

Chapter 12

The Effects of Goodman's Nominalism and Worldmaking on his Aesthetics

Abstract Goodman cannot, consistent with his metaphysics, countenance either intensional or intentional objects in his aesthetics, nor can he include states of mind as part of the analysis. The “super-extensionalist”/nominalist’s prohibition against classes, null sets, fictive entities, and general terms also affects the kinds of terms and concepts available to him in his aesthetics. Goodman’s relativistic epistemology and his pluralistic metaphysics similarly do not allow him an aesthetics that would claim artworks reveal genuine truths about the universal human condition. As Goodman’s constructionalism begins with “an uninterpreted system”, which presumably also means that the body itself is not an “interpreted” system, there are therefore no “natural” responses. It does, then, become difficult to explain how certain facts pattern themselves across all cultures, as it also becomes difficult to account for art’s significant; predicate matching fails to explain people’s passion for art. In short, what we are expecting from an aesthetic theory is an explanation of *what happens* the moment we are looking; not the predicate labels that general linguistic usage would attach to the painting after we have seen it. This is especially true as knowing that other people descriptively apply the term cannot be the sufficient condition for understanding an artwork.

12.1 Introduction

We are now at the point where we can summarize the effects of both Goodman’s nominalism and his worldmaking on the terms and concepts available to him in his aesthetics. While many of these same effects have been the evident consequences in the two earlier sections i.e., “The Metaphysics” and “The Epistemology”, their relevance to aesthetics in particular will be discussed now.

12.2 No Intensions/No Intentions

While there are a few writers who argue that the two terms “intentional” and “intensional” are indistinguishable and equivalent, I would argue, with others, that the terms have important distinctions. This is relevant to Goodman, as he repeatedly

discussed his opposition to intensions, though he only used the word "intention" in the usual layman's use of the term, partially for the reason that the term hadn't gained general currency during the years he was writing, particularly in his early career. But I believe a cogent argument can be made that his nominalism and his epistemology commit him to having neither intensions nor intentional objects in his aesthetics. Before making the case for this, I will first reiterate a brief definition of the two terms.

The term "intensional" is used in logic contexts in two (non-mutually exclusive) ways: (1) to mean the equivalent of non-extensional and (2) as distinguished from the extension of the term, which is defined as the set of objects to which the term applies, while the intension is defined as that by virtue of which the objects belong to that set. The latter is thought to be primarily either a property or a quality, thereby providing the *meaning* of the term as opposed to the extensional *reference* of the term, and hence, for philosophers like Goodman, is suspect. As we have seen in every facet of Goodman's philosophy, he rejected meaning in favor of reference.

"Intentional" is used in philosophy of mind to frame issues of mental or psychological attitudes towards objects. Initially posited by Brentano as a way of explaining how it is that we are able to refer to non-existent objects, he thus referred to the objects of things such as believing, wanting, etc., as instances of "intentional inexistence" and argued that the mental object is neither completely actual nor completely non-existent and that it ceases to exist at all once the thought is over. Hence believing, wanting, etc., are "intentional acts". It is also thought by some that intentional acts are able to explain what is peculiar to psychological phenomena, and thus provides a clarification of the difference between mental and nonmental. Of course, working this thesis out in convincing detail has proved not to the satisfaction of all, particularly for someone like Goodman.

As we saw in Parts I and II, intensional accounts are those for which we possess no rules of replacement, and therefore are unquantifiable and unable to give intersubjective verification, and therefore not acceptable options for Goodman. Intersubjective verification is of course that which gives science its claim to factual truth and though Goodman is not committed to objective empiricist science he is committed to the intersubjective verification garnered from the semantic account, which also demands replacement of terms *salva veritate* at least within the constraints imposed by his extensional isomorphism. This is why we saw, in Part I, that he disclaimed intensions in his metaphysics, which included for him abstract objects as they are construed by the mind and often thought of as independent of space and time. Clearly, it is true that intensional objects have no foundation within a Goodmanian system constructed around phenomenal qualia as the basic unit of experience, as qualia exist within a specific time and place. The demand for extensional individuals negates any consideration of intensional objects.

This is true in aesthetics as well. While Goodman will enumerate the objects in a set, thereby giving an extensional account of the term, he will not give an account of what it is by virtue of which those objects are grouped together. In other words,

we are given the predicate that is expressed by the painting, but we are not given an analysis of exactly what it is in virtue of which the predicate applies. As Goodman expresses the point:

If we are pressed to say what sort of similarity must obtain between what a predicate applies to literally and what it applies to metaphorically, we might ask in return what sort of similarity must obtain among the things a predicate applies to literally. How must past and future things be alike for a given predicate, say 'green', to apply literally to them all? Having some property or other in common is not enough; they must have a *certain* property in common. But what property? Obviously the property named by the predicate in question; that is, the predicate must apply to all the things it must apply to. The question why predicates apply as they do metaphorically is much the same as the question why they apply as they do literally. And if we have no good answer in either case, perhaps that is because there is no real question. At any rate, the general explanation why things have the properties, literal and metaphorical, that they do have – why things are as they are – is a task I am content to leave to the cosmologist.¹

Goodman very clearly denies that aesthetic predicates can be given an intensional account. Though he never explicitly denied that there were such things as mental entities, he was also careful not to reference mental entities as something to which existential generalization would apply, and he did deny abstract objects, properties, and all other things that were not concrete individuals.

But perhaps it is not enough to “leave [it] to the cosmologist”. This somewhat coy comment is meant to convince the reader in the pointlessness of a certain direction of questioning and thereby upend the reader’s objections. But there are several embedded questions here. On the most obvious level, Goodman wants to argue of course that all one can know for example is that the predicate “green” applies to the grass, but to ask *why* green is linked with grass and not blue would be to ask an almost theological question. That’s his argument, at least on the surface. But there is more to the statement than that, for Goodman is also claiming that questions outside the realm of strict reference e.g., questions of meaning, are unanswerable. Predicates apply because they apply. Period. That is the slightly deeper level of questioning that is to be thwarted.

But what I would call the most embedded question is the question of how predicates apply metaphorically in ways that are different from how they apply literally. It is of course true from Goodman’s point of view that the way predicates apply metaphorically is not at all the same as the way they apply literally, which is why metaphorical exemplification is an important part of his theory. But as predicates applied in metaphorical language are not the same as when they are applied literally as we are much more involved in the application of metaphorical predicates, it is a situation that might easily yield to an analyses involving meaning, intentions, and mental states. But Goodman is not interested, in this excerpt as well as in general, in allowing the question of why predicates apply metaphorically to lead into a terrain that would violate his nominalist principles, and hence the quick retort that stops such temptations.

¹ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* 2nd ed. (Hackett, 1976), 78.

But if one is to try to answer the question how art means something, one must somehow grapple with the difficult question of why certain predicates apply to certain objects and *how* it is that certain things have certain properties, and even more importantly, *what* is it that we get out of looking at art and *why* are we motivated to do it? Other philosophers who have been willing to accept meaning have been able to construct theories that are more flexible and accommodating to the question of how it is that we ascertain the content of a work of art, emphasizing the experiencing of it in the mind of the viewer.² But Goodman cannot discuss meaning or mental states as he has limited himself to a referential account of semantics based on his “super-extensionalism” and therefore is constrained to a closefisted explanation of what it is that we experience when we look at art and what exactly motivates us to do so.

This turns the question to intentional objects. Leaving aside Frege's notion of propositions that are thought of as the intention of a mental act, and also leaving aside Meinong's *Aussersein* (though both concepts are related issues and both would also violate Goodman's nominalism), and using the term “intentional” in the way that it was defined in the beginning of this section, Goodman is clearly unwilling to allow that such things as “believing” or “desiring” are directed at objects such that the objects are to be entities for which the operation of existential generalization might apply, nor is he to claim that the desiring or the believing themselves are objects. It is to be remembered that Russell's multiple relation notion, which reified such intentional acts as “believing”, “thinking”, or “judging”, would not pass the nominalist's criterion for existence claims, and the nominalist is likely to counter that the theory of intentionality simply is mistaken in that it assumes that intentional verbs are analogous to perceptual verbs; thenominalist would counter

² See for example Keith Lehrer's, “Knowing Content in the Visual Arts” in *Knowing Art: Essays in Aesthetics and Epistemology*, Matthew Kieran and Dominic McIver Lopes (eds.) (Springer, 2007). He discusses the viewer's experience of a work of art as an instance of a larger class of similar experiences, which he describes as “the experience of the work of art as an exemplar to stand for a class of experiences of which it is a member.” This exemplarization is the generalization of a particular, but unlike Goodman's notion of induction, Lehrer also acknowledges that it is “knowledge of something common to a class of particulars”. In this way the expression is representational without reference to a predicate. As he states, “The exemplarization of the sensory experience of the painting yields knowledge of what the painting is like by enhancing the conception of the painting we might obtain from a description of the painting, no matter how complete. The person who sees the painting adds the sensory conception of the content, obtained from exemplarizing the particular, to the descriptive content of the painting and thereby obtains an enriched or enhanced conception of that content.” (8–9). The proper emphasis here is the “sensory experience”, which Lehrer also ventures is innate, and it is that sort of experience that Goodman is unwilling to confront as it cannot be neatly fitted into a semantic account that is part of a constructionalism, nor can it fit into a strict nominalist account if it is coupled – as it is here in Lehrer's account – with knowledge of a property common to the class, as common properties are absolutely forbidden. But I would agree with Lehrer that this is more or less the direction in which one must go, which then avoids us abandoning the project to either the cosmologists or mystics.

that “believing” is not like “seeing”, as the latter requires an accusative object whereas the former does not.

For Goodman, linguistic phrases that refer to such things as “believing” might be used in mention form, but the states of mind themselves will never be directly referred to as though they were existents. Clearly, this follows directly from his nominalism that rejected everything that could not be counted as an individual, construed extensionally. Since Goodman is willing to count as entities only those singular individuals at the lowest level, intentional objects would not be among those things he is willing to countenance. Reference is seen, therefore, as compatible with nominalism, as referential accounts can more easily be given within extensional definitions of objects construed as individuals than can accounts of things such as believing and desiring, which are not in any specific time or place and hence are not concrete phenomenal entities. Individuals are such only if they are discrete from other entities, and clearly intentional accounts of experience do not yield entities that are either discrete from one another or locatable in a specific place and time.

The question is whether human cognition and behavior in general – or aesthetic experience in particular – can be accounted for in terms that are purely extensional and thus committed only to an ontology of physical objects and to linguistic symbols for nonphysical entities that, by referring only to the linguistic symbol, leave aside any reference to something not in a specific place and time and hence leave aside an ontological commitment to something non-physical. While abstract entities can be paraphrased into linguistic surrogates e.g., the formalist can talk about numerals instead of numbers, the question remains whether or not a commitment to only concrete, non-abstract individuals is sufficient to explain the experience of art, even when the intentional objects are substituted by linguistic phrases.

But, again, the main thesis of this book is clearly demonstrated: Goodman’s aesthetics is completely delimited by his nominalism. He cannot, consistent with his metaphysics, countenance either intensional or intentional objects, and his theory of art cannot employ an explanation that includes non-extensional entities nor can it include states of mind as part of the analysis. While idealism extols the first-person account, this can clearly not be an option for Goodman.

12.3 No Properties

It is not difficult to move from a rejection of intensional objects to a rejection of properties, as the latter are normally thought of as an example of the former, and therefore the relevant points can be made fairly briefly. For those maintaining this traditional notion of property, it is identified as being an essentialist characteristic and is suspect on a nominalist account. Since Goodman’s “super-extensionalism” went even further than others, such things as classes, universals, abstract objects, and properties were all unacceptable. And as we have seen Goodman was often at pains to deny that his usage of the word “property” countenanced the typical

platonist commitments. Instead, he would want to maintain a definition of “property” consistent with that given in his metaphysics i.e., it is only the name that we give to the most frequently repeated qualia in an object. Leaving aside the question of whether or not *Languages of Art* can be read with that definition in mind, the present point I am making is clearly true: Goodman cannot use “property” in a way that gives to his aesthetics a role for property construed as a non-extensional quality. Of course, this negates traditional notions of beauty, but it also negates notions of emotion conceived as a non-extensional quality. It is, thus, a position that falls very automatically out of his nominalism and his epistemology.

12.4 No Referencing of General Terms or Fictive Entities

Another direct consequence of Goodman's nominalism and his epistemology is his position regarding the denotational function of subject terms in his aesthetics i.e., that such terms cannot refer to general or fictive entities. While both restrictions are of the same general form, I will explain each of them independently.

In many places Goodman reiterates two main points regarding his nominalism: (1) that it allows anything to be an individual and (2) that it strictly forbids classes. This becomes pertinent in his aesthetics because it restricts the denotative possibilities of the subject terms in the sentence describing the artwork i.e., general terms cannot denote. The reason is as follows. General statements are contrasted with singular statements, and can be either of a universal form e.g., “All cats are furry” or of a particular form e.g., “Some cats are furry”. In either case, the subject of the statement is not a concrete individual. Goodman treated general terms much the same way he treated classes, wherein the restriction on the usage of the term “class” springs, in part, from an opposition to the fallacious assumption that things in the class are alike, which, thus, is defining membership on the basis of a common property. But Goodman, like many others who began their work after Russell's paradox was formulated, argued that sets are defined by their members rather than by the characteristics required for membership i.e., by extension rather than by intension. Thus the traditional notion of classes must be forbidden because they depend upon the recognition of essentialist traits. Furthermore, to have classes is to accept the further operations that give us classes of classes, etc. – a Platonism that Goodman would want to avoid.

Defined extensionally, Goodman only admits concrete particulars. As general terms are signs standing for or referring to sets of objects, the entity referred to by a general term itself cannot be said to exist as a concrete individual, nor do the general terms refer to independent entities that are “general” entities, as there is no such thing as, for example, a “general” cat, just as there is, on a nominalist account, no such thing as a universal cat. Hence the restriction manifests itself in Goodman's aesthetics as a prohibition against, for example, a description of an etching by Rembrandt, entitled “Landscape with a Huntsman”, that would claim that the etching denoted a generalized man, for there is no such thing on a Goodmanian account, and it cannot be a specific man for we do not know who the etching is

depicting; therefore the etching is properly said to denote a “man-representation”. As Goodman states the issue: “In other words, the etching represents no man but is simply a man-picture, and more particularly a the-man-in-Rembrandt’s-*Landscape-with-a-Huntsman-picture*.”³ This is consistent with Goodman’s position in *The Structure of Appearance*,

May a nominalistic language contain even so platonistic-sounding a predicate of individuals as ‘belongs to some classes satisfying the function F’? If we use such a predicate and regard as true some sentences applying it, are we not acknowledging that there are classes? Strangely enough we are not- so long as we take this string of words as a single predicate of individuals. For then the words in the predicate are no more separable units of the language than are the letters in the words, and we cannot take the predicate apart and operate on a sentence containing it so as to derive such a consequence as ‘there are some classes satisfying the function F’...The distinction between nominalism and Platonism thus depends not upon what predicates of individuals are employed but upon what values are admitted for the variables.⁴

The linguistic string of words can be made an “unbreakable” single predicate, making the variable an individual whose value is the function it describes. Since terms function referentially, the unbreakable predicate has replaced the whole string of words, and the non-denoting term is replaced. In this unbroken one-place predicate the fictive object “unicorn” becomes the real object i.e., the “unicorn-picture”, and is thus a satisfactory subject for a referential relation. Therefore, the nominalist prohibition against classes, null sets, fictive entities, and general terms affects the kinds of terms and concepts available to him in his aesthetics, and necessitates the role of the unbreakable predicate in his aesthetics.⁵

The difficulty of referring to a non-entity is similar to the difficulty of referring to a general term: neither are concrete individuals, and hence no argument can be made for existence claims for such terms. The restriction Goodman has on fictive entities is analogous to his restriction on the null set, as both are at odds with both nominalism and extensionalism.

³ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* 2nd ed. (Hackett, 1976), 26.

⁴ Nelson Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance*, 3rd ed. (Reidel, 1977), 27.

⁵ Given that he refused to countenance classes, a difficulty for the reader, though, remains: how does one parse his frequent (though “presystematic”) usage of the term “class”? If the platonistic term is only used provisionally prior to proper translation into the syntax of the calculus of individuals, how is the reader to referentially use the term – as it is being currently used in the given (presystematic) sentence? In other words, what does “class” mean in a Goodmanian sentence? If the term is literally vacuous in Goodman’s scheme, and if we are to understand that it is only being used temporarily as a place-holder until a proper translation has been developed, it seems conceptually odd for the reader as words are – again, in the Goodmanian system – used referentially. To what exactly is the word “class” referring? Thus, it is open for question whether or not that is how the term is, in fact, parsed. Language use is an accrued skill and the meaning of words relies on the translation of those terms based on the past usage. It is questionable whether the term “class” can be read without platonic ontological meaning, except in those instances that explicitly refer to the strictest mathematical usage.

General terms are at the heart of the debate between the nominalists and the Platonists and it is worthwhile to take a moment and review the issue. "Cat" is the name we use to label all individual instances of cats, but "cat" is not something in the world. We don't see "cat" nor does "cat" function as an existent. It is just a name. This of course is Goodman's position. Justice would be another example. It is a name we attach to all those individual instances of just actions, just laws, etc., but Goodman of course would want to say that "justice" doesn't exist. We can't go out and find it, it is simply the name we attach to the ever-changing set of members that fall under it.

But do aesthetic general terms function analogously? For example are abstract art, landscape painting, or formalism just general terms standing as place holders for all the instances that fall under it? In a Goodmanian analysis, if I look at an abstract painting, I see that it is an instance of "abstract painting", and hence a relationship between a general term and a singular term. I also see that the abstract painting is expressing several things, one of them perhaps would be sadness. He is correct that that is the way predicate matching works, but the question of course is *Is that all?* I would argue that that's not all. I would argue that I'm also developing some kind of relationship (for want of a better word) with the general term "abstract art" through the specific instance of the abstract painting in front of me, and that my understanding of the expression function of sadness within the painting is dependent upon my understanding of the general term.⁶

The way that I would cash this out is as follows. I'm seeing certain properties in the painting such as the flatness of a particular area contrasted with the roughness of another, a warm color nudging aggressively against a cool one, a jagged line seemingly out of control next to the other fairly placid ones, etc. My eye travels around the painting and my thoughts are formed not of course just by the instance in front of me but also by my antecedent knowledge of abstract art in general. If this were my first encounter with completely abstract non-objective art I would have little understanding of the vocabulary that is now allowing me to look at the painting and understand what it is I'm looking at. I am able to experience the utter flatness and its refusal to yield up any secrets and compare that to the roughness of a nearby surface, noticing how the roughness looks alternately like scratched wood or wrinkled skin. But now I notice something I hadn't noticed before, which is that all of this abstract vocabulary is dependent upon contrasts: the jagged line means something in contrast to less jagged lines e.g., it is more agitated, or the smooth surface is more (well) soothing than the rough surfaces, etc. I take this knowledge that I have just obtained in this one instance and I place it back in the larger category of "abstract art" i.e., abstract art depends on relative terms and furthermore those relative terms are instantiated in the formalist properties (the surface, color, shapes, etc.) of the canvas. It is then in reference to the general term that much of the discussion is now directed i.e., "abstract art communicates

⁶ This is, I take it, somewhat similar to the way Keith Lehrer argues for the role of cognition in aesthetics. Cf. footnote 2 above.

its language because it can speak about relative terms via the formalist properties of paint". I am now directing my thoughts, referring to, the general term "abstract art".

But am I doing it differently than when I use a general term like "cat"? I can certainly talk about "cat" and I am not confusing naming with referencing. I can think about the general category of "cat" and ruminate on its properties and there is no attempt at ostension. I am not tempted to think that it is an instance of Meinong's Golden Mountain. Likewise, I can talk about "unicorn" and not confuse naming with existence claims. But when I speak of "abstract art" and the properties of abstract art, I have developed a relationship with a theoretical construct that functions as part of the aesthetic experience, and without which the aesthetic experience could not be understood. This means that general terms play a particular role in aesthetics as art is a symbol system – Goodman was right about that very general point – and that comprehending the particular example of art in front of me is completely dependent upon my having antecedently comprehended the various instances of general categories to which the particular instance belongs.

That is not the case with empirical and material entities that are not art objects. My unaided faculties are often sufficient for the inductive analysis that the Greeks recognized was the first step in scientific understanding. But aesthetics is not just another example of empirical data recognition. Art is that rare instance when I am able to see an individual's transmission of his or her experience/viewpoint of the world to others e.g., the viewers. (This of course is not Goodman's point of view). I get to look, for example, at the world through Monet's eyes when I look at a Monet; I see the haystacks as he saw them, with all their ephemeral and terrifyingly irradiating molecules of light, I watch them in that brief moment of visual capture knowing they were quickly to change into something else as the light was soon to shift. It's the fleetingness of light and the fleetingness of mortality, and I see it in Monet's cathedrals and water lilies as well. I've been given a glimpse into Monet's mind. To eradicate any consideration of intensions, intentions, mental concepts, abstract entities, properties, or general terms is not constricting the analysis to a disciplined, rigorous format; it is vivisectioning the experience of art and leaving a very partial and truncated analysis that offers only the dull, routine matching of predicates. I do not look at art just to match predicates. Instead I look at art in order to think about the object in front of me in terms of other similar examples I've seen and about worlds that are referenced, trying to inhabit the attitude and thinking of the artist. Art is the way that one human mind can transmit itself to another human mind. It is quite different from a mind merely absorbing data from an inanimate object, which is why the epistemology becomes so convoluted; this contributes, I believe, to some of the dismal failures within aesthetics. Goodman was very right to place aesthetics within epistemology, and for that, he was both brave and correct. Art is not just a pleasurable sensation, it's not a warm bath. Something very profound happens when I experience art and I am, through the process, absorbing knowledge of both the world outside me, of another person i.e., the artist, and of myself. When I look at art, my thinking boomerangs between the general categories and the particular instance and then from that to associated other categories, whether political,

sexual, or theological, trying to find the artist's voice in those messages. And the general terms within that dialog form an important part of the process. And as part of the aesthetic experience, its ontological role must be fixed instead of its existence denied.

This is also, by the way, the way artists and critics routinely talk about art, and an aesthetics ought not, in my opinion, depart so fully from the way the discipline itself treats its own subject. But Goodman was willing in art as in mathematics and science to ignore the discipline's guiding rules.

12.5 No Non-semantic Meanings

Goodman's epistemology, with its reliance on reference, is seen reflected in his particular brand of aesthetics, which also, as has been demonstrated, relies on reference. Thus Goodman's aesthetics is a referential account of semantics, and art is understood through the language that describes it. Though Goodman never claims that there exist no nonverbal forms of communication e.g., he admits that things like shrugging one's shoulders clearly communicates though it is not verbal, he does argue that our knowledge of artworks is formulated semantically. We understand what the artwork is about once we have accurately ascertained the referential relations between the terms and what the terms denote or what the terms are denoted by. Hence meaning results from reference, and there are no meanings outside reference; there are no non-semantic meanings.

As Goodman's epistemology is relativistic, it is, of course, true that the semantic account is relative only to the world under consideration/construction, but it is, even given that relativism, never the case that non-semantic meanings, such as essentialist definitions or other meanings derived from any kind of process other than referential, would be gained. Reference is the only source of epistemological understanding. Given this view in his epistemology, it is *de rigueur* that his aesthetics would likewise require a semantic view of knowledge acquisition. It is also *de rigueur* that induction would play an important role in understanding artworks, just as induction played an important role in his epistemology, as all understanding is accomplished by the projection of predicates within the system of social conformity upon which linguistic agreement is based. It is thus that the symbols in artworks, by referring to things outside themselves, thereby become meaningful symbols instead of merely decorative items. These symbols, in turn, pattern themselves in society into broader movements as they are governed by the natural result of induction, which gains adherents as the probabilistic accretion of the projection of predicates determines changes in the models for artmaking. In other words, art history is moved forward because of the changes in the patterns of predicates that are projected. While this semantic account combines with the role of induction to give us a version of cultural progress, it concomitantly denies the possibility of knowledge acquisition coming from any other sources, such as would be gained in a natural kinds doctrine or a causal account of knowledge. For Goodman, artworks communicate only those

symbols that have been assigned to the terms used in the semantic context that describes the artwork.

12.6 No Natural Symbols

It follows directly from both this referential constraint and from the constructionalism imposed by his epistemology that the aesthetics likewise provides only semantic and referential accounts of relativistic knowledge acquisition, and therefore it also follows that Goodman's aesthetics allows for no natural symbols. As I argued previously in Chapter 8.6, Goodman is constrained in his usage of the term "object", as it cannot be used in such a way as to presuppose its existence a priori to its adoption into a constructed symbol system, or apart from that adoption. A further consequence of this that I pointed out in the same subsection is that the object does not symbolize anything other than what it has been determined to symbolize based on the referential functions within the symbol system in use, except in those cases where new metaphors are being introduced. Since the subject metaphysically creates what the subject epistemologically experiences, and since Goodman's semantics is non-causal, non-natural, constructionalist, and relativist, there is not only no autonomous object, there are also no natural kinds and no natural symbols. Therefore, he does not have available to him any notion of non-constructed symbols in his aesthetics. Of course he embraces this position, since the Goodmanian object is constructed by those who are participating in the symbol system, and this must be true in aesthetics as in all other worlds. And since he states in several places that there are no epistemological natural kinds therefore, of course, this would be applicable in aesthetics as well. The projection of predicates – an operation done by social units – constructs the objects as it selects those predicates most frequently projected. But we are entirely free to choose predicates – and hence to choose kinds.

On a Goodmanian account, therefore, we cannot claim that our sensory faculties are constructed a priori to any symbol system such that the faculties would determine the inputted data, creating thereby a uniformly parsed experience. This makes his philosophy in contrast to most other philosophers, even to Quine, who begins with the neural input as the origin of epistemological data. In contradistinction, Goodman begins with no physiology determining uniform human responses. It is important to remember that Goodman's constructionalism begins with "an uninterpreted system", which presumably also means that the body itself is not an "interpreted" system.

I would rather argue that we are embedded in physical selves and understand one another's messages through the intuitive and instinctual interpretation of signals as voice intonation, facial expression, bodily movements, etc. In other words: *we begin with an interpreted system*. But for Goodman, the primary predicates are not yet a part of the constructionalism, and we are given only the very basic in phenomenal

experience and those concrete individuals can cohere in any way that we determine they may. In other words, Goodman discards not only resemblance, but also all so-called natural responses to stimuli.

Therefore, in his aesthetics, there can be no claim that warm colors “naturally” make us feel a certain way, as he states in *Languages of Art*:

Why does ‘sad’ apply to certain pictures and ‘gay’ to others? What is meant by saying that a metaphorical application is ‘guided by’ or ‘patterned after’ the literal one? Sometimes we can contrive a plausible history: warm colors are those of fire, cold colors those of ice. In other cases, we have only fanciful alternative legends. . . . Whatever the answer, these are all isolated questions of etymology.⁷

Goodman's theory states that such interpretations as these are relative to the symbol systems in which they exist, which then implies that they are relative to the culture in which they are formed, and, even if they seem to be broader than a particular culture, the reason for that would fall to “legend” and vaguely answered questions of “etymology”. In other words, there are no natural reactions. It does, then, become difficult to explain how certain facts pattern themselves across all cultures, such as the reaction to warm and cool colors, or other basic design issues, such as the way diagonals cause viewers to react less placidly than do verticals or horizontals; thus, in response to such seemingly universal reactions, Goodman answers that the genetic answer is unprovable and, therefore, uninteresting.

But, be that as it may, the point I am making is that Goodman clearly cannot claim, if he is to be consistent with his epistemology, that any univocal reactions in aesthetics are biologically determined and, hence, natural. As he states it, we understand the symbols and value them because these are the meanings we have attached to these particular symbols, but they need not be the meanings – we could have attached other meanings. There are no natural kinds. This again separates him from the causal point of view, which is committed to an irremediably biological necessity in perception. And though the causal point of view is most frequently relied upon by both scientists and artists, Goodman is unable to appeal to natural responses in either science or art; there are no natural kinds and there are no natural ways of seeing things. These leaves completely unexplained how it is that we appreciate the art of other cultures, or how the same basic design principles hold across cultures and across times; a problem that a theory relying on innate genetic structures does not have.

12.7 No Central Role for Emotion

While many aesthetic theories rely on emotion as the centerpiece of the theory, it is, for Goodman, merely one of the things that an artwork might express, and it is neither a necessary nor sufficient cause determining whether or not something qualifies as art. But the reduced role of emotion is even greater than that obvious point. I

⁷ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* 2nd ed. (Hackett, 1976), 76.

would argue that one of the results of the prohibition on both general terms and intentional objects necessarily is a diminished role for emotion within Goodman's system, for emotion can seem ineluctably mental and general and hence quite distinct from a concrete particular. And since current science characterizes emotion chemically, whereby the existence of an emotion is accomplished *not* through the activation of a particular neural pathway but through a flooding of areas of the brain with a chemical, which then only gradually diminishes over time, the emotion itself is difficult to locate in a particular time and place, and could probably not, therefore, be considered as a phenomenal quale.

Goodman, of course, never denies the existence of emotions; the truth is quite the contrary – he is eager to include emotions as part of cognition, in both science and in art. But while he argues this general point, he cannot argue the point within the referential and semantic framework that he has provided without violating his nominalism. The reason for this is as follows. Emotion itself, as distinct from the linguistic symbol for it, does not function as a concrete particular in Goodman's system and he cannot, consistent with the other parts of his philosophy, treat it as an existent. Metaphorical exemplification serves to explain how epistemology is consistent with his nominalism e.g., the swatch is a sample but not a paradigm. The exemplification is one case of something, in contradistinction to the usual interpretation of exemplification that gives the meaning of the term as a manifestation of an ideal paradigm. For Goodman, the metaphorical exemplification is a token like other tokens absent a type/token relationship. This is why the emotion is replaced with the linguistic symbol for it i.e., the predicate, but whether it is the predicate "sadness" or the sadness itself is not always clearly referenced. While he is at pains not to have sadness itself be denoted by a term i.e., the "sad painting" does not denote sadness, (remember his disclaimers regarding the word "property" in these contexts), he does state that "the painting expresses sadness" or – in alternative formulation – "the painting is denoted by the term 'sadness'". But these two expressions i.e., "the painting is denoted by the term 'sadness'" and "the painting expresses sadness", are not equivalent to the other two expressions i.e., "the painting is denoted by the term 'sadness'" and "the painting refers to – through expression – the term 'sadness'". These pairs are not the same. The lack of equivalence is between the two phrases "the painting expresses sadness" and "the painting refers to – through expression – the term 'sadness'". I will try to clarify this issue with the following.

Expression is a kind of reference, but because he also says that the expression relation is a subrelation of the converse denotation, which exists only when the direction of the denotation is running in both directions, clearly then the terms that are linked by the double arrow need to be the same, whether one begins at the point of the painting or whether one begins at the point of the predicate. (Refer to the diagram in Chapter 9.4) The pair of terms cannot be both sadness (as a non-linguistic symbol) and "sadness" (as a linguistic symbol) i.e., the pair becomes {sadness, "sadness"} in one instance where the direction is going from the painting to the denoting term, and in the other case – where the direction is from the denoting term to the painting – the terms cannot then be changed such that the pair is {"sadness",

“sadness”}. In other words, one cannot begin with the linguistic expression “the painting expresses sadness”, having the referential arrow go from the painting to the denoting term “sadness”, and, when the process begins at the denoting term “sadness” then have it link with the phrase “the painting is denoted by the term ‘sadness’”, and thereby blur the distinction between the notion sadness and the linguistic substitute for that notion. The subrelation of the converse denotation must link a *pair* of terms i.e., {“sadness”, “sadness”}, and not shift to a different pair of terms i.e., {sadness, “sadness”}. These two pairs are not identical. The subrelation of converse denotation would only be the case if the related pairs were the same, and did not allow the term “sadness” to shift between its linguistic formation and its non-linguistic formation. It is like claiming that the pair {x,y} is equivalent to {x,z} without proof that y = z. Clearly, the last pair is not identical in meaning with the first pair.

Therefore, sadness as a non-linguistic term cannot be part of the referential relationship. And, thus, sadness as an emotion itself – not in the guise of its linguistic substitute – cannot be part of Goodman's referential semantics. But when Goodman says the painting is expressing sadness, he is not saying the painting is expressing “sadness”. It is, therefore, not clear whether or not he is shifting between the linguistic sign for the entity and the entity itself, for if he were, then it would be an equivocation of terms. The point that I am making is only that if he were to be consistent, then the pairs of entities related by the subrelation of the converse denotation could only be {“sadness”, “sadness”}, and the more general entity sadness (not its linguistic substitute) would be unavailable to him.

But even if Goodman were to not use only the linguistic substitute for sadness, it is unclear whether or not this is a sufficient explanation for expression. For if I were told that “the painting expresses sadness” I would not necessarily have understood anything, for two separate reasons. Firstly, knowing that others legitimately attribute “sadness” to the painting does not insure that the bearer of this information has the adequate emotional and psychological profile that makes normal cognitive functions possible. For much pathology is defined by the patient's inability to properly experience emotion, even though the patient can be perfectly aware of others' expectations, and thus, in this instance, the person may understand that the word “sadness” is the proper predicate, but nevertheless be unable to experience the painting, and, hence, understand the painting. As Keith Lehrer has pointed out, “A linguistic description of the content of the work, though providing useful information for many purposes, seems to leave out something essential to what a work of art is like.”⁸

Obviously, there are two different uses of the word “understand” and it is not clear whether or not Goodman has conflated them. In other words, we could say there is a knowing₁ and a knowing₂ such that “knowing₁” means awareness of

⁸ Keith Lehrer, “Knowing Content in the Visual Arts” in *Knowing Art: Essays in Aesthetics and Epistemology*, Matthew Kieran and Dominic McIver Lopes (eds.) (Springer, 2007), 2.

linguistic agreement i.e., knowing that the emotion predicate is applied in a particular instance, and knowing₂ would mean to experience the emotion oneself. Thus, “knowing” (read: knowing₁) that other people descriptively apply the term cannot be the sufficient condition for understanding (read: knowing₂) an artwork.

In addition to this definitional point, Goodman’s theory negates the possibility that the viewer is experiencing the work of art in ways that *directly* communicate the psychological and emotional intent of the artist. As Richard Wollheim has stated the problem: “For the problem seems to be not, How can a work of art *qua* physical object of this or that kind express this or that emotion? But, How can a work of art *qua* physical object express emotion?”⁹ Goodman is not interested in addressing this question, which, to those like Wollheim, seems an inadequacy of the theory. Thus, in conclusion, there are several ways that emotions do not serve a central role in Goodman’s theory:

- They are only one of the things that may be expressed by an artwork; they are not *the* thing.
- They do not seem to be a concrete particular, and, hence, cannot be given ontological status within a referential account.
- The substitution of the predicate for the emotion itself ensures that the emotion itself is not part of the referential symbol system.
- Knowing that others use the predicate does not guarantee the viewer’s own emotional experience.

12.8 No Relation to Universal Truth

Goodman’s notion of truth is noticeably different from most philosophers. This is the joint consequence of several different strains in his philosophy: his pluralism, his relativism, his coherentism, and his constructionalism. As we have seen, Goodman does not completely abandon the traditional sense of the term “truth”, but agrees with many other logicians that it be applied to verbal statements that have the strictly circumscribed relation of a predicate describing (or failing to describe) a subject. But since we are unable to appeal to an epistemology that gives either knowledge claims that presuppose universal, immutable human constructs or any external objective reality that would necessarily appear the same to all observers, and because there are metaphysically many worlds and, thus, many incompatible predicate/subject relations, Goodman’s notion of truth becomes likewise relativistic. Furthermore, even though Goodman’s epistemological relativism can’t claim objective truth, it fails to force him to abandon notions of truth altogether, claiming both sentential truth and “right fit”. As he states in *Languages of Art*:

⁹ Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 22.

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... 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.¹⁰

The point that he is making is that truth exists within the confines of a particular system, and, hence, is a right fit for that particular system, though it would not necessarily be so in others. Though this notion of truth is significantly at odds with traditional substitutability definitions of truth, which does not require mere relativistic substitutability, it is important to remember that, for Goodman, apart from a system, an entity is indeterminate. As each definition is right within its own system, the notion of "rightness" serves as a kind of harness on relativism, such that not everything is acceptable, and thus consistency, coherence, appropriateness within the system, and accordance with past practice and antecedent projections, are all constraints he recognizes.

How this impacts on art is clear, as art does not consist of statements in sentential form. As he states it in the interview published in *Of Mind and Other Things*, "I like to keep the term 'true' for statements. Statements in a language are true or they are false. I don't like to speak of a picture as being true or false, since it doesn't literally make a statement. But I would rather say that a picture can be right or wrong the way a design can be right or wrong."¹¹

Hence, a picture cannot be true or false since it is not a statement, though even a statement is only relativistically true, and exactly how that differs from "a matter of fit – fit with a body of theory" is not clear, for if a statement is only true relative to a system and a painting is merely right because it fits with a body of theory, then the difference between the terms "true" and "right" becomes negligible. Nevertheless, a pertinent and remaining point still remains to be stated. Goodman's relativistic epistemology and his pluralistic metaphysics commit him to an aesthetics that cannot allow artworks to reveal genuine truths about the human condition; a claim often made (by others) for art. Hence, Goodman's aesthetic commitments, again consequent to other facets of his thought, must deny some of those very traits most often thought of as associated with the enterprise. Therefore art cannot give insightful truths about human nature, both because there is no such thing as human nature and also because art, as non-sentential, is unable to be either true or false.

12.9 Conclusion

The ultimate question of course is whether the metaphysical and ontological commitments attendant upon Goodman's language do, in fact, sufficiently represent the aesthetic discourse. Many have argued that looking at art is not like reading

¹⁰ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* 2nd ed. (Hackett, 1976), 264.

¹¹ Nelson Goodman, *Of Mind and Other Matters* (Harvard University Press, 1984), 196.

a sentence, but leaving that rather fair criticism aside, there is, I believe, other points worth looking at. The first is an overlooked but odd fact, namely that Goodman's methodology of analyzing the artwork by means of analyzing the parts of the sentence that describe the artwork is, in effect, offering art as the first layer of meaning and the linguistic sentence as the second layer of symbolic meaning. In other words, we must see through the layer of visual symbolizing *and* the layer of linguistic symbolizing in order to understand what the artwork is "saying". Are these two screens through which the viewer looks identical? One need only remember Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description to understand the latter point. The painting is actually referring *to something* – which just happens to be called, in English, "sadness" but (1) our word for what the painting is *pointing to* and (2) the painting's expression (i.e., what it is that we are directly acquainted with when we perceive the painting), are not completely equivalent. What we are expecting from an aesthetic theory is an explanation of *what happens* the moment we are looking; not our verbal label that we attach to the painting after we have seen it. Rephrased, the question becomes "Is it the case that our understanding of art is gained through an analysis of the referencing, which is done by the words that describe the painting?" It seems as though we still don't have any explanation of the internal character of expression. When Goodman asks, "But what is the logical character of the relationship the picture bears to what it is said to express?"¹² he is right to focus on that as the essential question, but it is not clear if it is completely answered. And what we want to know is how to logically characterize the moment of experiencing the expression, not the terms we might use at a later date to describe, with linguistic shorthand, the thing experienced.

The second issue concerning whether or not Goodman's nominalist aesthetics is sufficient for the discourse revolves around his reluctance to commit to anything that could not be absolutely verified. Goodman chose the reference fork over the meaning fork as it entailed a better chance of success. That is certainly prudent and probably true; there is a better chance of success in that it is less easy to make obvious blunders. But when we stand in front of an artwork (and for Goodman, as for me, visual art was the art form of primary interest) there is a complex process of ascertaining the artwork, the explanation of which must somehow or other entail its significance to me the viewer. It is not enough to say that the picture denotes the sea. Lots of pictures denote the sea. But some of them are worth looking at and others are not. Embedded within that decision is all the meat of epistemology and aesthetics. What do I get out of – what do I learn – from the painting that is worthwhile that I don't get out of the aesthetic experience of the one that is not worthwhile? *That* is the heart of the aesthetic experience and Goodman's theory of reference within a semantic account simply gives us nothing in that arena. He said of course that he would leave it to others to decide the difference between good and bad art, but an aesthetics that lacks the tools to even in principle distinguish

¹² Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* 2nd ed. (Hackett, 1976), 50.

between an aesthetic experience that is worthwhile from an aesthetic experience that ought to be avoided, is an aesthetics whose tools are not adequate for the discourse.

While there are not any glaring logical fallacies of which we might easily be able to convict him, it is clear that his "parsimonious" presentation of the facts leaves out many, many significant questions and answers for which any reasonable aesthetics ought to be responsible. We simply have no idea, on a Goodmanian account, *why* we stand in front of a piece of artwork or *what* we get out of it. To only know that the linguistic terms normally associated with it (read: by others) would be "sad" or "sea" says pathetically little about my experience. What we want out of an aesthetics is an account of what happens when we experience a work of art. It is worth wondering whether Goodman's difficulties with words like "property" and "classes", and his seeming inability or reluctance to completely avoid using them in contexts that seemed to impart some platonic meaning was not a concession to the larger issue of finding the nominalism too restrictive and unfruitful for the discourse at hand.¹³

It is though easy to sympathize with Goodman in his unwillingness to go down the path of countless scores of misguided idealists who think vague pronouncements of ill-defined objects sufficiently describe the ontology at hand, especially when it is so often combined with even more poorly defined cognition in the face of those ill-defined objects. His rigor and his consistency are to be admired. But alas the proof of the pudding is in the eating and we need not only flavor but nutrition. Unfortunately Goodman gives us neither. The question that is to be answered in aesthetics is a simple but thorny one: what is that happens when I experience an artwork? Goodman's theory commits few glaring mistakes to which we might be able to point our fingers, but that is only because it also takes few chances.

This is due to the fact that Goodman consistently and methodically applied his antecedent metaphysical commitments that then delimited his epistemological constructs, which, in turn, further affected his terminology and concepts available to him in his aesthetics. This is seen in the restrictions on such concepts as intensional and intentional objects, the forbidding of properties, the prohibition of referencing general terms or fictive entities, the elimination of non-semantic meanings, the denial of natural symbols, the lack of a central role for emotion, and the denial of art's relation to universal truth. It was so easy, each step along the way, to assent and say "yes". Each step was reasonable and each alternative was unacceptable. And yet at the end of all those forks in the road, we find ourselves in a terrain that is, yes, clean and without the stench of a "crowded slum", but it is also a terrain

¹³ Cf. discussions in Chapters 2.4 and 9.5. In the discussion on classes, I listed the various ways that the word "class" was used by Goodman in ways that seemed to import non-nominalist parsing, and in the section on expression I have done the same with the word "property". The point to these discussions was to note that while Goodman is claiming to maintain a strict nominalism, it is questionable whether he was also not also importing some degree of Platonist reading into a context that would have been even less amenable to the demands of the discourse if it had language that did not import such meaning.

sterile to the point of absurdity. Surely the aesthetic experience bears more fruit than Goodman is willing to account for, and his parsimonious approach and his careful analysis, while not committing any obvious blunders, also does not yield an explanation. A theory must have sufficient explanatory power for the complexity of the discourse at hand. Unfortunately for Goodman, as for the rest of us, the discourse at hand is quite complex and a successful analysis might require a less cautious hand.