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## Verisimilitude, Conventions, and Beliefs\*

Menachem Brinker

I

A MAJORITY of modern theorists clearly shares the conviction that both the creation and the enjoyment of works of art are governed by the ability to use and understand various sets of conventions. Equally prevalent is the view that rejection of a specific set of conventions necessarily entails the adoption of another set.

Artistic representations of reality make it clear that the conventionality of art stretches far beyond the particular conventions specific to a given genre, school, or period. Underlying conventions are recognized: in the case of figurative painting, the convention of representing three-dimensional objects on a flat surface is viewed as one; in the case of theater it would include the convention according to which the stage is separated from the hall and set apart as the location upon which an imaginary action is to be projected. Such a basic convention in fiction would be the license to use ordinary language without making commitments to the existence of people and events referred to by this language.

Nevertheless, tremendous developments have taken place within the borders delineated by these basic conventions, and these have been persistently described as transitions from more to less conventional art. Long before the term *convention* was introduced into criticism, such developments were described in terms of the oppositions between the organic and the mechanical, the natural and the artificial. Processes such as the discovery of perspective in Renaissance painting, rejection of the classicist unities of time and place in the theater, or the rise of the realistic novel were—and are—still described today as transitions from more conventional forms to less conventional (or more natural) ones.

The question implied is the following one: Is it the case that some parts of art and literature are really more convention ruled, while other parts are really freer of this rule, or is it the case that an impres-

\* The author thanks Rela Mazali for her help in preparing the English version of this essay.

sion of freedom from artistic and literary conventions is only an illusion projected by the reader or the viewer?

The question is especially pertinent to the issue of realism in literature. Realism tried to create an impression of fidelity to the real world by stressing prior representations' thorough dependence upon conventions of style and genre. Critical polemics as well as parodistic elements incorporated into the fiction itself joined forces to expose the artificiality of antecedent conventions of style, thematic preference, plot construction, and motivation. Realist writers were interested in displaying their rejection of internal literary models and their preference for models taken from "reality itself." They were making a persistent and extensive attempt to demonstrate their subscription to what Johnson had called an "appeal from criticism to nature." True, some of them did admit to the systematic use of specific devices intended to create an impression of lifelikeness or truth. These devices were, however, thought of as the exact opposite of conventions.

Quite a few theorists and historians have accepted Realism's self-appraisal and accordingly assume the existence of types of art that are more natural and less conventional than others.<sup>2</sup> More fashionable today, though, is the stance of theorists and philosophers who reject this self-appraisal. They consider "realistic" or "naturalistic" representations to be no less conventional than any other artistic representation. The impression that they are somehow more "natural" is an illusion, the existence of which must be explained in terms of how the reader-viewer is historically situated vis-à-vis the conventions used by a given representation. The desired effect of realistic representations—verisimilitude—is brought about through a peculiar match or clash between the conventions used and the artistic or literary habits guiding the reader or viewer.

Various descriptions of this process have been offered, some of them mutually contradictory. One such description attributes the illusions of verisimilitude and naturalness to the reader-viewer's thoroughgoing familiarity with the conventions of representation used by the work. Such familiarity breeds an unawareness of the existence of these conventions. Another description sees the impression of "lifelikeness" as deriving from the use of completely new and unfamiliar modes of representation. The reader-viewer, who perceives the breakdown of an antecedent, standard mode, is impressed with the freshness of the new mode and accordingly sees the representation as less conventional and more "lifelike."

The following is an analysis of two such contradictory representatives of this stance on realistic representation. I will attempt

out the shortcomings and limitations of these two theories. Throughout, I will be making the following basic claim: Any given impression of naturalness or of conventionalization is, obviously, dually relative—relative to the basic conventions of the art form and also relative to the habits and expectations of its audience. This impression, however, is not completely illusionary. Impressions of relative naturalness or conventionalization may be fixed along objective coordinates and justified in terms of objective criteria. However, the key to such an ordering is yet a third factor to which these impressions are related, a factor that has been too easily ignored by modern theorists of art—the audiences' *beliefs* about the portion of reality being represented. These beliefs are clearly not formed only or mostly by artistic representations. It is precisely because of this that we cannot hope to describe impressions of verisimilitude as following exclusively from the way in which a reader-viewer is historically situated in regard to artistic conventions of representation.

## II

Modern philosophy's most consistent yet equally daring attempt to do away with the opposition of iconic versus conventional was made by the philosopher Nelson Goodman.<sup>3</sup> The dominant aesthetic interest motivating Goodman's theory was undoubtedly directed toward painting. His forceful, far-ranging arguments have, however, to do with all kinds of descriptions and depictions. In Goodman's view, the very notion of iconic representation is based upon an illusion. All pictorial representations are equally conventional, as the fact that they are representations can only be recognized after the completion of a complex learning process. When a viewer is completely familiar with the conventions incorporated by a given representation, he remains unaware of the fact that he had to learn to "read" this representation. This unawareness results in an illusion of iconicity (an illusion of the representation's "natural" or "absolute" resemblance to its model). As familiarity with modes of representation is an acquired quality, it should be possible, at least in principle, to change a viewer's impression as to the naturalness, iconicity, or conventionality of a given representation. Goodman is presupposing that this can be accomplished with no change in the viewer's beliefs about the models, since these beliefs themselves result from the conventions accepted as adequate for the model's representation.

Goodman's use of the predicate *realistic* can easily be shown to be quite far removed from standard usage. Critics often compare the

degrees of realism embodied by two works of art which incorporate the selfsame "standard" modes of representation, when one of them has idealized or deformed some of the features of the reality it represents. The points in question, in such cases, are the amount and accuracy of the information yielded by representations. The decree with which Goodman banishes "information yield" from its status as a component of realism is, at the very least, in direct opposition to accepted usage of the term.

Secondly, the notion of "familiarity" is extremely problematic. Should an expert Egyptologist consider an Impressionist exhibit less realistically representational than Egyptian art merely because of the fact that he is far more used to the ancient Egyptian modes of representation?

Thirdly, moments of crisis are accompanied by radical changes in the modes made use of by art in its representation of reality. In such cases, both audiences and critics are fully aware of the differences between the customary modes and the new ones. Parts of the community of art consumers (including the innovative artists themselves) actually see the new, unfamiliar modes as attaining higher degrees of realism. There are, in principle, two ways of explaining this phenomenon. The first is to say that the new modes of representation are easier to identify and simpler to decode. Such an explanation keeps Goodman's claim intact—we consider a given representation to be realistic not owing to the amount of information it yields but owing to the ease with which this information is obtained. On the other hand, this stance contradicts his view that inculcation or habit are what make modes of representation easy to decode. We are subsequently obliged to postulate some kind of inherent feature which makes the mode of representation easy to understand, a feature which we would almost certainly call "natural resemblance" or "iconicity." The second way to explain such transitions in views of what is considered realistic is to assume that the audience actually meets with considerable difficulties in understanding the new modes and the representation. However, these new modes are still seen as generating more realistic portrayals, and the effort invested in gaining command of them is accompanied by a willingness to modify prior views of extraartistic reality. In this case a sharp line is drawn between ease of understanding and "resemblance," and there is no doubt as to which side common usage of the term *realism* would take.

Banishing "iconicity" altogether, and making the impression of resemblance totally dependent upon habit, will necessarily lead to the following conclusion: not only can anything be a representation of anything else, it can also be a *realistic* representation of anything else.

Let's imagine we have raised a child from babyhood in a closed academy. We have let him see the landscape outside his window—the trees, the ground, the sky. Inside the academy we have displayed accurate pictures of this landscape where only the component of color has been changed: the trees are brown, the sky is green, and the ground is blue. When we finally free the grown child and show him regular color snapshots of the view, he will undoubtedly find them strange. He had been accustomed to representations depicting the view in a different manner. However, we have no reason to suppose that his wonder has anything to do with the "unrealistic" nature of the new color signs. We can just as easily describe this wonder as stemming from the "realism" of the new colors. The point that I am making here is the following: There is just as much speculation involved in the claim that no hard-core resemblances take part in our judgments on realism as there is in the opposite claim. The second claim, however, has a very strong intuitive appeal, which Goodman's stance lacks. Intuitively, something seems to be wrong with a view according to which anything can represent anything else *realistically*.

This discussion may seem to concern a term: Is there any point in divorcing the meaning assigned to the term *realism* from the way in which it is normally understood? Doesn't this tend to make the term superfluous? In fact, however, these differences of opinion have to do with the meanings assigned to various units of art history, and with the right to speak of varying degrees of conventionalization or naturalness in representations of reality. As I have already stated, Goodman's approach seems to me to offer an extremely speculative account of the relevant facts. The history of art and the history of literature present us with a finite series of ideograms for representing real objects, scenes, or themes. The assumption that almost anything can serve as a "realistic" pictorial representation or as a lifelike description of anything else constitutes a speculative claim. This claim is no better justified than the one according to which the emergence of new ways of representing is an impossibility, as the series of modes is already complete. At any rate, all of the existing modes contain a discernible trait which I would like to call their "iconic core" and which Gombrich calls "relational models."<sup>5</sup>

The various traditions of representation embodied in artistic genres or schools do much to facilitate the identification of such relational models. Once they are familiar and institutionalized, the conventions of given genres or schools become built-in parts of our expectation systems, making specific types of representational gaps completely irrelevant to judgments of realism, much in the same way as absence of color is seen as irrelevant to judgments of realism in bronze or marble

sculpture. Conventions direct us as to where we must look for the relational model, and they may accustom us to project absent details into the representation. When such processes result in our belief that an "absolute," "complete," or "natural" resemblance exists between the figure in the representation and its real model, we have in fact arrived at an illusion. There exists nothing that could be considered a real parallelism of details or features between painted figures and their models. Yet Gombrich has pointed this out without having to conclude that resemblance itself is an illusion. Conventions of representation define artistic traditions. Illusionistic art is inconceivable without them. Yet insofar as pictorial representation is concerned, traditions and conventions work through (or on the basis of the existence of) structural affinities between what is represented and what is seen. Therefore, these original relational models cannot be regarded as products of conventional traditions. What we see is posited by Gombrich as a factor which is indeed influenced by artistic representations of nature, but which may nevertheless be separated from them. It is also a factor that controls artistic representation and explains its evolution.<sup>6</sup>

This account differs enormously from the one given by Goodman. Goodman's analysis of resemblance and realism is made philosophically (as distinct from "commonsensibly") plausible by the general tendency prevalent in his thought to assimilate all kinds of *beliefs* to *representations*. Belief in the resemblance between a representation and its model is "inculcated" by the fact that the "literal or realistic or naturalistic system of representation is simply the customary one."<sup>7</sup> Goodman speaks of "judicious departure from a traditional system of representation."<sup>8</sup> Yet he has nothing to say about what makes it "judicious"; the new "frame of reference" achieved in such a departure is never connected, in his discussion, with any of the beliefs that viewers or critics may hold. Changes in standard systems of "representing" must somehow be explained in Goodman's account without allusion to changes in standard systems of "seeing." For Goodman, as opposed to Gombrich, "seeing" is completely inseparable from, as well as utterly dependent upon, "depicting." In the same way, beliefs about objects will tend to be derived from, and to mingle with, representations of these objects.

As I will shortly discuss a similar theory on the realist effect in literature, I shall, for the moment, delay my arguments against this metaphysical stand. Later on, I intend to clarify my reasons for finding it to be extremely sterile when applied to the history of art or literature.

### III

The arguments presented by Jakobson in the brilliant essay he wrote some sixty years ago were not meant to serve philosophical conventionalism.<sup>9</sup> However, they come very close to those presented by Goodman in their attempt to demonstrate that every opposition between the "conventional" and the "natural" is always totally relative to a given historical moment and to the established models of representation existing at that moment.

Jakobson's approach, however, is that of the historian. Like Gombrich, he too is interested in the issue of evolution, and in the occurrence of shifts from one mode of representation to another. He regards the aspiration toward realism as the broadest common denominator of almost all modern schools of art and literature. Each school challenges previous ones by claiming to achieve greater verisimilitude in the representation of reality (i.e., objects, scenery, human behavior, and so forth). Subsequently, modes of representation have changed rather rapidly in the course of the last two centuries. What is of the most importance to Jakobson, though, is the fact that each change establishes in turn a new model for realistic representation and consequently splits both critics and audiences into two respective camps: revolutionaries advocating the new model and conservatives supporting the old one. For the latter an impression of realism is derived from familiarity with established modes of representation, while deviations will be seen as the causes of "incorrect" representations. The revolutionaries derive this impression from the author's or artist's incorporation of new and unfamiliar modes of representation. Modes that are long established and familiar cause the object represented and the representation itself to be "known" rather than "sensed." Defamiliarization slows down the process of understanding and results in a conscious sensation or a vivid imaginative grasp of both the represented or described object and its representation or description. These are the sentiments harbored by those who support the new modes in each and every debate on realism.

Of course, Jakobson is well aware that the disputing parties do not, as a rule, cite their habits or the degree of their astonishment when such habits are frustrated as arguments for or against a particular mode of representation. They argue about the way in which a specific scene, action, or object should be represented, while taking assistance from various ideologies that concern the represented reality itself (war, love, childhood, light, volume, space). Yet he sees all of these arguments as secondary. Beliefs and ideologies supply means for the

rationalization and the justification of an attitude that has already been formed. Critics are rarely conscious of their real motives. These can only be discerned from the superior vantage point of the historian. The historian must supplant the critic's naive assumption that certain representations, descriptions, or portrayals of a given reality are in themselves closer to reality than others, with a historicistic understanding of the origins of all impressions of lifelikeness and realism.

An acquaintance with the evolution of Russian Formalism will help us in understanding the doctrinal background of this position. Taking up the challenge implied by Shklovsky, Jakobson was seeking an immanent explanation of changes in artistic norms. De-automatization and the rejuvenating force of defamiliarization were regarded by the formalists so highly owing to the fact that they could be identified as the interliterary and interartistic forces exclusively responsible for the shift of norms. It was only later that the formalists found it difficult to limit the importance of ideas and ideologies in literature to the role of justifying, post factum, changes of artistic norms. In Tynjanov's view, the need for breaking an automatized convention still constituted the most basic artistic need. Yet the direction taken in the course of the change, i.e., the choice of new norms and models (destined to become, in their turn, the new conventions), is influenced by ideas and ideologies existing within the other series of culture (science, philosophy, religion, and so forth). The Czech structuralist Jan Mukařovský went even farther in his refusal to ascribe a secondary role to the ideological developments outside of art. He saw the evolution occurring within each specific type of art as necessarily adjusting itself to the developments taking place in the other cultural series.<sup>10</sup>

However, Jakobson's phenomenology of realism suffers from yet another glaring fault, which no doctrinal amendments in formalism or structuralism can correct. The whole of his analysis rests on a fundamental equivocation of the term *realism*. Verisimilitude is, in fact, identified with the vivid and concrete presence of objects or images. There are no grounds whatsoever for accepting this equation. A musical score or an architectural design may be more perceivable to the perceiving parties, both as music or as architecture and as this specific piece of music or architecture, owing to their departure from familiar or conventional norms. Yet they don't raise the problem of verisimilitude. They can only be grasped as representations of reality, if at all, with the help of some kind of consciously acquired, specific symbolism. Literature, on the other hand, is immediately grasped as *representation*. People, objects, landscapes, at events that are de-

scribed may, therefore, be grasped as either close to life or remote from it. Accordingly, vividness of details and even relative completeness of description may work in either direction. Consequently, they may sometimes strengthen our impression that a certain fictional object is wholly fantastic. Vividness of detail and completeness of description are very often used in ordinary speech interchangeably with "realism." We should therefore do well to take great care in separating these submeanings of the term from verisimilitude, another of its submeanings. Verisimilitude may be described as the factor by which a representation is recognized as a possible model of a given (nonartistic) reality when the representation in question seems to us to be modeled upon this very reality.

#### IV

The remarks made by Jakobson, and at a later stage by Barthes, regarding the role of inessential details in creating effects of verisimilitude or "l'effet de réel" reveal the imminent dangers involved in such an equation of realism's two submeanings. The trait of focusing attention upon inessential details is seen by Jakobson as a standard technique, employed by nineteenth-century authors for deforming traditional "ideograms" and intensifying the illusion of realism. An example of this is Tolstoy's description of Anna Karenina's act of suicide, which focuses upon her purse several times, thus enhancing the representation's concreteness.

Without wishing to detract from the generalization itself, or from the example illustrating it, I find the account lacking. The purse is judged to be an inessential detail according to a norm set by another description of suicide—the description of poor Liza's suicide in the novel by Karamzin.<sup>11</sup> In Tolstoy's novel, however, it is very difficult to divorce this enriching detail from the reader's overall view of the heroine's conduct, and it is consequently impossible to see the detail as possessing a significance which is purely artistic. In this part of the novel, the heroine's state of mind is one of progressive and consistent alienation from the whole world. She gradually encloses herself within her own discourse. Anything outside of her fateful discourse with herself is strange and foreign. First the servants seem strange to her, then places become incomprehensible. Finally, the intimate article that she carries upon her person—the only companion taken along on her journey—appears as an obstruction to the last effort demanded of her body. Understandably, at this point, the reader grasps the purse as that which remains, the vestige of Anna's contact with external

reality, a contact which is in the process of becoming an oppressive annoyance. The inessential detail, then, is deeply embedded within what is essential to the description, and we would do well to remember that the theory of reflexes, as well as other aspects of mind-body relations, are subjects which are present in the novel's fictional world, and which constantly preoccupy several of its protagonists.

I am not making the claim that inessential details *always* possess significance which exceeds their artistic or rhetorical "lifelike" effect, or that they *always* and of *necessity* imply a new ideological view of the represented object. I merely wish to point out that this subject may be approached from two alternative directions (as may all of the issues raised in connection with realism): that of the representation's aesthetic effectiveness, its sensory freshness and vividness; and that of the degree of truthfulness with which the representation depicts reality, its degree of acceptability as a possible model of reality. There is no good reason to limit the "ideological" approach to a search for the "motivation" serving and covering an artistic need.

The issue of the inessential detail is the subject of an important paper by Roland Barthes.<sup>12</sup> In the course of this paper, Barthes retracts his formerly expressed opinion that each and every detail in a discourse serves some function in the structure of what is being related.<sup>13</sup> He now expressly identifies such "superfluous" details, intentionally connecting them with the creation of a "referential illusion." Static, descriptive notations that add nothing toward construction of the story's dynamic elements—i.e., characters or plot—create an impression of reality for the reader.

Barthes establishes what he himself calls "the mythological contradiction between the intelligible and the real,"<sup>14</sup> after the philosophies of Hegel and Sartre. The real asserts its existence including a nonsignifying aspect within itself, an aspect which is unnecessary to the structures of signification. Accordingly, fictional narrative also stresses the factuality of what is "real" by means of details that make no contribution to the overall intelligibility.

In fact, however, it is impossible to equate the whole of the "impression of reality" (*l'effet de réel*) created by literature with the philosophical concept designated by this term. The reader's impression that the objects represented in a work of literature are concrete and palpable is one that is established in the course of the reading process. Not all of the structures present in the tale and in what is being told are immediately present in each phase of the reading process. Therefore, the reader won't always be aware that specific details are "unnecessary" or "superfluous." The portions of text wasted on the creation of a "referential illusion" (i.e., Barthes's "inessential

"realistic motivation" (in those of Tomashevsky),<sup>15</sup> will only emerge as such from an analytical standpoint which surveys the whole of the work at the end of the reading process.

Furthermore, "the inessential detail" has a tendency to assume additional functions whose nature is not purely rhetorical. While aiding the creation of "an impression of reality," it simultaneously discloses the author's concept of what it is that creates such impressions, leaves its mark upon the "world" projected by the work, influences the style in which the work is written, and sometimes also discloses a general ideology behind the author's rhetorical decisions. Four-year-old Gadi tells the following tale: "When Rari (an imaginary friend) was *twenty-seven* he took me to the moon, and then we came back to Earth and built a tall building and we could see the moon from it." Rari's age is unimportant for purposes of the story, and was undoubtedly added for the rhetorical purpose of creating a factual impression. Yet by virtue of the very fact that it exists, we cannot help but assign it additional tasks: the narrator is revealing an opinion on the suitable age for responsibly escorting small boys to the moon.

The most important point to consider, though, is the following: The factor that Barthes calls "l'effet de réel" is actually capable of increasing the fantastic impression made by the palpably present image. Anna Karenina's suicide is not the only description that contains details which may be judged to be inessential (at least when compared with previous literary representations of similar themes). Dostoyevsky's devil too is made extremely concrete by the inessential details included in his portrayal. It is precisely because of this that he is so strange and so utterly fantastic, even as a devil, without losing an inkling of his vividness and his palpable presence as a delusory image.

The lesson to be learned from an analysis of the equivocation to which both Jakobson and Barthes fell victims is the following: The degree of perceptibility possessed by a represented object, and its "truth-representing force," are entirely different issues, of which we are forced, by our defective terminology, to speak jointly as "realism."

The perceptual or quasi-perceptual (i.e., imaginative) vividness of a literary description and its objects may be a function of the degree to which the description's modes of representation are new and unconventional ones. The ease with which a literary representation is "read" may be a function of the reader's familiarity with the relevant conventions of description. Yet these can induce the impression of verisimilitude only when they fit the reader's beliefs concerning the world or the aspect of the world that (he believes) is being portrayed. Some of the most careful studies of conventions' role and fate in

realism suffer from a lack of clarity on this point. To quote just two examples, this happens to both Boris Tomashevsky and Northrop Frye. Both of them insist upon the conventional nature of the basic units of literature (termed "motives" by Tomashevsky and "archetypal images" by Frye). Both recognize that realism attempts to disguise this conventionality through "realist motivation" or a "displacement of mythical themes." Yet neither takes account of the fact that once admitted, a norm such as plausibility cannot be contained in a secondary and negative role. It tends to act dynamically, becoming an independent pole which opposes the conventionality of literature's basic units. Once one acknowledges the role played by such a norm in adjusting literature to audiences' changing beliefs, one can no longer speak of "art reshaping itself from its own depths."<sup>16</sup>

Insofar as revisions of norms and conventions are made in an attempt to achieve greater verisimilitude (or greater "truth"), art and literature must constantly adjust themselves to the cultural developments surrounding them. That is why it is very rarely that a new mode of representation becomes familiar or standardized through repetition alone. The process of familiarization is usually connected to the entrenchment of the beliefs accompanying the new mode, those called upon to explain and justify it, or those that are derived from it. More often than not, conventionalization of such a mode will coincide with a growing acceptance of certain beliefs concerning the world.

## V

This discussion has been attempting to establish two fundamental claims. According to the first one, which is opposed to the stand taken by Nelson Goodman, familiarity with given conventions of representation cannot, on its own, produce impressions of "resemblance" or of "realism." A necessary condition for the production of such impressions is the representation's adjustment to *beliefs* held by the viewer or reader regarding the represented reality. For this very reason, periods of revolutionary change in prevalent beliefs about the world are frequently accompanied by the acknowledgment of new and unfamiliar modes of representation as more "realistic."

The second claim, made in opposition to Roman Jakobson's view, is that beliefs about the world or the represented reality, which are called upon to justify or condemn specific modes of representation, cannot be seen as a secondary phenomenon, covering or concealing "innate" tendencies toward conservatism and habit or, alternately, toward novelty and de-automatization.

To sum up, the "naive" belief in "realism," i.e., the belief that some literary and artistic representations are closer to reality than others owing to the fact that they are relatively freer of conventional models, cannot be ruled out a priori. Whenever a claim to this effect appears, it must be discussed individually, in view of the beliefs about "the world" held by the critic who is making the claim, and not only with his views about art or literature.

The assumption common to various theorists, according to which realism can be exhaustively studied and appreciated only in terms of the types of conventions employed, derives, in my opinion, from several fundamentally mistaken ideas prevalent in classical aesthetics. When critics attempt to describe aesthetic experience in terms such as "the suspension of disbelief," or the "negative capability" of forgetting one's own beliefs about the world, or the "ultimate fictionality" of all art and literature, they are implying a reader or a viewer who is a passive recipient of any kind of belief (at least "for the moment," as Coleridge hastens to add in his famous formula).

The formulas established by Coleridge and Keats do, perhaps, fit some aesthetic experiences, such as the marvelous, where beliefs are meant to become completely subordinated to the vividness and "poetic force" of the fictional representation. Farce, however, which also deviates from plausibility, seems intent upon invoking our disbelief rather than suspending it. In this way we are made to sense the clash between the perceptually vivid and the incredible, between what is "lifelike" and what is like life.

Serious realism, on the other hand, doesn't encourage us to suspend either beliefs or disbeliefs, nor does it invoke them for the purpose of allowing us to savor the incredibility of its representations. Insofar as it is strictly illusionistic, it adjusts its representations to the beliefs held by the reader or the viewer. Generally, though, realistic fiction does not strive for complete and immediate convergence between the fictional representation and the reader's ordinary beliefs. Its cognitive ambitions will make it avoid illusionism and offer representations that seem to be deformations and distortions of reality at least "for the moment." The reader is presented with something which clearly differs from his ordinary beliefs, thus putting these beliefs in question. He will have either to adjust his own beliefs to the representation, or at least to sense the fact that they may be seriously questioned. While complete illusionism makes the informational value of artistic representations equal zero, the ideological potential possessed by art and literature is necessarily tied to deviations from consistent illusionism and not to its adoption. This has already been demonstrated very impressively by theorists such as Mukarovsky and Iser.

Serious fiction, then, will always contain some amount of play and tension between cognition and illusion, between contested and reaffirmed beliefs. Dostoyevsky's underground man is only able to contest our ordinary and cherished beliefs about the rationality of man owing to the fact that on another level he is very lifelike and spreads an aura of verisimilitude. The representation holds us entranced only because it shares various "relational models" with what we are able to recognize immediately as "real." This basic illusion allows us to realize the shifts of belief which are necessary if we wish to recognize the fictional character as completely verisimilar, as a representation of a possible human reality.

This is why an acknowledgment of the connections existing between modes of representation and beliefs seems to me to be vital in every respect. Representations of reality may adjust themselves to our beliefs. They may also try to change and readjust these beliefs to the realism or truth of the representation. Yet in both cases as well as in the more frequent ones, where both of these tendencies exist simultaneously, a distinction between *representing* and *seeing*, between *artistic conventions* on the one hand and *beliefs* on the other, seems to me to be a conceptual necessity. Insofar as we account for it in such terms, the opposition of the verisimilar representation and the conventional one cannot be considered a mere illusion.

## TEL-AVIV UNIVERSITY

## NOTES

- 1 For valuable information on the early history of the term, see Harry Levin, "Notes on Conventions" (1950), included in his *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature* (New York, 1966), pp. 32-61.
- 2 A naive acceptance of realism's self-image can be found in Ortega y Gasset's popular essay, "The Dehumanization of Art" (1923); see *The Dehumanization of Art and other essays on Art, Culture and Literature* (Princeton, 1968), pp. 3-56. For a more qualified acceptance of this self-image, see J. P. Stern, *On Realism* (London, 1973).
- 3 Nelson Goodman, *The Languages of Art* (London, 1969). See also his essay "Seven Strictures on Similarity," in *Experience and Theory*, ed. Lawrence Foster and Joe Williams Swanson (London, 1970), pp. 19-29.
- 4 See Goodman, *Languages of Art*, p. 36.
- 5 See E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London, 1960), p. 214.
- 6 This somewhat "doctrinal" presentation of Gombrich's views in *Art and Illusion* is based, in part, on his explicit response to Goodman's position. See E. H. Gombrich, "The 'What' and the 'How': Perspective Representation and the Phenomenal World," in *Logic and Art*, ed. Richard Rudner and Israel Scheffler (Indianapolis, 1972), pp. 129-49.

- 7 Goodman, *Languages of Art*, p. 38.
- 8 Goodman, *Languages of Art*, p. 37.
- 9 Roman Jakobson, "On Realism in Art" (1921), in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1971), pp. 38-46.
- 10 For a recent analysis of these developments, see Peter Steiner, "Three Metaphors of Russian Formalism," *Poetics Today*, 2, No. 1b (Winter 1980-81), 59-116.
- 11 Jakobson, p. 44.
- 12 Roland Barthes, "L'effet de réel," *Communications*, 11 (1968), 84-89.
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- 15 Boris Tomashevsky, "Thematics," in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, Neb. and London, 1965), pp. 61-95.
- 16 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York, 1968), p. 132.