THE PROBLEM OF THICK REPRESENTATION
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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is twofold, to: (1) define the problem of thick representation and (2) show that the problem is a puzzle for representation rather than a puzzle for a specific art form or art in general, as has previously been suggested. In the course of identifying and formulating the problem I shall demonstrate why the solution proposed thus far fails to solve either the artistic problem at which it is aimed or the representational problem I define. I conclude by indicating two promising directions in which a solution might be found and by explaining the philosophical and critical significance of finding a solution.

KEY WORDS: Art, Cognitive Value, Literature, Painting, Representation

1. Conspicuous Representation

In "Realism and Representation: The Case of Rembrandt's Hat", Michael Morris uses Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait with Two Circles* (1660) to illustrate the concept of *conspicuous representation*. Conspicuous representations are 'ways of representing the real world which call attention to their own medium of representation'.[1] They are contrasted with self-effacing representations, in which 'an effort is made to prevent the medium calling attention to itself, or when the use of the medium follows some over-familiar formula.'[2] Significantly, conspicuous representations not only draw attention to their medium, but also to that which they represent. In the self-portrait, Rembrandt represents his hat with thick, greasy white paint that fails to cover the darker background completely. Morris maintains that it is impossible not to see Rembrandt's simple strokes of creamy paint *qua* paint, but that they nonetheless constitute an especially effective representation of a cloth hat. The representation is puzzling because it is both conspicuous (drawing attention to itself as paint) and vivid (revealing the character of the hat):

> artistic representations are often particularly effective at presenting the character of something in the real world precisely in virtue of calling attention to some feature of the medium of representation […].[3]

Morris is concerned with representational art in general rather than painting, but his paper is focused entirely on pictorial representation. In disambiguating conspicuous representation from related issues, for example, he distinguishes it from both Richard Wollheim's seeing-in and Robert Hopkins' inflected seeing-in.[4] The question of seeing-in concerns the way in which three-dimensional objects are represented on two-dimensional surfaces and is related to what E.H. Gombrich describes as 'the essential paradox of painting, which is that it represents depth on a surface.'[5] Morris furthermore names no other work of art in his paper (and does not refer to *Self-Portrait with Two Circles* by name), but the only other example discussed is of 'a *trompe l'oeil* violin painted on the back of a door in a great house', which seems to either refer to or have been inspired by William Michael Harnett's *Still Life – Violin and Music* (1888).[6] Morris' examples and argument thus focus on painting and the extension of his thesis of conspicuous representation to art in general is reliant on essentialist assumptions about works of art for which he fails to argue and which I do not wish to assume here. I shall therefore restrict his thesis to its strongest version, as a thesis about painting, and augment it with another example, Picasso's representation of a violin in *Violin and Grapes* (1912). Gombrich employs Picasso's still life as a paradigmatic example of a cubist work, describing the painting as representing the way in which one thinks of a violin, i.e. of different aspects simultaneously with some more distinct than others.[7] In Morris' terms, *Violin and Grapes* both draws attention to a feature of the representation – the juxtaposition of shapes on the canvas – and presents the character of real violins. I shall

leave the question of whether the cubist style is particularly suited to conspicuous representation open.

Morris distinguishes between the psychological and philosophical questions raised by the phenomenon of conspicuous representation and restricts his interest to the latter. He sets out *the problem of conspicuous representation* in terms of the truth of both of the following two contradictory propositions:

(A)   Good conspicuous representations enable us to understand the world as it is in itself.[8]

(B)   Conspicuous representations can only enable us to understand the world as it stands to their own means of representation.[9]

Rembrandt and Picasso's respective works seem to tell us something about real cloth hats and real violins (A), but the fact that they draw attention to the thickly-applied paint and carefully-arranged shapes on the canvases suggests that they can only tell us about hats and violins in relation to textures and shapes (B). The problem that Morris sets out to solve is thus about the cognitive value of conspicuous representation.

Before casting the problem in my own terms and examining Morris's solution, there are two points about his example that require clarification. If one compares *Self-Portrait with Two Circles* with the self-portrait Rembrandt completed earlier in the same year, *Self-Portrait at the Easel* (1660), he appears to be wearing a similar or identical hat.[10] The comparison between the representations of the hat in each painting serves as a nice illustration of Morris' point. One does not need to see the actual painting in Kenwood House to realise that the white paint in *Self-Portrait with Two Circles* 'is applied thickly, almost in slabs' in a way that draws attention to the brushstrokes on the canvas.[11] Rembrandt was, however, in the habit of leaving some parts of his paintings crudely depicted in comparison with the rest, creating an unfinished appearance. Gombrich uses the example of *Jan Six* (1654), where Rembrandt 'left the hand in the glove as a mere sketch' in contrast to the rest of his friend, who is depicted in lifelike detail.[12] The question of whether Rembrandt is attempting to draw attention to the medium of painting in *Self-Portrait with Two Circles* or is, as Gombrich puts it, exercising his right to decide when the painting is finished is not, however, relevant to Morris' thesis, which excludes both artistic intention and the expression of emotion or attitudes as relevant.[13] A detailed discussion of artistic technique is beyond the scope of this paper, but the contrast between Rembrandt's hat and Six's gloved hand offers a ready answer. Although there is a sense in which both representations are crudely sketched rather than finely detailed, the hat – due to the features identified by Morris – draws attention to the paint in a way that the hand does not. My conclusion is that the property of being unfinished – however that is construed – is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition of conspicuous representation.

The second point concerns what Morris calls *reflexive representations*, 'representations which are concerned to represent features of their own medium of representation: paintings in which painters are at work painting, for example.'[14] Unlike *Self-Portrait at the Easel*, *Self-Portrait with Two Circles* does not depict Rembrandt actually at work – he has turned away from his canvas and adopted a pose – but there is nonetheless a sense in which the painting draws attention to its medium of representation in a way that *Jan Six* does not. The point is better illustrated by paradigmatic examples of reflexive representations, such as Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) and Magritte's *Attempting the Impossible* (1928). Morris distinguishes the issue raised by conspicuous representation from the issues raised by reflexive representation. Once again, comparison can be employed to offer evidence for his claim. The way in which the representation of the hat in *Self-Portrait with Two Circles* and the representation of Velázquez painting a portrait in *Las Meninas* draw attention to the medium of painting is entirely different. My conclusion is that the property of being reflexive is neither a sufficient nor necessary condition for conspicuous representation.

2. Poetic Representation

In *The Event of Literature*, Terry Eagleton identifies a paradox characteristic of the linguistic medium of representation, which he refers to variously as: 'the idea of the self-flaunting sign', the 'paradox of the poetic sign', and the paradox of 'the dual nature of language'.[15] Unlike Morris, Eagleton is not setting out a problem preparatory to presenting one or more solutions, but articulating a paradox that is at least partly constitutive of the poetic or literary medium of representation. The paradox nonetheless poses a problem for a specific literary genre – literary realism – and my discussion of Eagleton's work will focus on this problem. Eagleton introduces the idea of the self-flaunting sign while attempting to delineate a plausible concept of literature, noting the difference between obtrusive (or conspicuous) and self-effacing literary styles, typified by authors such as Flaubert and Hemingway respectively. In a manner reminiscent of Morris' treatment of reflexive representations, Eagleton is quick to point out that the obtrusive style cannot be reduced to self-referentiality and quotes Britain's Banking Act 1979 as an example of a text that has failed to attract poetic interest despite its explicit self-reference.[16] He explores the obtrusive style by articulating the paradoxical nature of the referential relations of the self-flaunting or poetic sign (where the latter appears to be a sub-category of the former). The poetic use of language appears to both loosen the link between word and world (by drawing attention to the poem as a representation) and increase the referential power of the words (by means of its formal density).[17] Eagleton regards the paradox of the poetic sign as the paradigm of a more basic paradox of the linguistic sign:

> There is a paradox involved in the dual nature of language. This is the fact that the more rigorously one specifies, the more general possibilities one evokes. To depict a thing in all its singularity means laying language on thick; but this then swaddles the thing in a dense web of connotations and allows the imagination to play freely around it.[18]

The paradox is caused by the ambiguity of meaning, the combination of denotation and connotation essential to linguistic representation. As Eagleton's initial name for the paradox suggests, this ambiguity is not exclusive to linguistic signs (or linguistic representations). A picture of a bulldog can signify both a breed of dog and a nation state. The ambiguity may be more prominent in linguistic signs, however, due to the necessary absence of resemblance, i.e. "bulldog" resembles neither a bulldog nor a nation, but a picture of a bulldog standardly resembles an actual bulldog. Eagleton's concern in his book is restricted to linguistic signs so he is not required to make a more general claim – but I shall return to this question in §3. The paradox of the linguistic sign is exacerbated in poetry, but is symptomatic of the poetic sign rather than problematic: 'The more thickly textured the poem's language, the more it becomes a thing in its own right, yet the more it can gesture beyond itself.'[19] For Eagleton, the paradox only becomes a problem in the genre of literary realism. The realist author attempts to represent the real world by means of language and creates a representation where 'what looks free-floating and particularised is covertly ordered into a more "typical" or generic set of fables, characters and situations.'[20] The relation between the particular and the general presents the following problem for the author:

> Because the general attitudes of a realist text are incarnate in its concrete particulars, those particulars need to be realised as compellingly as possible. Indeed, literature is the "thickest" description of reality that we have. Yet this may have the effect of undercutting the work's overall way of seeing, drawing the reader's eye from that to the details that instantiate it. The text needs to allude to more than itself, but not at the expense of the very specificity which renders such allusions pervasive. The concrete is the medium of the general, but can always end up obstructing it.[21]

The realist author aims to explore and develop general (or universal) subjects and themes by means of compelling concrete particulars. Flaubert, for example, explores the ethics of powerlessness by means of his thick descriptions of everyday domestic life in *Madame Bovary* (1856).[22] These thick descriptions generate their own interest, however, and this

interest is at odds with and can threaten to overwhelm or obstruct interest in the theme. The tension between particular and universal that realist authors must negotiate is supervenient on the tension between denotation and connotation in linguistic representation: in attempting to draw attention to the real world, authors employ thick descriptions that draw attention away from the real world to the medium of representation.

The problem for literary realism is similar to Morris' problem of conspicuous representation (which is consistent with Morris' claim that conspicuous representation occurs across all art forms) and I shall set out the problem in a way that mirrors Morris' formulation while remaining faithful to Eagleton's conception. Realist poets aim to represent the world as it is, i.e. in all its detail and complexity. In consequence, realist poetic representations are typically rich in formal features such as structure, morphology (the patterns of word formation), syntax (the rules of sentence formation), metre (the arrangement of words in regularly measured, patterned, or rhythmic lines or verses), and tropes (all literary or rhetorical devices that use words in other than their literal sense). These formal features draw attention to the poetic medium of representation. The philosophical problem arises with the apparent truth of both of the following contradictory propositions:

(1) Poetic representations of reality draw attention away from their medium of representation to the world.
(2) Poetic representations of reality draw attention away from the world to their medium of representation.

I shall call this the problem of *poetic representation*.

3. Thick Representation

Thus far I have discussed two kinds of artistic representation, conspicuous and poetic. My concern is with modes of representation rather than art forms, however, so the kinds in which I am interested are pictorial representation and linguistic representation, which I define as:

(1) Pictorial representation: the *representans*, a picture (either a painting or a photograph), represents the *representatum*, an object (either physical or abstract), by means of depiction.
(2) Linguistic representation: the *representans*, a series of words (either written or spoken), represents the *representatum*, an object (either physical or abstract), by means of description.

Drawing on Eagleton's claims that poetic language is thick in texture and literary language the thickest description of reality available, I shall apply Gilbert Ryle's thick/thin distinction to representation. Recall that Morris distinguishes between conspicuous representations, which draw attention to their medium of representation, and self-effacing representations, which draw attention away from their medium of representation. Morris notes two ways in which a representation can be self-effacing: either the artist makes an effort to prevent the medium from drawing attention to itself or the artist employs an over-familiar formula. In the latter case, representations draw attention away from their medium of representation by employing well-established conventions that do not require interpretation or are so familiar that interpretation is automatic. With this in mind, I employ the thick/thin distinction as follows:

(a) THICK REPRESENTATION: a representation that draws attention to its *representans*, i.e. to the medium of representation.
(b) THIN REPRESENTATION: a self-effacing representation that draws attention to its *representatum*, i.e. to the subject of representation.

There are four points to note about this distinction. First, both Morris' conspicuous representations and Eagleton's poetic representations are thick representations. Second, the thick/thin distinction is gradational rather than categorical. Third, thickness and thinness are antagonistic properties such that a representation cannot be both thick and thin and the extent to which a representation is thick is inversely proportional to the extent to which it is

thin. Finally, the distinction is neutral with respect to artistic representation. Thickness may be a necessary or a sufficient condition of artistic representation, but classification as art or non-art is beyond the scope of the problem in which I am interested.[23]

My concern in this paper is with the cognitive value of representations, which I define as follows:

> COGNITIVE VALUE: a representation is cognitively valuable to the extent that it provides knowledge of the world as it is in itself.

My definition employs Morris' contrast between *knowledge of the world as it is in itself* and *knowledge of the world as it stands to the particular medium of representation*. I do not deny that the latter is knowledge or has cognitive value; it is simply not the kind of cognitive value in which I am interested here. Returning to my example in §1, no violin – not even one that has been disassembled – looks like Picasso's thick representation of a violin in *Violin and grapes*. Similarly, Erich Auerbach makes the following observation concerning a passage in chapter twelve of the second part of *Madame Bovary*:

> This is not at all a naturalistic representation of consciousness. Natural shocks occur quite differently. The ordering hand of the writer is present here, deliberately summing up the confusion of the psychological situation in the direction toward which it tends of itself – the direction of "aversion to Charles Bovary."[24]

Auerbach is commenting on a specific passage, but the ordering hand of the writer is obvious in most, if not all, thick linguistic representations. The relation I am proposing between thickness/thinness and cognitive value (as defined above) is thus:

(i)   The cognitive value of a representation is directly proportional to its thinness.
(ii)   The cognitive value of a representation is inversely proportional to its thickness.

If (i) and (ii) are correct, then one would expect thick representations to be poor vehicles for providing knowledge about the world as it is. The comparison of thick and thin representations of a similar *representatum* suggests that this is not always the case. Consider the following comparison, the pictorial pair taken from Kendall Walton:[25]

(A)   *Representatum*: the horror of war;
         thick representation: Goya's "Even Worse" (1810), part of his *The Disasters of War*;
         thin representation: Timothy H. O'Sullivan's photograph, *Death on a Misty Morning* (1866).
(B)   *Representatum*: Dublin on 16th June 1904;
         thick representation: Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922);
         thin representation: *The Irish Times* for 16th June 1904.

It seems that in at least some cases thick representations can have a higher cognitive value than corresponding thin representations. Gombrich and Auerbach both gesture towards this phenomenon in their respective commentaries on *Violin and grapes* and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*:

(I)   'And yet this strange medley of images represents more of the "real" violin than any simple snapshot or meticulous painting could ever contain.'[26]
(II)   'In both excurses we are dealing with attempts to fathom a more genuine, a deeper, and indeed a more real reality'.[27]

Recall from §1 that the problem Morris is seeking to solve is *how artistic representations are often particularly effective at presenting the character of something in the real world precisely in virtue of calling attention to some feature of the medium of representation*. That is the problem of conspicuous representation. Recall from §2 that the problem Eagleton identified for the realist author was that in attempting to draw attention to the real world, he or she employs thick descriptions that draw attention away from the real world to the medium of representation. This is the problem of poetic representation. Both the phenomena of conspicuous representation and poetic representation are instantiations of thick

representation as defined above. The problem with which I am concerned, the problem of thick representation, can be set out in the form of a paradox containing three propositions for whose plausibility I have argued, but which are nonetheless mutually inconsistent:

(1) Thick representations draw attention to their *representans*.
(2) Drawing attention to the *representatum* is a necessary condition of cognitive value.
(3) Some thick representations are cognitively valuable.

4. Morris' Solution

Morris sets out the problem of conspicuous representation in terms of the following pair of contradictory propositions:

(A) *Good conspicuous representations enable us to understand the world as it is in itself.*
(B) *Conspicuous representations can only enable us to understand the world as it stands to their own means of representation.*

He claims that both propositions are true and solves the problem by demonstrating that (A) and (B) are not contradictory by means of a third proposition:

(C) Conspicuous representations enable us to understand the world as it is in itself *as it stands to their own means of representation*.[28]

Morris maintains that (C) shows not only the point of conspicuous representation, but the point of artistic (as opposed to non-artistic) representation.[29] Morris reaches (C) by returning to the question of the cognitive value of conspicuous representation and amending (Cog) to (Cog2):

(Cog) The basic virtue of conspicuous representation is that it enables us to understand the world.[30]
(Cog2) The basic virtue of conspicuous representation is that it reveals what it represents *as the object of its own medium of representation*.[31]

By *the object of its own medium of representation* Morris means that the conspicuous representation reveals the opportunities and challenges that the particular *representatum* poses for the particular *representans* and the way in which they are exploited and overcome by the artist. In conspicuous representations, 'we are forced to reconsider the relation between the medium and the object of representation'.[32] In other words, Morris has amended his initial claim that *Self-Portrait with Two Circles* and *Violin and Grapes* enable us to understand cloth hats and violins to the claim that the respective paintings enable us to understand the opportunities and challenges cloth hats and violins present for painters.

The revised proposition (C) is clearly true, but equally clearly an unsatisfactory solution to the problem. First, (Cog2) verges on the trivial: paintings that draw attention to their *representans* do enable us to understand the opportunities and challenges the *representatum* presents to the painter, but so do self-effacing pictorial representations. Even the most self-effacing representation represents a physical or abstract object and in so doing reveals its *representatum* as the object of its *representans*. When one looks at *Death on a Misty Morning* or – to take a photograph that represents colours accurately and is thus less likely to draw attention to its *representans* – Kevin Carter's *Struggling Girl* (1993) one is not under the illusion that one is actually in the presence of the casualties of war and famine depicted. The only obvious exception to this rule is *trompe l'oeil*, which seems to have the potential to be completely self-effacing, at least on initial viewing. If one grants this, then aside from *trompe l'oeil* representations, (Cog2) – and therefore (C) – are true of most representations, even if conspicuous representations may provide a more sophisticated understanding than self-effacing representations.

Second, compare the violin in *Violin and Grapes* with, for example, Frans Hals' more readily-recognisable violin in *Daniel van Aken Playing the Violin* (1640). Hals' representation of a violin provides an accurate depiction of what it is like to see a real violin from a particular

angle and an accurate depiction of real motion (Van Aken's light touch with the bow) in a static medium. Picasso's representation of a violin looks, as I mentioned in §1, nothing like a real violin, but the effect of presenting the violin from several angles at once enables the understanding to which Gombrich alludes, mentioned in §3. The different understanding of violins enabled by Hals and Picasso cannot be explained by attributing (C) to Picasso's work because *Violin and Grapes* enables more than an understanding of the relationship between violins and painting. (A) is more appropriate than (C) because *Violin and Grapes* enables us to understand the various constitutive properties of the concept violin, i.e. violins as they are. By contrast, (C) is more appropriate in describing the cognitive value of Hals' work because *Daniel van Aken Playing the Violin* enables us to understand the perspectival problem of representing an object (the neck of the violin) that is pointed at the viewer, which is solved by foreshortening.

In summary, Morris' solution to the problem of conspicuous representation is unsatisfactory because although it is true, it fails to account for the cognitive value of conspicuous representations in two related ways: by failing to distinguish the cognitive value of conspicuous representations from self-effacing representations and by making an erroneously deflationary claim about conspicuous representations. An application of Morris' solution to the problem of conspicuous representation to the problem of thick representation would involve a straightforward rejection of the second proposition (drawing attention to the *representatum* is a necessary condition of cognitive value) on the basis that drawing attention to the *representans* is cognitively valuable in the sense of (Cog2), i.e. revealing the *representatum* as the object of the *representans*. As such, the criticism I have made of the conspicuous representation solution can be reiterated: (Cog2) is neither a satisfactory account of the cognitive value of conspicuous representations nor a satisfactory account of the cognitive value of thick representations.

5. New Solutions?

As noted in §1, Morris differentiates conspicuous representation from both seeing-in and inflected seeing-in. The problems of thick representation and seeing-in are similarly different, but Hopkins' inflected seeing-in and Michael Newall's related imbrication are nonetheless suggestive of a resolution to the paradox with which I am concerned. Seeing-in refers to the 'twofoldness' of the visual experience of pictures as contrasted with the visual experience of objects.[33] Wollheim's proposal is that unlike seeing, for example, a cloth hat, seeing a painting of a cloth hat involves seeing both the surface of the painting and the cloth hat "in" that painted surface. He initially conceived of twofoldness in terms of two simultaneous experiences, but his subsequent conception of a single experience with two aspects has become the standard account.[34] Hopkins employs Dominic McIver Lopes' distinction between the *design* of a picture and the *scene* visible in the picture.[35] According to Lopes, design refers to 'those visible surface properties in virtue of which a picture depicts what it does.'[36] Design is thus what Morris is attending to when he writes of seeing Rembrandt's simple strokes of creamy paint *qua* paint. Hopkins claims that inflected seeing-in occurs when 'what is seen in a surface includes properties a full characterization of which needs to make reference to that surface's design'.[37] He uses Rembrandt's sketch of Jan Cornelisz Sylvius (1646) as an example of inflected seeing-in, stating that one does not just see a hand in the sketch, but a hand constituted by strokes of ink. The contrast with seeing-in seems to be something like this. In seeing-in, one sees, for example, the gesture of a right hand (scene) in the photograph (design) of Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* (1936) and that gesture can be characterised without reference to the paper or emulsion used to produce the photographic print. In inflected seeing-in, one sees the gesture of a left hand (scene) in Rembrandt's sketch (design), but the gesture cannot be fully-characterised without referring to the ink on the paper, specifically the brushstrokes that flow upwards (in contrast to the downward flow of the strokes constituting the robe) and outwards (towards the viewer). In other words, in order to characterise the properties of the *representatum*

(moving hand) fully, one must refer to the properties of the *representans* (way the ink has been applied to the paper), i.e. one must see the ink-strokes *qua* ink-strokes in order to see not only the hand, but the gesture that the hand is making.

Newall proposes a particular type of inflected seeing-in, which he calls *imbrication*, in his discussion of the relationship between seeing-in and transparency/opacity.[38] Imbrication indicates 'the appearance of a picture's subject matter when textural features of brushwork are attributed to the surface of the subject matter rather than the picture.'[39] Imbrication thus occurs when the features of the brushwork, for example the thick, greasy slabs applied by Rembrandt, are attributed to the represented cloth hat (scene/subject matter) rather than the canvas (design/picture). Newall takes another of Rembrandt's self-portraits – *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul* (1661) – as an example, noting the way in which the brushstrokes depict Rembrandt's turban, face, and hair:

> Where tone and texture are laid down in the same strokes, as we see in those sections of Rembrandt's self-portrait that I have mentioned, the elements of the depicted texture and actual texture will be similar in size and orientation, and so they are attributed to a single surface, that of the subject matter. Here the textures of the paint appear imbricated with the subject matter in its own space. This creates the appearance of a composite texture, comprised of the texture that the picture is depicted as having through the manipulation of tone, and the texture of the paint, which we also attribute to the depicted surface.[40]

Newall notes that this experience is not twofold in Wollheim's sense and that different parts of the same painting may sustain distinct experiences of imbrication and transparency.[41] In what Newall attributes to analytic caution, Hopkins restricts his claims about inflected seeing-in to the sketch of Jan Cornelisz Sylvius, but that sketch in particular and the phenomenon of imbrication more generally seem to offer paradigmatic examples of thick representation, i.e. representations that draw attention to their *representans*. It is also interesting that Morris and Hopkins employ works by Rembrandt independently of each other and Morris and Newall employ self-portraits by Rembrandt independently of each other. There is something in that artist's style, it seems, which succeeds in providing knowledge of the world as it is in itself in spite of – or perhaps in virtue of – drawing attention to the *representans* of his works. As such, the research on inflected seeing-in suggests that drawing attention to the *representatum* is not a necessary condition of cognitive value for paintings and sketches. The question of whether this approach can be applied to linguistic representation and thus provide a solution to the problem of thick representation remains to be explored.

Nelson Goodman claims that resemblance is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition of representation.[42] The relationship between a representation and that which it represents is denotation: 'A picture that represents – like a passage that describes – an object refers to and, more particularly, *denotes* it.'[43] Denotation is contrasted with exemplification and the relationships are explained in terms of labelling and sampling. Any representation can, for example, be used to denote redness, but only a red thing can be used as a sample of redness.[44] "Red" thus denotes red in virtue of the referential relation between the word and the colour whereas a tailor's swatch of cloth exemplifies red in virtue of being red, i.e. possessing the property of redness like the bolt of material of which it is a sample. The red swatch also refers to red, however, and exemplification is possession (of redness) plus reference (to redness).[45] In other words, 'denotation implies reference between two elements in one direction while exemplification implies reference between the two in both directions.'[46] Reference in "red" occurs in one direction (from the word to the colour) and reference in the tailor's swatch in two directions (from the swatch to the colour and from the colour to the swatch). I have used "red" and a tailor's swatch as convenient examples of denotation and exemplification respectively, but I could equally have used the drawing ╬ and "red" typed in red font instead. In this case, the former would refer to red without possessing the property of redness and the latter would both refer to the colour and possess the colour.

The problem of thick representation is concerned with how, for example, Rembrandt's slabs of creamy white paint provide knowledge about cloth hats in spite of drawing attention to themselves *qua* paint. Exemplification, understood in terms of possession, is suggestive of an explanation. The representation of Rembrandt's hat in *Self-Portrait at the Easel* appears to be a case of denotation, i.e. the paint on the canvas denotes the cloth hat. In *Self-Portrait with Two Circles*, the paint on the canvas not only denotes the cloth hat, but appears to possess certain properties in virtue of which it provides more knowledge of the clothiness of the hat. Goodman employs his conception of exemplification to explain expression, claiming: 'What is expressed is metaphorically exemplified.'[47] What is expressed is therefore possessed and he is explicit that 'the property belongs to the symbol itself'.[48] Expression and exemplification are both distinct from and opposed to representation and description: 'a passage or picture may exemplify or express without describing or representing, and even without being a description or representation at all'.[49] Goodman summarises his conception of expression as displaying rather than depicting or describing (the means of communication employed by representation).[50] In these terms, one might say that Rembrandt's painting depicts the hat and displays its clothiness.

One of the appealing features of Goodman's theory is that it is intended to apply to all media of representation and – perhaps more readily than answers that may emerge from inflected seeing-in – can be just as easily brought to bear on linguistic representation. The naturalistic representation of consciousness in *Madame Bovary* upon which Auerbach comments both refers to Emma Bovary's thoughts and expresses her aversion to her husband:

> But it was above all at mealtimes that she could bear it no longer, in that little room on the ground floor, with the smoking stove, the creaking door, the oozing walls, the damp floor-tiles; all the bitterness of life seemed to be served to her on her plate, and, with the steam from the boiled beef, there rose from the depths of her soul other exhalations as it were of disgust. Charles was a slow-eater; she would nibble a few hazel-nuts, or else, leaning on her elbow, would amuse herself making marks on the oilcloth with the point of her table-knife.[51]

What is of particular interest here is that the passage quoted contains no explicit aversion to Charles Bovary – the only mention of him is the neutral comment on his eating – but the descriptions of the room, the food, and Emma's actions combine to express her aversion. Exemplification may thus be able to demonstrate that drawing attention to the *representatum* is not a necessary condition of cognitive value in either pictorial or linguistic representation. If exemplification is to provide a solution to the problem of thick representation, however, the way in which displays provide knowledge of the world as it is in addition to – or in virtue of – depiction and description will require detailed explanation.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to identify a problem rather than provide a solution and to field questions rather than answers. If my argument that there is a single problem underlying the problems of conspicuous and poetic representation is convincing, then the most important question has yet to be answered: why does the problem of thick representation matter? There are three answers to this question, each of which is both independent of the others and significant enough to warrant attention on its own merit. I list them in order of ascending ambition. First, at least some thick representations are also works of art. A solution to the problem of thick representation would therefore provide an answer to the much-debated question of the cognitive value of art or the dispute concerning aesthetic cognitivism. Thick representations provide knowledge in a manner that is aesthetically relevant because it is precisely in virtue of drawing attention to the *representans* that they provide knowledge of the *representatum*. Second, if – as I have claimed – the problem of thick representation is not a puzzle about one or more art forms, but about representation *per se*, then a solution would shed light on the mechanism by which representation operates. That solution may involve an explication of the relationship

between representation and expression, a perennial issue in both philosophy and criticism, or involve a new direction for research, exploring the similarities between texture in pictorial and linguistic representation. Finally, solving the problem of the association of cognitive value with thick representation has the potential to offer a new theory of representation, which could be applied to both artistic and cultural criticism. Thick representation is thus not only a genuine problem, but one whose solution is well worth pursuing.

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[1] Michael Morris, "Realism and Representation: The Case of Rembrandt's Hat," *European Journal of Philosophy 23* (2013), 909-932, 912.

[2] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 922.

[3] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 909.

[4] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 910.

[5] E.H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 16th edition (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 575.

[6] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 925.

[7] Gombrich, *Story of Art*, 574.

[8] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 913.

[9] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 914.

[10] The same may also be true of the subsequent self-portrait, *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul* (1661), which I discuss in §5.

[11] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 909.

[12] Gombrich, *Story of Art*, 422-423.

[13] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 911 en.6.

[14] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 915 en.17.

[15] Terry Eagleton, *The Event of Literature* (London: Yale, 2012): 37, 38 & 84.

[16] Eagleton, *Event of Literature*, 36.

[17] Eagleton, *Event of Literature*, 37-38.

[18] Eagleton, *Event of Literature*, 84.

[19] Eagleton, *Event of Literature*, 205.

[20] Eagleton, *Event of Literature*, 15.

[21] Eagleton, *Event of Literature*, 86.

[22] The thick-thin terminology Eagleton employs is from: Gilbert Ryle, "The Thinking of Thoughts: What is 'Le Penseur' Doing?" in *Volume II: Collected Essays 1929-1969* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1971), 480-96.

[23] Morris treats conspicuous representation as a sufficient condition of artistic representation in his paper ("Realism and Representation," 925). I am inclined to the view that thick representation is a necessary condition for artistic representation.

[24] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton, 2003), 485.

[25] Kendall Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism," *Critical Inquiry 11* (1984), 246-277: 247-248.

[26] Gombrich, *Story of Art*, 574.

[27] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 540.

[28] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 928.

[29] Morris, "Realism and Representation, 923. This is consistent with his treatment of conspicuous representation as a sufficient condition of artistic representation. See: en.25.

[30] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 912.

[31] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 921.

[32] Morris, "Realism and Representation," 922.

[33] Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980 [1990]), 215.

[34] Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 46-77.

[35] Hopkins, "Inflected Pictorial Experience," 155.
[36] Dominic McIver Lopes, *Sight and Sensibility: Evaluating Pictures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005 [2007]), 25.
[37] Hopkins, "Inflected Pictorial Experience," 158.
[38] Michael Newall, "Is Seeing-In a Transparency Effect?" *British Journal of Aesthetics 55* (2015), 131-156: 152.
[39] Newall, "Transparency Effect?" 151.
[40] Newall, "Transparency Effect?" 148.
[41] Newall, "Transparency Effect?" 147-148.
[42] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, 2nd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 4-5.
[43] Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 5.
[44] Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 58-59.
[45] Goodman*, Languages of Art*, 53.
[46] Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 59.
[47] Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 85.
[48] Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 85.
[49] Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 92.
[50] Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 93.
[51] Auerbach's translation of Flaubert in: Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 483.