents itself as such, it exemplifies its shape (?). Any symbol that at once instantiates and refers to a feature exemplifies that feature [LA, 52-67].

Exemplification, like denotation, is ubiquitous. It links a sample to what it samples and an example, to what it is an example of. Exemplification is thus a staple of commerce, science, and pedagogy, as well as art. A free sample of laundry detergent exemplifies the soap's cleaning power; a blood sample, the presence of antibodies. A theorem exemplifies its logical form, while a sample problem in a textbook exemplifies the reasoning it seeks to inculcate.

(2) Nothing of philosophical substance turns on the correctness of my interpretation of any particular work of art. The reader who disagrees with my interpretations can easily supply examples of her own.

A symbol can denote anything, so long as appropriate conventions are in force. Thus Pei's pyramid can denote my cat, if we establish a convention to that effect. But a symbol can exemplify only features it has. Not being a circle, Pei's pyramid is incapable of exemplifying circularity. Not being a cat, it cannot exemplify felinity. Exemplification, moreover, is selective. A symbol denotes everything it applies to, but exemplifies only some of the features it has. Even if Pei's pyramid was commissioned on a Tuesday, it does not exemplify *commissioned on a Tuesday*. For it does not highlight, exhibit, display, or convey that property.

Everyone uses examples. But few philosophers have appreciated their function. Examples are not merely decorative or heuristic devices, though they are often treated as such. They advance understanding in ways descriptions cannot. They show forth aspects of themselves, making those aspects available for exploration, elaboration, and projection. Wittgenstein and Kuhn extol examples and ground their philosophies in them. Goodman does more. He explains how examples function.

By exemplifying a feature, an example or other symbol affords epistemic access to it. Exemplified features need not be obvious. Often they are remarkably obscure. An intricate experiment may be mounted to exemplify minute differences in electromagnetic radiation. Mondrian's *Trafalgar Square* exemplifies astoundingly precise geometrical relations. The insight a work of art or a scientific experiment yields is seldom limited to a single case. Typically, it reverberates, as exemplified features and their kin turn up in other settings. A telling example opens a window on a world.

That Goodman's discussions of exemplification occur almost exclusively in his works on aesthetics is perhaps unfortunate. The arts have no monopoly on the device. Although philosophy of science has yet to acknowledge it, without exemplification empirical science would be mute (?).

Denotation and exemplification to do not preclude each other. Works of art that denote usually exemplify as well. *Arrangement in Black and Gray* exemplifies shades of gray while denoting Whistler's

(3) Cf., Catherine Z. Elgin 'Understanding: Art and Science', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 16 (1991), 196-208.

mother. *War and Peace* denotes the Battle of Borodino while exemplifying Tolstoy's philosophy of history. That a single symbol can perform multiple referential functions is a central tenet of Goodman's aesthetics. Indeed, he takes multiple reference to be symptomatic of aesthetic functioning [WW, 68].

Reference need not be literal, Goodman maintains. Symbols genuinely refer to the objects they figuratively characterize [LA, 68-85]. An indiscriminately enthusiastic undergraduate is genuinely, because metaphorically, a panting puppy. Brancusi's literally solid *Bird in Space* genuinely, because metaphorically, exemplifies fluidity. For it both refers to and metaphorically instantiates the feature. The grue paradox genuinely, though not literally, pulled the rug out from under advocates of a syntactic solution to the problem of induction.

No more than reference is truth confined to the domain of the literal. If the student is metaphorically a panting puppy, 'The student is a panting puppy' is metaphorically true. To be metaphorically true is to be true when interpreted metaphorically, just as to be literally true is to be true when interpreted literally. Non-tautologous sentences are true only under an interpretation. Goodman's point is that when it comes to assigning truth values, whether the interpretation is literal or metaphorical is a matter of indifference. Figurative reference then is no watered down substitute. It performs all the symbolic functions of literal reference, and others besides.

Goodman's discussion of metaphor abounds with metaphors that exemplify the features he describes. In typically Goodmanian fashion he eschews literal characterization and describes metaphor's operation metaphorically. Thus, he contends, metaphor is 'an affair between a predicate with a past and an object that yields while protesting' [LA, 69]. His contention does double duty, both describing and exhibiting the interplay of attraction and resistance metaphor requires. Without resistance, a new application is literal; without attraction, it is arbitrary. Where an object both attracts and resists the application of a term, that application is metaphorical. Goodman's characterization needs no literal gloss. As my discussion amply illustrates, the temptation is not to paraphrase, but to elaborate — to see how much insight the description of metaphor as seduction will yield. By practicing what he preaches, Goodman both argues for and illustrates the tenability of his account.

Symbols do not ordinarily operate in isolation. They belong to, and function as members of families of alternatives that collectively sort the objects in a realm. 'Panting puppy' belongs to a scheme that literally sorts dogs. Metaphor, Goodman maintains, exports the scheme to a distant realm, or reapplies it to effect a novel sorting of its native realm. Thus the scheme that sorts dogs transfers to and effects a reorganization of people. Under that transfer, an enthusiastic undergraduate qualifies as a panting puppy, an unusually vicious critic, as a rabid Rottweiler; a trendy, self-promoting aesthete, as a prancing poodle. Novel patterns and distinctions reveal themselves as the metaphorical scheme sorts people into categories no literal scheme recognizes. Much of this is tacit. By calling one person a puppy, we make other dog labels available for characterizing people, whether or not we actually employ those labels.

Goodman's endorsement of metaphorical reference and truth connects with his nominalism. Contemporary realists are prone to think that literal language at its best partitions its domain into natural kinds, or divides nature at the joints, or discloses the true and ultimate structure of reality. Somehow, the world is supposed to dictate its proper description. Goodman denies this. He believes that any order we find is an order we impose. Systems of categories are contrived to impose order. They divide a domain into individuals and group those individuals into kinds. They thereby equip us to describe, predict, explain, and complain about the entities thus recognized. But the success of one category scheme does not preclude the success of others. There is no unique way the world is, hence no privileged way the world is to be described [PP, 24-32]. A single domain may be organized in multiple ways. And for different purposes, different classifications may be best. Political geography and physical geography, for example, characterize their common domain quite differently, the one delineating the boundaries of cities and states, the other, the boundaries of forests and swamps. Each yields truths about the entities its terms refer to. Neither invalidates the other [WW, 91-107].

Similarly, Goodman maintains, a literal and a metaphorical scheme may organize a common domain and yield divergent truths about it. No more than the adequacy of the terminology of political geography discredits that of physical geography does the adequacy of a literal scheme discredit that of a metaphorical one. To call a freshman enthusiastic is not to deny that he is a panting puppy.