

On Aesthetics: A Review and Some Revisions

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1. My work in aesthetics began in the 1960s, at a time when the prevailing conception of the subject was remarkably constricted. The limitations under which aesthetics laboured, which today are not easily imagined, came from two different sources: one more general, the other more particular.

In the first place, aesthetics, in line with what was held to be true of any branch of philosophy, was conceived of as an exclusively second-order activity. But, in those days, 'second-order' had, in the context of philosophy, a special meaning: it meant something close to meta-linguistic. For it was definitive of philosophy that the first-order activity upon which it, or any branch of it, was reflexive was a form of discourse. So the question arose, what was the discourse upon which aesthetics was reflexive? Where did its subject matter come from?

At this point, the second limitation upon aesthetics came into play. For if aesthetics was required to take on the general form of philosophy, its particular features or the key to its subject matter derived from the assimilation of aesthetics to another branch of philosophy, in which, it was widely believed, much progress had been made: moral philosophy as it was currently conceived. What aesthetics and moral philosophy were held to have in common was that both concerned themselves with value — that is, with the language of value — and where they differed was in the kind of value with which they were concerned. Moral philosophy concerned itself with the language of moral value, aesthetics with the language of aesthetic value. However, subject matter apart, the methods of the two branches of philosophy were

expected to coincide, and thus the branches themselves to run parallel to one another.

This analogy imposed upon aesthetics a twofold task. Like moral philosophy, it had to pick out the judgement that enjoyed pride of place within the discourse of value it surveyed. Then it had to provide an analysis of this judgement. As to the judgement itself, it equated this with the judgement of taste, or what was asserted by sentences of the form, 'X is beautiful'.

2. One way of thinking about this programme for aesthetics is to think of what it promoted, and, to help one out, there was a body of literature — certainly not big, but sizeable — constructed around this programme and exhibiting to a high degree what John Passmore, in the title that he gave to a famous article, called 'the dreariness of aesthetics'.¹ Another way of thinking about the programme, which was not in favour at the time, was to think of what it inhibited. As I wrote in *Art and its Objects*,² it was this negative aspect of contemporary aesthetics that increasingly disturbed me. Indeed, it is a significant fact about *Art and its Objects* that it was a commissioned book: left to myself, I might, out of love of art, have continued as I had until then, and never have written a word in aesthetics.

What was missing from aesthetics could be summarized as follows: in the first place, the fundamental distinction between works of nature and works of art was neglected. Secondly, this neglect was ensured by two further facts: the artist dropped out of the picture, and the spectator was of interest solely for an attitude of his, which ranged over art and nature indifferently. Thirdly, the attitude in question took in only the beauty of the work, and, the better to do this, it required the spectator to approach the work with a blank mind. All other responses of the spectator, and specifically all non-evaluative responses, were treated as things that aesthetics could ignore. And, finally, of the spectator's response to the

beauty of what was before him, the only aspects that counted were those which received linguistic formulation.

If this was the way the wind blew, *Art and its Objects* was built to sail directly against it.

3. Without any desire to overlook whatever other claims there might be upon aesthetics, I felt that place needed to be found within the subject for something that could be plausibly thought of as the philosophy of art. Nor did it seem to me that anything deserving of this name could be exclusively, or even primarily, a study of the spectator's judgement of taste: it must also include the spectator's judgement of interest. If that was so, the agent or artist could no longer be ignored, for it was due to his activity that aesthetics, in its new-found sense, had a subject matter at all. And, finally, if progress were to be made with this subject matter, aesthetics would have to abandon the methodology imposed upon it by a general conception of philosophy. It could no longer afford to be exclusively 'linguistic' in either of two very different senses of that term, which had somehow coalesced. It could no longer take as its sole subject matter language or discourse. It must broaden its subject matter, and, once it had done so, it could not restrict its method of inquiry to linguistic analysis.

With hindsight, it is now apparent that, judged even by its own standards, post-war philosophy imposed upon aesthetics grotesque constraints. The analogy with moral philosophy could never lead to the conclusion that the analysis of 'X is beautiful' supplied the core of aesthetics. For, if moral philosophy was to pass any test of material adequacy, it, too, would have to lay claim to a subject matter that went beyond a mere body of human discourse: it would have to take on a whole reach of human activity and achievement, rich in psychological considerations, in which expression, perception, and the acceptance of reality were intricately woven together. To do this, it could not confine itself to the standpoint of the moral judge or critic: at least as significant

was the standpoint of the moral agent. And, in so far as the moral judge deserved attention, it was unrealistic to maintain that the only thing important about him was the judgement he came out with, and its analysis. An adequate moral philosophy could no more be exclusively linguistic in either of the two senses I have tried to isolate than an adequate philosophy of art.

4. If *Art and its Objects* set out to give a philosophical account of art as such, in *Painting as an Art*,⁷ which came out of lectures that I delivered at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in 1984, a very different moment for aesthetics, I tried to offer a philosophical account of one particular art: the art of painting. The two books were thus complementary in subject matter, and so were their methodologies.

Aesthetics, both in its broad scope as the study of art in general and in its narrower scope as the study of this or that art, I see as applied rather than pure philosophy. Accordingly, *Art and its Objects* and *Painting as an Art* are equally works in applied philosophy. My justification for saying this is that both books, and the branch of philosophy to which they belong, assume, over and above the general activities of the mind, certain particular forms of thinking, certain particular forms of intentional activity, through which persons, or the bearers of mind, engage with some special aspect of the contingent world. And here is one reason why aesthetics – and, for that matter, moral philosophy, and social philosophy, and the philosophy of science, all of which I see as applied philosophy — cannot exclusively rely on conceptual analysis. Art, morality, science, are not spun out of the mere structure of our thinking.

However, if both books are works in applied philosophy, there is a difference between them, which corresponds to a difference, first within aesthetics, then, more generally, within applied philosophy. For the later book, *Painting as an Art*, is a work in what I have come to see as 'substantive philosophy'. Substantive philosophy includes, in addition to

the philosophy of the individual arts, such subjects as the philosophy of quantum mechanics, the philosophy of law, medical ethics, environmental ethics, and the difference is that substantive philosophy pursues forms of thought, forms of action, that are much more implicated with contingent features of the world. In doing so, it goes deeper into the historical development of the activities it studies, and how trial and error have made them what they are. In *Painting as an Art*, having at the beginning of the book laid down the general conditions by which the painter can generate meaning from the application of pigment to a support, I then went on to consider how different painters, with different aims and ambitions, having in mind different sorts of meaning with which they wished to emblazon the surfaces they marked, entered into somewhat different struggles with their chosen medium.

But what should be clear is that all these distinctions within philosophy — applied against pure, substantive against applied — are only approximate. They are ways of classifying different forms of inquiry, and of describing certain salient differences between them, but they explain little, and there is a point at which they cease to repay examination.

5. Certainly for me more interesting than the differences between the philosophy of art as such and the philosophy of this or that art have been the relations between art and the arts, and the nature of the network that used to be called 'the system of the arts'. How does the unity of art accommodate itself to the diversity of the individual arts? Do the individual arts reiterate, each in its own way, the general characteristics of art, or is it that art itself is simply a construct out of the individual arts?

In this case, the answer, it seems to me, must lie where it seldom does: in the middle. I do not believe that anyone could doubt either that there are certain general characteristics of art or that what distinguishes the arts are

matters of real importance both to the theory and to the practice of art. Tension arises because there is no *principium individuationis* for the different arts. The arts differ one from another, but in no one respect, and, in consequence, when the general characteristics of art trickle down to any one particular art, they have been filtered through what is peculiar to that art with the result that they are recognizable only with skill.

In *Painting as an Art* I was particularly engaged with one broad characteristic of art, and with how that characteristic is realized in painting: that is, 'meaning' as this attaches to particular works of art. And 'meaning' means what we grasp when we understand the work of art: when we understand the work itself, as opposed to why the work came into being, or any other fact about it. The meaning of a work of art occupies what I have called the judgement of interest.

The meaning of a work of art, I had claimed in *Art and its Objects*, is iconic. Nowadays, I would prefer to put this by saying that the meaning of a work of art is experiential, and in *Painting as an Art* I developed this point into the more particular thesis that the meaning of a pictorial work of art is visual, which, I take it, is some large part of the view that painting is an essentially visual art.

6. That the meaning of pictures is visual can be established through the convergence of three lines of thought.

In the first place, there is the broad contrast between how we grasp pictorial meaning and how we grasp linguistic meaning. Think of a painting that represents a bison standing, and put beside it either the word 'Bison', or the sentence 'The bison is standing'. (It is perhaps a significant fact that we do not know which of the two fragments of language – the noun or the sentence – is the more appropriate parallel to the picture.) Now understanding the fragment of language is a process that is reconstructable as an essentially two-stage process. Stage one consists in using our eyes to see the marks on the surface: stage two consists in

applying to the marks the rules or conventions of the language to which the marks belong. If we do not know the language, we shall be able to complete stage one, but will be held up by stage two. If we now turn to the picture, and try to understand it, this process is reconstructable as an essentially one-stage process. We – that is to say, the suitably sensitive, suitably informed spectator — will look at the picture, using the appropriate mode of perception, and drawing upon the needed information, and we shall go on looking at it until we come to understand it, and, from beginning to end, from our first sight of it to the moment when we grasp its meaning, what we subject the picture to forms a seamless whole.

That linguistic understanding is a two-stage process and pictorial understanding a one-stage process is underwritten by the difference in the way in which requisite knowledge enters into the two processes. For it enters into both. In the language case, a highly specific cache of knowledge – knowledge of the relevant natural language — erupts into our attempt to understand a linguistic fragment, and, when it does so, its effect is to transform radically how we stand to it: so abruptly that we can think of it as segmenting the process of understanding. In the picture case, by contrast, a diffuse amount of knowledge seeps into the process of pictorial understanding, it is undisclosed when it does so, and its effect is invariably incremental.

Secondly, the differences between the two processes of understanding are further secured when we concentrate on what it is that allows us to do one of them; when, that is, we concentrate on the visual capacity that we have and that we draw upon when, standing in front of a painting of a bison, we identify the painting as of a bison. I call this visual capacity 'seeing-in', and it is its distinctive phenomenology that warrants attention. The experiences that manifest this capacity exhibit what I call 'twofoldness', in that the adequately sensitive, adequately informed spectator will at once notice the marked surface and be visually aware of the represented animal. Twofoldness is a matter of a single experience with two aspects: one of which I call

configurational, the other I call recognitional. Twofoldness is not a matter of two experiences. It is not a matter of two simultaneous experiences, as I once maintained, for someone who has seen many bisons and many marked walls, has, on first seeing a representation of a bison on a wall, a new kind of experience rather than a new composite of familiar experiences. Nor is twofoldness a matter of two successive experiences, as Ernst Gombrich has felt obliged to claim – a position he got himself into because he thought that, standing in front of any picture and claiming to see the canvas at the same time as seeing what the canvas depicts is like standing in front of the duck/rabbit picture and claiming to see the duck at the same time as seeing the rabbit. Since the second pair of visual experiences are incompatible,⁴ Gombrich erroneously concluded that the first pair are too. But, since the incompatibility of seeing the duck and seeing the rabbit is an incompatibility *within* representation, it cannot be used, without further argument, to establish an incompatibility *across* representation: that is, between seeing the representing surface and seeing the represented object.

I have said in the past that the recognitional aspect of seeing a bison in a picture cannot be directly compared with seeing a bison face-to-face. We cannot, starting with the picture, somehow, by a process of subtraction and addition, each step involving no more than a phenomenological change, work our way backward to seeing the animal itself, nor vice versa. Doing either is no more possible than filling in the changes that would take us from hearing a tune in our head to hearing that same tune in a concert-hall. Nevertheless – and this is something that I have never wished to deny – seeing a bison in a picture has something in common with seeing a bison face-to-face. I suggest two components that occur in each: one is the thought of a bison, the other is the appearance of the bison. I believe that these links justify us in saying that seeing a bison in a surface is also a case of seeing a bison: though not, of course, a case of seeing it face-to-face.

If the foregoing is true, then we have a deeper insight into the difference between understanding a sentence about a bison and understanding a picture of a bison: one requires, but the other does not, an experience of a bison. And, since the experience in question is a visual experience, this in turn establishes that pictorial meaning is visual. We understand pictures of something or other through seeing that thing, moreover through seeing that thing in them.

Thirdly, there are two further psychological phenomena, on which there is general agreement, but the significance of which is often lost upon theorists of representation. These phenomena confirm the fact that, when we recognize what a picture is of, we do so by seeing that thing. The first phenomenon, which I call 'transfer', is this: if I can understand a picture as being of a dog, and I know what a cat looks like, then, in ordinary circumstances, I shall recognize a picture of a cat for what it is. The second phenomenon, which is a correlate of the first, is this: if I don't already know what a cat looks like, I can, again in ordinary circumstances, learn this from being shown a picture of a cat and, at the same, being time told that this is what it is. It is because, in being told that I am looking at a picture of a cat, I am in effect also being told that I am looking at a cat, that the lesson works and the world (and not just the world of pictures) enlarges for me. At one point in *The Languages of Art*,³ Nelson Goodman tries to persuade the reader that the classification of pictures into unicorn-pictures, man-pictures, and Pickwick-pictures, is like classifying furniture into desks, tables, and chair, or (the same point) that 'unicorn' makes as large a semantic contribution to our understanding of what a unicorn picture is as 'corn' does to our understanding of what a corn cob pipe is. It should be apparent that, if Goodman were right, neither of the two phenomena just considered would hold.

I have said that, if one common component of seeing a bison face-to-face and seeing a bison in a picture is the visual experience of a bison; another is the thought of a bison. I now turn to the second component, for it is only if we

understand the second component appropriately that we shall understand the first component adequately. This will involve something of a detour.

7. In saying that both seeing a bison face-to-face and seeing a bison on a picture contain the thought of a bison, I could have made this more precise by saying that both kinds of experience are *permeated* by the thought of a bison. What the word 'permeate' does is that it makes clear that, in the case of both experiences, the thought is not a mere accompaniment to the experience. The thought, in each case, structures the experience; I see according to the thought.

I now want to develop this point in the context of seeing-in. For if we combine the permeability by thought of seeing-in with an appreciation of the variety of thought that can permeate seeing-in, then, and only then, shall we get a true estimate of the range of seeing-in, hence of the range of pictorial meaning. (And, once we have done this, we could — though this would go beyond my present concern — turn the argument back on itself. For if it turns out that the expanded view of the range of pictorial meaning has much to recommend it independently, then the fact that this expanded range can best be explained through the range of seeing-in would do much to reinforce the connection between what can be seen in a picture and what that picture means.)

First, then, the variety of thought, or the range of thoughts, that can permeate seeing-in. In everything that I have said to date about seeing-in, I have taken it for granted that seeing-in, like seeing face-to-face, can be permeated by general, or non-referential, thoughts. It is this fact that allows me, in pictures, as in real life, not only to see things of a particular kind, but to see them as of that particular kind. In seeing a man or a woman in a picture, I can see the man as a man, the woman as a woman. Another way of putting this is to say that within seeing-in recognitional skills can be deployed.

And now I want to add the claim that seeing-in, again like seeing face-to-face, can be permeated by individual, or

referential, thoughts. It is this further fact that allows me, in pictures, as in real life, not only to see things of a particular kind, but to see particular things, and not only to see particular things, but to see them as the particular things that they are. In seeing Napoleon or Madame Moitessier, Ingres's model, in a picture, I can see Napoleon as Napoleon, Madame Moitessier as Madame Moitessier. Seeing-in finds room for the deployment of identificatory skills as well as for the deployment of recognitional skills.

I now want to correlate the larger scope of seeing-in with a certain breadth of representational meaning, not infrequently observed, but regularly left unexplained. This breadth of representational meaning can also be thought of in terms of a difference within representational meaning: a difference that might initially be expressed as that between representations of things of a particular kind, and representations of particular things. However, this way of putting the matter will not do, for, whereas — and this is where pictures take us into strange territory — some representations of things of a particular kind are not representations of particular things, every representation of a particular thing is also a representation of a thing of a particular kind. Accordingly, the difference we are after is one between representations of things *merely* of a particular kind and representations of particular things. So we can set beside Ingres's portrait of Madame Moitessier, who was herself a particular woman — hence his portrait is a picture of a particular woman, as well as a picture of a woman of a particular kind — Manet's *La Prune*. Now this picture represents a young shopgirl, who is on the look-out to supplement her meagre salary with what she can derive from the favours of men, and dresses the part, but, for all the specificity of detail in which she is displayed, this picture does not, in addition to representing a woman of a particular kind, a *grisette*, represent a particular woman. Manet's painting is a painting of a woman merely of a particular kind. Similarly we can set beside Uccello's depiction of the Rout of San Romano, which was a particular battle, Wouverman's *Cavalry Battle*, which represents a skirmish, fought at dusk between evenly equipped horsemen, some with guns, some

with sabres, but which, for all its detail, is no particular skirmish. Uccello's painting is a painting of a particular event, whereas Wouverman's painting is a painting of an event merely of a particular kind.

How are we to account for this difference in meaning? More particularly, can this difference be explained in exclusively experiential or visual terms, as I have been implying that it should be, given that we are talking about pictorial meaning? I believe that it can be, and furthermore that we have the materials for doing so to hand.

But let me introduce what I believe to be the right explanation through what I believe to be a subtly wrong explanation, and to which I may, at some moment, have given some credence. For we might think that the difference between the two kinds of representation, and the nature of each, can be explained by pointing to the fact that, when we are told, 'This is a picture of a woman', 'This is a picture of a battle', we can, in the case of one kind of representation, but not in the case of the other kind, meaningfully ask, 'Which woman?', 'Which battle?', where this question is understood in a certain way. However, though this is perfectly correct, it is no kind of explanation of the difference: for what it tells us is something that is a consequence of the difference, for which the explanation is therefore to be found elsewhere. I say this because what we can correctly say, or ask, in front of the two kinds of picture can only be a consequence of the difference between the two kinds of picture, for that difference must lie in what can correctly be seen in each.

What then I propose as the real explanation of the difference is that, with one kind of picture, we are, in the course of trying to see what we can see in its surface, required to bring to bear recognitional *and* identificatory skills, whereas, with the other kind of picture, we can see all that it is correct for us to see in its surface through drawing only upon recognitional skills.

8. 'Required to bring to bear', 'correctly seen in a surface' — where have these ideas, these normative ideas, suddenly come from?

It is a happy consequence of considering the distinction between pictures of particular things and pictures of things merely of a particular kind that we are led straight to the one element still missing from my account of pictorial meaning. Seeing-in precedes representation: it precedes representation, both logically and historically. Logically, in that we can see things in surfaces that neither are nor are thought by us to be representations. We can see in a frozen pane of glass dancers in gauze dresses, and we can see in a stained wall in Chicago a boy holding a mysterious box. Historically, in that our distant ancestors could engage in such games long before they thought of decorating the caves they lived in with images of the animals they hunted. The significance of the logical point is that it allows us *to define representation by reference to seeing-in without circularity*. The significance of the historical point is that it leads us *to grasp what changed when representation appeared on the scene*.

If we identify the origin of representation with the moment when people started to mark surfaces *so that* others (and themselves) could be led to see this rather than that in them, then we can think that what representation did to seeing-in was that it imposed upon it something that it had thus far done without: a standard of correctness. It is correct to see in an anonymous sixteenth-century portrait Henry VIII, and not, as old film buffs will be inclined to do, Charles Laughton: it will be correct to see in the famous double portrait of Ghirlandaio an old man with a polyp at the end of his nose, and not, as Proust used to pretend to do on his visits to the Louvre, his worldly friend from the Jockey Club, the Marquis du Lau. But in frozen panes of glass, in stained walls, it is all right to see what we choose, and, with Rorschach tests, the only error — though it is more of a failing than an error — is to see nothing rather than something. A standard of correctness reconciles what might otherwise be two incompatible lines of thought: that what a picture is of is

dependent upon what can be seen in it, and that a picture is not of everything that can be seen in it.

The immediate relevance of the standard of correctness to the discussion in hand is this: that, in saying, as I just did, that some representations require only recognitional skills, whereas others also call for identificatory skills, I was implicitly appealing to a standard, a complex standard, of correctness.

But, if one question is thereby resolved, another is posed: what is the source, or ground, of a standard of correctness for pictorial perception? The best answer, I believe, is that the standard is set – set anew for each painting – by the intentions of the artist, subject to two provisos. First of all, ‘intention’ must be taken to refer to, not some fiat on the artist’s part, but the range of psychological factors that caused him to work as he did. Secondly, these intentions must be fulfilled if they are to determine how the picture is to be understood: and an intention of the artist’s is fulfilled if and only if, as the intention finds an outlet for itself on the canvas, the spectator is able to see in the deposited marks what the artist intended to convey. Unfulfilled intentions make no direct contribution to what the work means, though it will always be interesting to an interpreter to know of such failures. No artist can make his work mean some particular thing simply by intending it to. And that his audience recognizes his intention makes no relevant difference; nor, for that matter, would the further fact that he knew that his audience would. Once again, it is the eyes that settle the issue.

From this last point it follows that the way in which a standard of correctness operates for pictures further underlines the difference between pictorial and linguistic meaning on which I have been labouring. Let us go back to the sentence ‘The bison is standing’, and now imagine that it is a newcomer to the language. In that case, a standard of linguistic correctness would be completely unfettered as to the semantic interpretation it imposed on the sentence. But take a would-be picture of a bison: here no standard of correctness would be acceptable if the interpretation it

proposed fell outside what a suitably sensitive, suitably informed spectator could see in it. And, in talking of what a spectator could see in a picture, I must be understood as leaving room enough for this possibility: that some spectators, prior to the moment when they are told what there is to be seen in the picture, just couldn't see it, but, as with the buried pictures of childhood, having once been told what there is there to see, then can see it. How much prompting the eyes of the spectator need is irrelevant, provided only that this prompting effects what he sees, not just what he says. An example from high art that makes my point is the anamorphic skull that lies under the table in Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, for few spectators would recognize it for what it is unless they were told.

A standard of correctness may — and *The Ambassadors* would be a case in point — tell us that we need to see more in a picture than we would be naturally inclined to see. However a standard of correctness can also tell us — and pictures of things merely of a particular kind would be a case in point — that we should see less in a picture than we would naturally be inclined to. But all such injunctions are idle, they do nothing to establish meaning, unless the eyes can comply with them.

9. Of recent years some philosophers have found it unsatisfactory that the phenomenology of seeing-in should be left as unspecified as I have been prepared to do. In particular they have wanted greater clarification on the relation between seeing face-to-face and what I have called the recognitional aspect of seeing-in, and they have been unhappy to be told that the two are incommensurate. For that reason, they have resurrected the idea of resemblance as foundational to representation. We find this project in the work of three thinkers of great subtlety — Christopher Peacocke, Malcolm Budd, and Rob Hopkins⁶ — but it is my hope that I can avoid going into the detail of the argument (or arguments, I should say) just because I believe that any attempt to explain seeing-in through resemblance can only

establish something other than what is aimed at. It gives an account, not of seeing-in, but of something else.

But it is important at the outset to recognize that there are three distinct roles that the notion of resemblance, or looking like, might play in an account of seeing-in. So the claim might be that

(one) for me to be able to see x in y , y must look like x (in some respect), even though I don't notice it; or

(two), for me to be able to see x in y , I must notice that x looks like y (in some respect), or I must see x as looking like y ; or

(three), my seeing x in y is just my seeing y as looking like x (in some respect).

The first proposes resemblance as a condition of seeing-in. The second proposes perceived resemblance as a condition of seeing-in. The third proposes an identity of seeing-in and a perception of resemblance. It is evident that it is only when resemblance takes on the third of these three roles that it claims to have something to tell us about the phenomenology of seeing-in. So long as it is cast in one or other of the first two roles, it leaves completely open what it is like to see x in y .

So what of the claim that my seeing x in y is just my seeing y as looking like x in some respect?

Now let us first clear the ground by reminding ourselves of a distinction that Wittgenstein makes in the *Philosophical Investigations* between two different kinds of situation in which we might be struck by the resemblance between two faces.⁷ One is when both faces are present to us, and we are struck by the match: the other is when only one face is present, and it summons up the thought of the other. The relevance of Wittgenstein's distinction is that it is obviously only the second kind of case, and its phenomenology, that could conceivably have anything to tell us about the phenomenology of seeing-in, for pictorial representation in absence is the standard case. We can go further: it would be

highly imprudent if we brought into our account of seeing-in any consideration suggested to us by the situation where we note the resemblance between two objects that are both before us.

The burden of my argument against any *analysis* of seeing x in y by starting from (for the same values of x and y) seeing y as looking like x is that it in effect reverts to the idea that the distinctive phenomenology of our perception of pictures is given, not by the notion of seeing-in (to which lip-service is being paid), but by the notion of seeing-as. Indeed this barely lies below the surface. For seeing y as looking like x is a variety of seeing y as x . And I believe that this project is doomed because it simultaneously gives too much attention to seeing y and too little attention to seeing x in the overall account of what goes on experientially when we look at a pictorial representation of x . However, I shall not rely on the general argument against seeing-as, but shall concentrate on the project before us of understanding representational seeing in terms of seeing y as looking like x .

But, first, a word on what might be called the minor flaw in this project. I have laboured the point before⁴, and it is this: when we look at a picture that represents x , there will be many cases where we can circumscribe that part of the surface in which x is represented. But there will be other cases where we can't. When Turner depicts a ship labouring in the aftermath of a prolonged storm, we can point to where the ship is represented, but we cannot point to where the aftermath of the prolonged storm is represented. In other words, localization is not a general requirement upon representation. But this is not a problem so long as representation is to be understood in terms of seeing-in, for, as the very phrase 'seeing x in a surface' makes clear, seeing-in does not insist on localization. But this changes when representation is to be understood in terms of seeing the surface as looking like x . For that phrase is unintelligible, and the corresponding activity is inchoate, unless a particular part of the surface that looks like x can be indicated. The minor flaw in an account of seeing-in in terms of a perceived resemblance between

surface and object is that it commits the theory of representation to an otherwise unmotivated requirement of localization.

So to the major flaw. It is that, as I have said, if we persist in analyzing x 's representing y in terms of seeing (some part of) y as looking like x , we shall distort the roles both of represented object and of representing surface in the complex visual phenomenon of seeing a pictorial representation. The suggested analysis gives at once insufficient prominence to the former, or the represented object, and excessive prominence to the latter, or the representing surface.

In the first place, seeing y as looking like x gives insufficient prominence to seeing x . For we have seen that seeing a representation of x has two components in common with seeing x face-to-face: the thought of x , and the visual experience of x . But all that seeing y as looking like x requires is the thought of x or, perhaps not even that, but just the thought of x 's appearance. What seeing y as looking like x does not require is a visual experience of x : it would be absurd to claim that seeing y as looking like x was a mode of seeing x . Secondly, seeing y as looking like x gives excessive prominence to y . For, when we look at y , and y is a representation of x , we are certainly required to be aware of y — this is a point that I have insisted on as against illusionistic, or quasi-illusionistic, accounts of representation — but it is not a primary feature of the situation that new aspects of y start to dawn upon us. If new aspects of y do dawn upon us, this is so largely in that they contribute to what is the central element in the phenomenology of seeing x in y : namely, the way in which x emerges out of y .

In insisting that seeing-in, as opposed to seeing-as, or, for that matter, seeing-as-looking-like, is central to the analysis of the perception of representations, it is not my point that seeing-in and seeing-as are completely disjoint perceptual activities, or that seeing-as enjoys no place within an account of representation. On the contrary, for as I understand the matter, seeing-as occupies a niche within seeing-in. But what

this niche is needs careful disentangling thus: when I see x in y , I look at a marked surface y , I see something in it, and on to that something I bring to bear, as we have seen, either just a recognitional skill or a recognitional skill plus an identificatory skill. In other words, I see what I see in the surface either as a mere thing of a particular kind or as a particular thing. However, this way in which seeing-as lurks within seeing-in does nothing to show that seeing-as has any foundational role in the explanation of representation. And that is because what I see as this or as that, as just a woman or as Madame Moitessier, is itself an artifact of representation; it is the represented object, not the representing surface, upon which I bring to bear the appropriate package of recognitional and identificatory skills. Seeing-as helps to account for the content of a representational picture, but it does not explain its nature or its existence.

10. This discussion of representational meaning in the pictorial arts is one thread in a larger argument for the experiential nature of aesthetic meaning, and that is something, you may feel, that is still far from being established. For how about, on the one hand, other forms of pictorial meaning than the representational, and, on the other hand, other forms of aesthetic meaning than the pictorial?

On the first topic, I can do no more than refer you to *Painting as an Art*, where I go to some lengths to show that there are other forms of pictorial meaning than the representational that are heavily dependent on the representational. Additionally there is the general warning which is never out of place that, if representation is understood as I understand it – that is, as the correlative to seeing-in – it is a far broader phenomenon than it is generally taken to be. For instance, it includes nearly all abstract painting, since nearly all abstract painting calls for seeing-in.

On the second topic, if there is also a prejudice to remove, it might be thought that it is a prejudice that I have done more than my fair share to reinforce.

I must explain.

11. Earlier on, I made a sharp contrast between meaning in painting and linguistic meaning, and I took meaning in painting to be prototypical experiential meaning. You may well think that this contrast, which advanced my argument so long as we were thinking primarily of the visual arts, will now return to plague my case. For once we come to the literary arts, the case for experiential meaning in that area lapses, and lapses of necessity, for surely the kind of meaning that we encounter in a poem, or in a novel, or in a play, is of the very kind that I set up as a foil to experiential meaning. It is meaning of a kind that is not just *like* linguistic meaning, it is linguistic meaning.

The objection fails, because it is based on a confusion. Literary works of art do indeed possess linguistic meaning, but this is not the meaning at issue. What is at issue is literary meaning, which is the kind of aesthetic meaning that works of literature possess. To grasp the linguistic meaning of a literary work of art is — issues of translation apart — a precondition of grasping its literary meaning, but it is not identical with doing so. The unfortunate gallicism, widespread in critical circles, of referring to poems, novels, plays as 'texts', when texts are merely the vehicles of literary works of art, encourages the confusion that we understand the literary work of art when the linguistic decipherment of its text is over.

So interrelated questions arise. What is it to grasp the literary meaning of a work of literature? How does the literary meaning of a literary work of art differ from its linguistic meaning? And is there any good reason to think of literary meaning, once distinguished from linguistic meaning, as experiential?

To attempt an answer to the question, I shall narrow the context to that of one kind of literary work of art, the novel, and I shall start by considering, from the points of view both of agent and reader, an activity which is, not just a simple version of the novel, but is something simpler than the novel: I call it telling – that is, merely telling – a story, and the relevant contrast will be between merely telling a story and constructing a narrative: the latter attains to the status of the novel.

So long as an agent – he is as yet no artist – confines himself to merely telling a story, all that he is committed to doing is to try to put the story across as effectively as possible, and the sole commitment on the part of the reader, which in turn is a commitment solely to himself, is to get the most out of the story. To this end the reader can bring his imagination to bear upon what he reads or hears in an unfettered fashion. The meaning of the story is independent of any experiences that he has, nor is his grasp of the story reflected in the experiences he has in taking it in.

The transition from the mere telling of a story to the construction of a narrative is effected when the agent, in carrying out the intention of telling a story, forms further intentions about how to tell the story. And, note, his concern with how to tell the story is not a subsidiary motivation, as it would be if he were concerned to impress the reader with the size of his vocabulary, it is now for him an integral aspect of telling the story. Different ways of telling the story no longer amount for him, as they did for the mere storyteller, to different ways of doing the same thing: they are now different things to do. This is because his concern is now with *the story as told*.

There are a number of ways in which telling a story can come to differentiate a narrative.

First of all, the story might be told straight through from the beginning to the end, or it might be broken up into parts, and, when it is, only certain parts might be narrated, or the

parts might be narrated not in the order in which they took place.

Secondly, the story might be narrated from an internal, or from an external, point of view. When it is told externally, it might be told from a narrator's point of view, or from no point of view. When it is told internally, it will be told from the point of view of a character, but the character might remain constant, or change at crucial moments, or fluctuate continuously.

Thirdly, parts of the story might be, not just omitted, but concealed, or the story might be told deceptively. Now the narrative cannot be grasped unless the novelist's motivation is inferred from the text.

Fourthly, some parts of the story, or some characters in the story, may be presented with greater favour than others. Now the narrative takes sides, for the novelist has inserted his sympathies, directly or indirectly, into the narrative.

However, as mere storytelling modulates into constructing a narrative, as the novel evolves, it is not only in the intentions of the novelist that this shift is registered. It is also registered in the appropriate responses of the reader. These may be divided into two.

The reader must first determine which aspects of the text he is confronted with result from any of the foregoing decisions, and then he must react accordingly.

And reacting accordingly can in turn be thought of as having two aspects to it: one negative, the other positive.

In the first place, the reader must rein in the imagination, which was not asked of him before, for, if he does not, he runs the risk of riding roughshod over the novelist's intentions.

Secondly, the reader must react to what the novelist has prepared for him in the way the novelist expects him to: if, that is to say, he can. In other words, he is not at fault if he fails to react as the novelist expects him to if the novelist in

turn has failed to make this a reasonable way for a suitably sensitive, suitably informed reader to respond to the text. However, when the reader can and does react in conformity with the novelist's intentions, the experiences that he has are his way of grasping the narrative, hence of understanding the novel. Now the reader's experiences, like the correct perceptions of the suitably sensitive, suitably informed spectator in front of a painting, act as constitutive of the meaning of the work with which he is engaged.

I hope that I have said enough to show how a case can be made out for thinking that meaning in arts other than the visual can also be properly regarded as experiential. Which is not to say that there won't be big differences between the arts in the matter of what it is to be experiential.

NOTES

- ¹John Passmore, "The Dreariness of Aesthetics", reprinted in ed. W. Elton, *Aesthetics and Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954).
- ²Richard Wollheim, *Art and its Objects* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), second edition, with supplementary essays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
- ³Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art: The Andrew W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts for 1984* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).
- ⁴E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: The Andrew W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts for 1956* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), particularly pp. 6-9, 24, 198, and 237.
- ⁵Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), pp.23-6.
- ⁶Christopher Peacocke, "Depiction", *Philosophical Review*, Vol 96 (1987), pp. 383-410; Malcolm Budd, "How Pictures Look", in D. Knowles and J. Skorupski (eds), *Virtue and Taste* (Blackwell, Oxford: 1993); and Robert Hopkins, *Picture, Image and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- ⁷Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. Elizabeth Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), II, xi, p. 193.
- ⁸Wollheim, *Art and its Objects*, second edition, pp. 211-2.