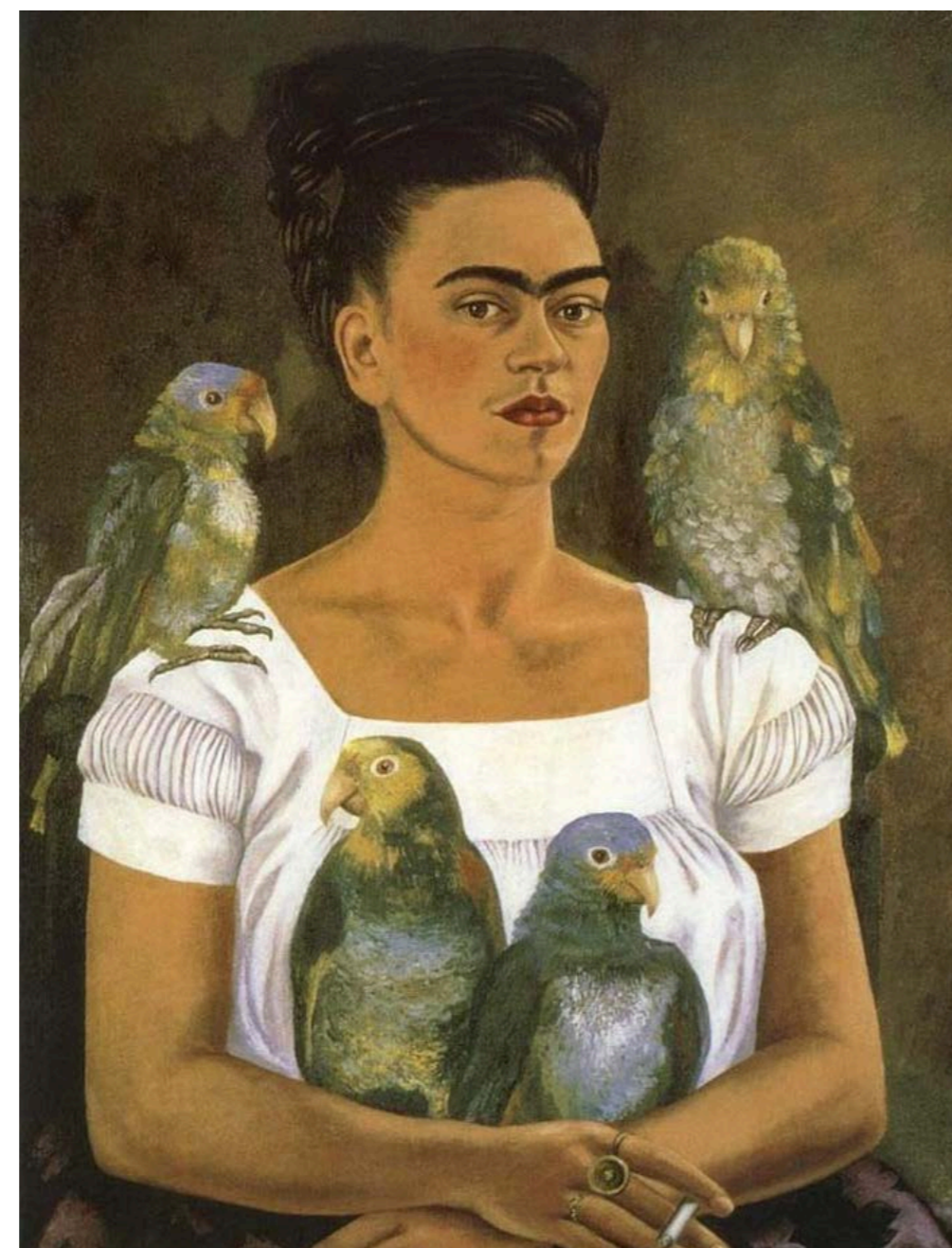


3rd Objection: Multiplicity and Ambiguity

According to Noth: This argument claims that pictorial messages are so ambiguous, vague, and polysemous that they cannot serve to prove any truth or falseness... As far as ambiguity is concerned, Wittgenstein (1953: 140b) is quoted as a witness, who once remarked that a man walking up a hill forward corresponds equally, and in the same way, to a man sliding down the hill backward. (Noth)

Wittgenstein 1953: "I see a picture; it represents an old man walking up a steep path leaning on a stick.— How? Might it not have looked just the same if he had been sliding downhill in that position? Perhaps a Martian would describe the picture so. I do not need to explain why we do not describe it so."

Suppose that the picture that corresponds to "John is tall" is a picture of John with a hat on. But then, what picture are we going to assign to "John wears a hat"? The same picture? If so, the representational system does not distinguish the thought that John is tall from the thought that John wears a hat... The trouble is precisely that icons are insufficiently abstract to be the vehicles of truth. (adapted from Fodor)



Problem of ambiguity:

the picture seems uncommittal about *which state of affairs* it is expressing. Is the person walking up or walking down backwards?

Problem of multiplicity:

the picture seems to express *too many states of affairs*. That Frida is sitting? That there are four parrots? etc.

In each case, is there a contrast with language?

4th Objection: Speech-act Ambiguity

"Imagine a picture representing a boxer in a particular stance. Now, this picture can be used to tell someone how he should stand, should hold himself; or how he should not hold himself; or how a particular man did stand in such-and-such a place; and so on. One might (using the language of chemistry) call this picture a proposition-radical."
— Wittgenstein

Phil 138: Pictorial Truth

2.5.26 • Prof. G. Greenberg • Quotes from Noth 1995

Can pictures lie?

Theory of the lie:

Semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth; it cannot in fact be used 'to tell' at all. I think that the definition of a 'theory of the lie' should be taken as a pretty comprehensive program for a general semiotics. (Eco 1976)

Can pictures lie? There are two questions here:

- (1) Can pictures be true or false?
- (2) Can pictures be used to affirmatively assert or deny?

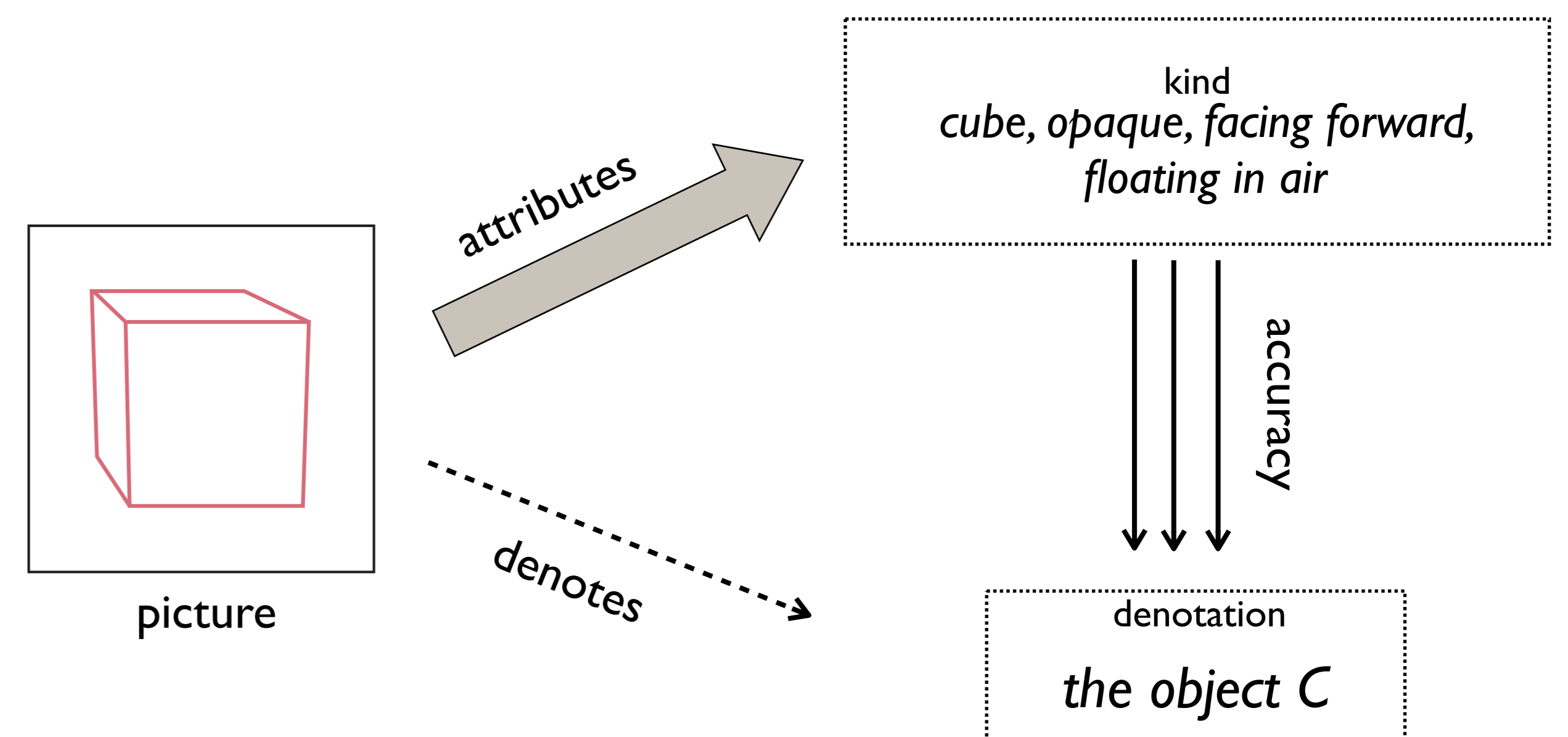
Accuracy is the pictorial counterpart of truth. So question (1) becomes: can pictures be accurate or inaccurate? For a sign to be accurate, it must represent a *state of affairs*, which either holds or does not hold. It can't just represent *an object*, or just represent a *property*.

Do pictures only represent objects, or can they represent objects together with predications about these objects? For three very different reasons, the answers which the theory of pictorial representation has given to this question have been negative. (Noth)

Goodman's theory of accuracy

For a picture to be faithful is simply for the object represented to have the properties that the picture in effect ascribes to it. (Goodman 36)

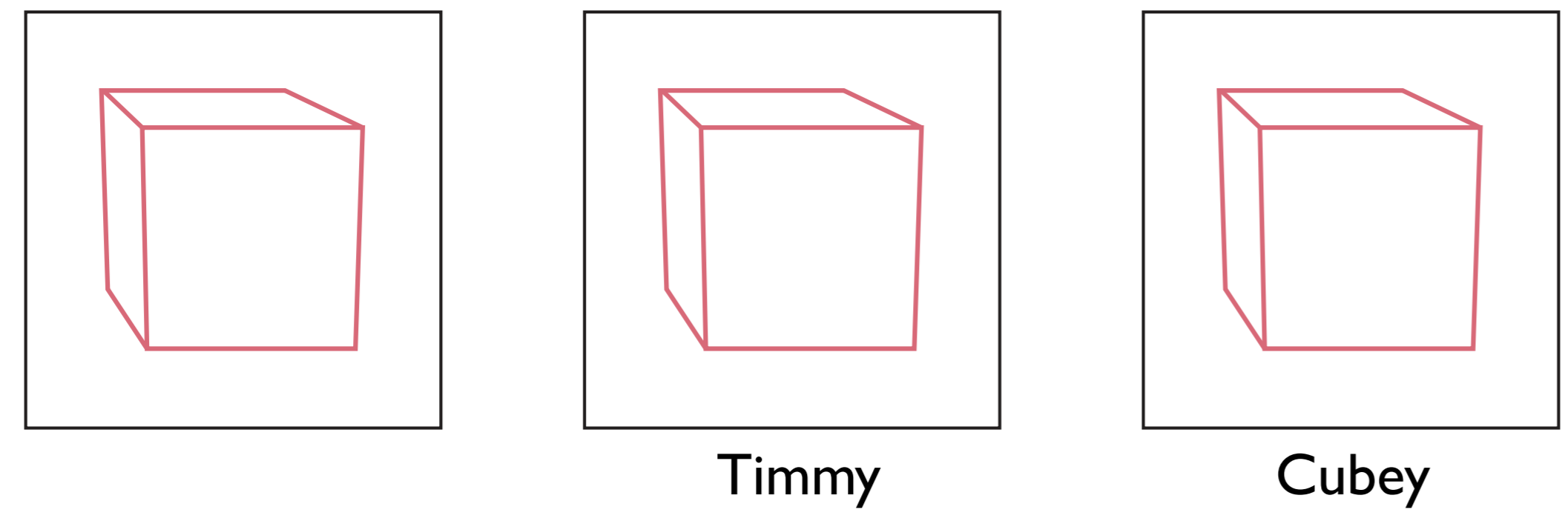
P is **accurate** if and only if
where P denotes O, and P attributes F:
O is in fact F.



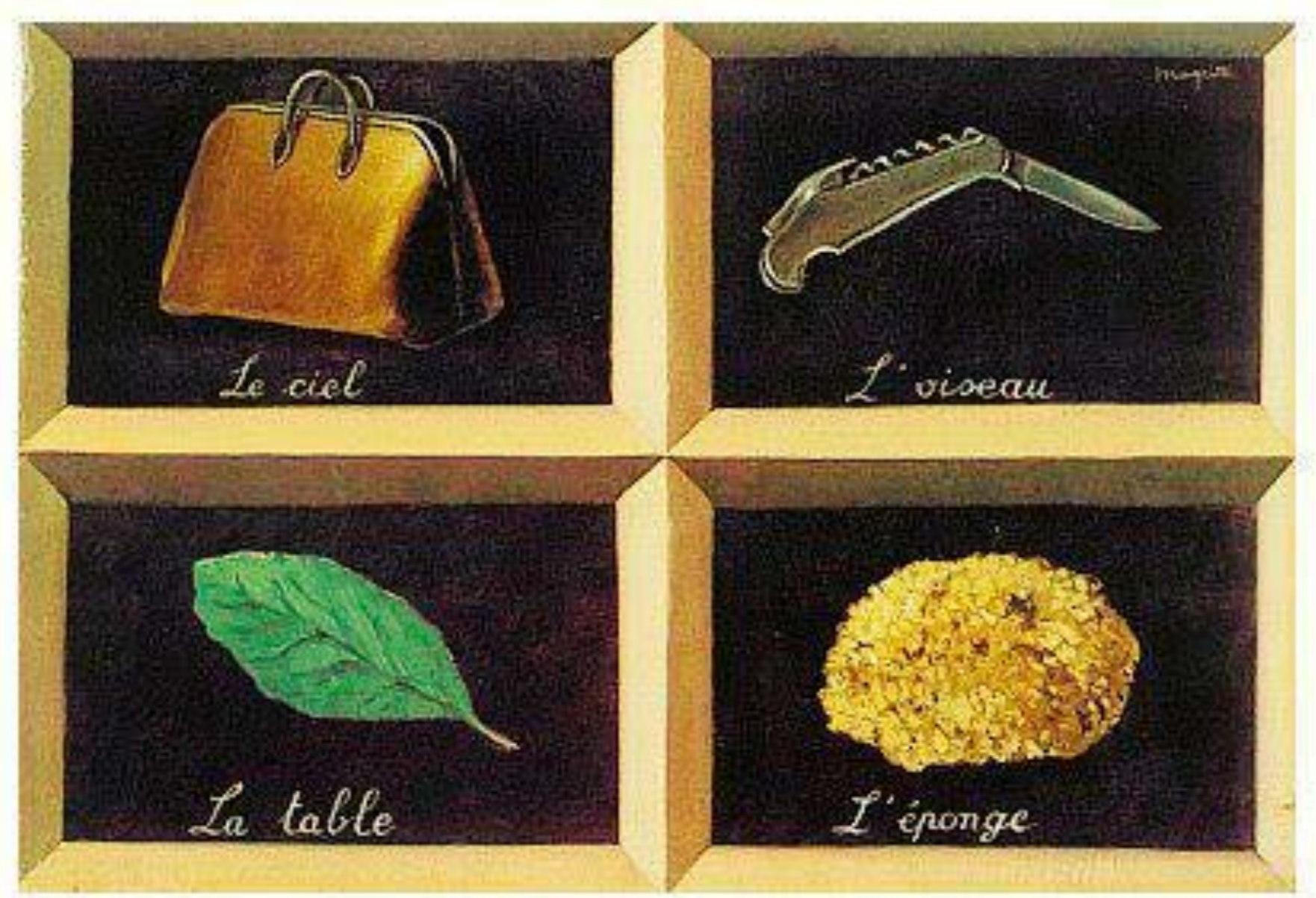
1st Objection: Context and Captions

The argument of contextual incompleteness was first exposed by Gombrich (1960: 58-59). In his view, pictures alone can never function like true or false statements. Only when a picture is accompanied by a caption or label can the resulting text-picture message convey a true or false proposition. Captions below press photos or a name below the picture of an object are his examples. The logician Bennett (1974: 263) interprets the picture in such text-picture combinations as "predicates in schemes of predication". ... In such verbal-visual messages, it is not the picture alone which forms the proposition, and therefore Bennett (1974: 259) concludes: "Pictures are not themselves true or false, but only parts of things that can be true or false."

What are the truth-values of these pictures according to Objection 1?

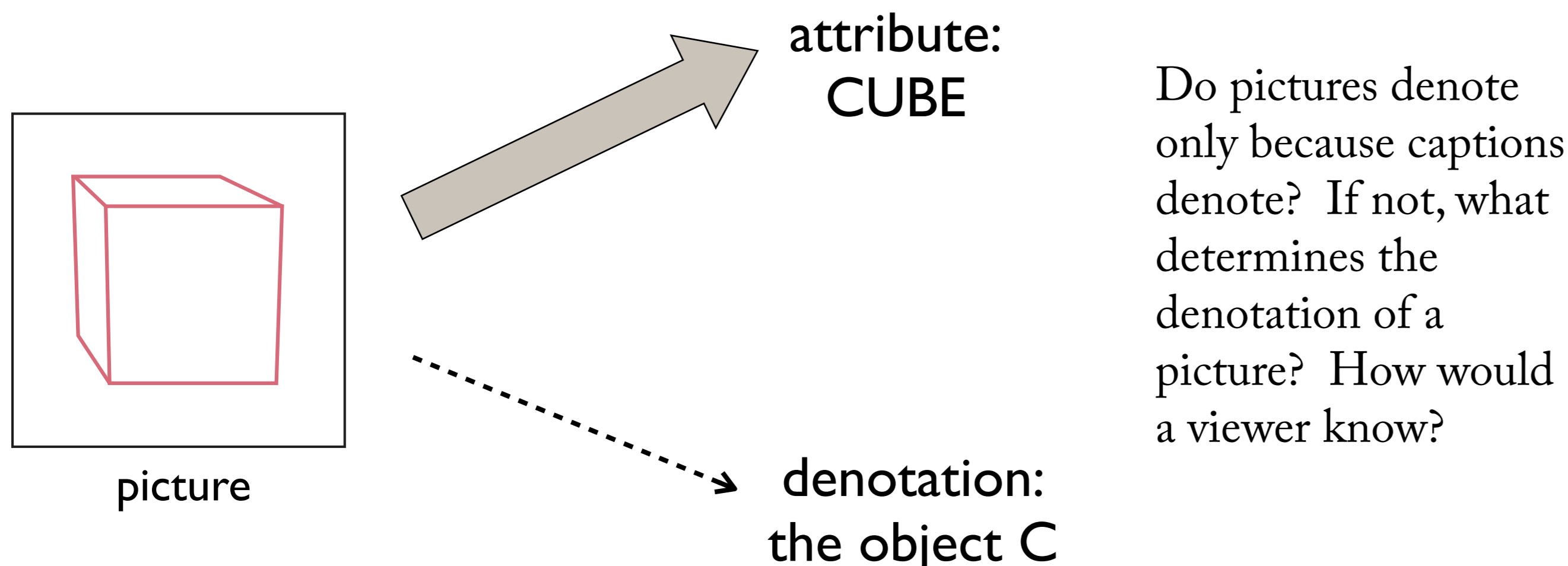


Magritte's commentary on pictorial truth.



Noth Replies

The thesis that pictorial messages can only be completed by their verbal anchorage is rather an indicator of the logocentric bias to be found in the current theory of pictorial representation... In pictorial genres such a paintings, family photos, or touristic slides, the lack of verbal anchorage is even the rule. (Noth)



2nd Objection: Subject-Predicate Structure

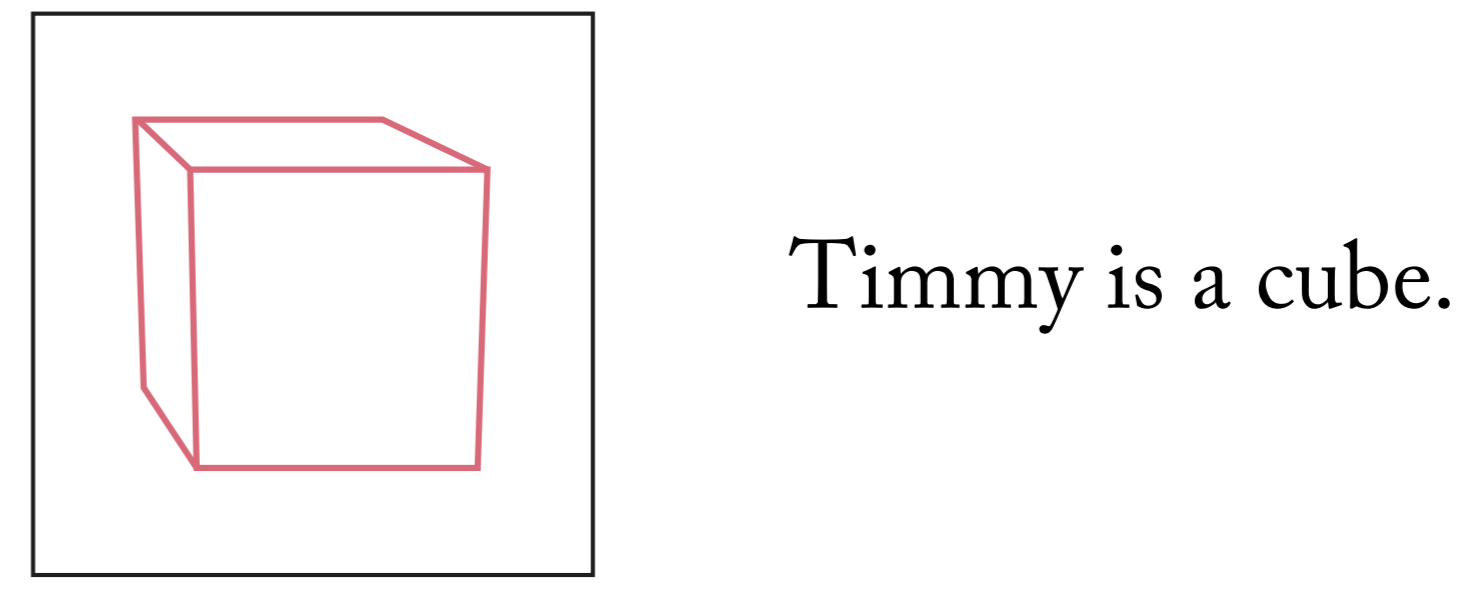
Because the interpreted parts of an iconic representation are in this sense syntactically and semantically homogeneous, iconic symbols can't represent things that discursive symbols can... They can't even express predication, since doing that requires (inter alia) distinguishing terms that contribute individuals to semantic interpretations from terms that contribute sets (or properties, or whatever). For very closely related reasons, pictures don't have truth-conditions. In the root case, for a symbol to be true it has to pick out an individual and a property and predicate the latter of the former; but iconic representations have no way to do either. (Fodor 2008)

Truth for sentences follows roughly the following type of rule:

A sentence of the form "[subject] [predicate]" is **true** iff the object denoted by [subject] has the property expressed by [predicate].

But this can't be the case for pictures!

1. If R has truth-conditions, then R attributes a property to an object.
2. If R attributes attributes a property to an object, then it must have distinct parts which express that property and object.
3. Pictures lack distinct parts which express properties and objects.
4. Therefore, pictures do not have truth-conditions.



Noth Replies

We claim that the argument "John" and the predicate "is green" must thus be sought in pictorial simultaneity and not in contiguity; or, if the linguistic analogy is preferred the visual predicate is suprasegmental to the segmental visual argument. (Noth 1995)

