

## Article 2: The viewer and the work of art

Having reached the conclusion in article 1 that the viewer's evaluation and aesthetic experience of a work of art lay in the subjectivity of the individual in the sense that both were dependent upon language and an apprehending mind which was compatible with the intersubjectivity of a society (Berndtson 1969: 196-199), we still need to examine how this process works. In this article I will concentrate on the relationship between the viewer and the work of art.

40 We have already seen in fig. 1 that the wordless experience of a work of art is built out of an articulate number of relations between figure and answer within the subjunctive predicative structure of language (Vanbergen 1986: 11) which must of necessity be based on an ontological epistemic structure of critical investigation. The initial problem that we encounter with a subjective eye is that it must transcend the idiosyncrasy [neurotic or culture-bound] of the self, yet continue to recognize the self's "genuine" experience as a kind of "touchstone of reality." Since the aesthetic experience *sui generis*, the object of inquiry, is the work of the mind [as an instrument of response and communication, rather than the work of art as a sacrosanct, autonomous object], we must accept that being subjective and human, every viewer grows in his/her *energia* <Aristotle> encounter with, and mastering of, the environment by adaption through the testing of his/her surroundings and in the "stultification" of his/her "psychohistory" and his/her *Erwartungshorizont* (Bakhtin 1982: 141; see also Jauss 1972).<sup>1</sup>

### The artist and the viewer

The *Einstellung* of the viewer can thus in some ways be complemented by our understanding of the artist who created the work of art. We can see in fig. 3 (Pg. 50) that both the artist and the viewer can be considered as subjects [S1 and S2] of an aesthetic experience. The artist is still considered, with a few exceptions, to be a craftsman or original maker of specific artifacts (Summers 1986: 314; see also Berleant 1970: 61). As such, the intentions realized in works of art can in some way be considered to have first been realized by the artist (Summers 1986: 305). As a paradigm of the perceiver, the artist can thus be considered as a professional visualizer whose vision shapes our vision by our "completion" of that vision during the perceptual process (Berleant 1970: 61).<sup>2</sup>

From the viewer's position, he/she almost takes for granted that the perceptual evidence supplied by the work of art is "specifically and adequately calculated to the task" of seeing (Steer 1989:

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<sup>1</sup> See also Freund (1987: 26, 33); Gay (1976: 27, 21).

<sup>2</sup> See also Baxandall (1972: 45); Rankin (1986: 15).

100). The close relation of the creative personality [S1] with the created work [O2], and the transformation of being [*Sein*] into aesthetic semblance [*Schein*], bestows upon the imagination of the creative achievement a dual role, which is the viewer's task to re-view and contemplate (Rapp 1984: 153). This complex process is made "easier" by the fact that most viewer's assume that the governing principles of the work of art remain formulable to their task, as these rules are immanent with the contextual situation of the work of art, and are "cemented into its practical techniques, in the way that the eye of the needle calls for its thread" (Bryson 1983: 74). Since the artist is usually dependent on the sales of his/her work, on patronage and critics, he/she is obliged to carry some kind of social responsibility towards the public eye's *Einstellung* which is the domain of the viewer's private eye. Although this is not a slavish loyalty, it is, to an extent, a sharing of visual experience and habit (Baxandall 1972: 40, 87-88). Cézanne summarized the meditative and manipulative adjustments during the creative process when he said: "the landscape thinks itself in me, and I am its consciousness."

All human expressions are thus oblique developments in their encounters with actual situations. The reflective character of vision, thus, for both artist [S1] and viewer [S2], make our dis-

course with, and about, the world and the work of art possible. In the thoughts of Merleau-Ponty, the human perceiver is a man of *exemplar sensible* whose creative mind is sustained by the development of the eye, hand, and culture, by an artist [S1] as he "pictures the world" (Gilmour 1986: 91, 98-99, 107, 152, 169, 188). Michaelangelo would have agreed with Merleau-Ponty: "I answer that one paints with the brain not the hands";<sup>3</sup> "... for the hands do, but the eye judges"<sup>4</sup> (Tatarkiewicz 1974: 148).

This relationship between artist [S1], the visible world [O1], and the work that he/she created [O2] is indicated in fig. 3. The dotted line adjoining O1 and O2 can be considered paradigmatic in the sense that O1 is an *eidōs*-model of the artist's aesthetic ideas simulated by the exploration of the creative process "within a system [of] transferring ... parameters and strategies to the analogue" of the work of art [O2] (Rapp 1984: 142; see also Black 1984: 175-178). However, the model as a visual motif and an expressive motive should be seen as referring to a *meersinnigheid* of active associations whose substantial ontological taxis within the visual creativity of the artist [S1] is never really abstract, totally sensory, or merely formal (Van den Berg [s.a.]: 4, 13, 15). It is pragmatic in terms of Peirce's reference to the Greek word *pragma* [meaning act or deed], in that it develops out of the artist's

<sup>3</sup> "Io rispondo che si dipinge con cervello e non con le mani." Written by Michaelangelo in a letter to Msgr. Aliotti (1542).

<sup>4</sup> "... perchè le mani operano e l'occhio giudica."

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eye-mind-hand activities and cannot be separated from this process of paradigmatic creativity (Stumpf 1966: 404; see also Abrams 1953: 20-21).

At the same time, the artist's work [O2] can be seen as syntagmatic in the sense that depicted images are sequentially placed in a composition (Bryson 1981: 20, 22-23) so that the eye is able to scan them. This syntagm can in turn be collectively seen in its all embracing composition as syntactical in the literal sense of a complete novel that has already embedded into its structure a number of various words and paragraphs. This has prompted some critics to think of works of art as texts<sup>5</sup> which embody a "language of images" (Mitchell 1984: 505).

## Imagination

Throughout the artist's pragmatic skills of creativity, and the viewer's working towards a recovery of meaning, via perception and interpretation, imagination plays a key role. Imagination, as part of the thinking eye's *Einstellung* covers a broad spectrum of activities from day-dreaming to the mass psycholitative practices of intersubjective make-believe play often performed by children. As every artist knows,

<sup>5</sup> For information about the work of art as a text see Suleiman & Crosman (1980: 10, 40); Caws (1981: 9); Freund (1987: 155); Rabinow & Sullivan (1979: 85); Ricoeur (1979: 88); Hasenmueller (1989: 276).

<sup>6</sup> See also Rapp (1984: 150-151, 164).

phantasying is a "fictive" activity that makes possible an experience which modifies reality "as if" its new relationship were true. Phantasying, in other words, posits a fiction qua fiction of the real world. In this sense, it corresponds to the visionary area of fig. 1.

As the imagination consummated itself by arriving at everyday "reality," a state of suspension is set up between the two, which the active creative imagination continually challenges as it puts the analogy to the test. Since the spontaneous life of imagining is distinguished from the imageries imagined, in that they can be considered as "*phantasma*" of the personal world constituted from a "phantagy world," we can agree with Schultz (1962: 235) that imaging projects representative experiences concerned in advance of themselves, as much as, reciprocally, the player's projected action always remains an imaged act. Thus the *Erwartungshorizont* plays an important role in imagination. The *Einstellung* of the mind's eye is capable of envisioning images in the mind, or *Vorstellungen*. As this imaginative process takes place, the person shapes himself/herself in relation to his/her world; the artist being able to externally express his/her phantasy-constructs during the process of his/her manifested production of his/her work of art [*Darstellung*] (Schultz 1962: 238, 240).<sup>6</sup>

The private eye of the imagination, however, is never isolated from the world of everyday life, which from the outset remains an intersubjective

experience. Our knowledge of another's mind – if such a thing is possible – is itself based on appresentational references and the reciprocity of points of view (Schultz 1962: 312). Like the context surrounding the image of a language, and the surrounding speech which plays a major role in its creation, both the S1 and S2 subjects in fig. 3 frame each other's points of view by means of the dialogizing background of nature [O1] and the work of art [O2] (Bakhtin 1982: 358). Fish, for instance, believes that no sentence in a language can ever be apprehended independently of some or other illocutionary force, which I will add, gains its potential force from the *Erwartungshorizont*: "[a] reader ... is at once interpreter and interpretation ... [and] is always situated inside a system of language, inside a context of discursive practices in which are inscribed values, interests, attitudes, and beliefs" (Freund 1987: 109). To an extent, therefore, we could say that an aesthetic transaction is always affected by, and integrated with, an extra-aesthetic experience and information because ultimately the distinctively aesthetic mode of the viewer's attention is inseparable from those extra-aesthetic and non-aesthetic dimensions in life (Wolff 1983: 81).<sup>7</sup>

### The reception process

But how does all this aid the visualizing and reception processes of subjective interpretation?

First of all, if the viewer is to fulfill his/her role as an interpretator of a work of art through observations, the considerations of seeing, and be a critical theorist using language, he/she has to realize that the *organon* of his/her method of interpretation can only emulate from the prestige of the valid methods of knowing. The meaning of any work of art rests its case on the diagnostic starting point of axiomatic assumptions about that work of art. Without a fixed point on his/her compass, the viewer's journey is unthinkable; as without a conceptualizing map, proceeding into the labyrinth of a metropolis will not grant the traveler a safe conduct of passage. This is where methodology becomes the procedure by which data is collected in such a manner that the viewer will be able to arrive at the most probable statements about a work of art and thus develop the appropriate theoretical explanation and standard of judgment (Freund 1987: 42-43).<sup>8</sup>

### Theory

The concept of holding a theory is itself an intriguing problem which is not in itself a negative concept in terms of the relativity of theories to each other. The word "theory" comes from the Greek word *theorein*, and has the same root "looking at," as the word "theater" (Freund

<sup>7</sup> See also Berleant (1970: 26, 57).

<sup>8</sup> See also Freund (1987: 58, 147-148); Berleant (1970: 17).

1987: 14). Theory thus deals with a way of seeing and making others see (Bourdieu 1987: 203). It corresponds to the area of audience participation (visual spectatordom) indicated in fig. 1. Although theories always remain (by their very nature) a point of view, they should be seen as an act of interpretation as well (Freund 1987: 15; see also Rabinow & Sullivan 1979: 19). Obviously, all theoretical or philosophical discourses have no privileged status, or purified metalanguage in which to conduct and express their investigations. They all in some way or another are paradoxical in the provisional trust or credence that they give to an "ides-logical" view, and the suspicious scrutiny of a critical invader (Freund 1987: 18). Scynchronic rivalry will always remain among revalitive critical theorists. The viewer, however, should not feel too deterred though by his/her theory laden beliefs; for no work of art itself is without a theoretical foundation. Every time an artist re-presents the natural world, his/her point of view adds up to a new theory of seeing. Theories, in a sense, embody in the cognitive wiles of tropes and figures, the deposits of their subjective creator's unconsciousness and disjunctive meanings (Freund 1987: 17-18). By doing so, a well-grounded theory alters in some degree the aesthetic perceptions which its *Erwartungshorizont* seeks to discover (Abrams 1953: 5).

## Value

Theorizing about the world, or another's world, is an activity whose aim is to come to knowledge of what a represented work of art can offer (Bakhtin 1982: 353). Since cognitive processes forever mediate between the aspirations of men and their present conditions, knowledge is a product of the process of acquiring value (Berleant 1970: 26).<sup>9</sup> For the idea of aesthetic value to remain a valid pursuit for the viewer's constant evaluation of a work of art, we must accept that it is a necessary condition of our minds which is not fact-free or empirically justified, but like taste, is also not merely a report on a private liking (Berndtson 1969: 196).<sup>10</sup> Values have to be experienced as intrinsic to a work of art and the viewer, and be judged as extrinsic to them both. Values are made through choices of the "perspective valuations" while the interpreter interprets.

The effective formulation of value depends on the viewer's insight into a culture and his/her ability to persuade the market place of values (such as other theories, ideological stances, or alternative methodologies). Like the socio-cultural challenge of changes in political or moral value, aesthetic values are also not permanent features of art objects, although the endowment of meaning and value, and the value of the experience of

<sup>9</sup> See also Berleant (1970: 117, 121, 183-184); Wolff (1983: 60); Bryson (1983: 69-73).

<sup>10</sup> See also Berndtson (1969: 203-205); Wolff (1983: 59).

art works, is the result of the accord founded in the two mutual aspects of cultured *habitus* and the aesthetic field within the same historical institution. Like art, which cannot render reality as untouched by man's involvement, human meanings and values are formulated in the paradoxical 'ever changing' concreteness of the cultural, historical and socially structured reality they inhabit. Searle believes value is an essential condition, a *sinneghalt* <Husserl>, of the viewer, which covers both the matter [propositional content] and quality [the illocutionary force] of the work of art he/she is evaluating (Gilmour 1986: 20).<sup>11</sup> Value, in a sense, is part and parcel of evaluating, and the theory of value accompanies the fact that all theories themselves have certain values, and can, be deconstructively "e-valuated" as well.

## Intuition

The value of ideas and theories are the insight they can bring to the cognitive understanding of a work of art during the interpretative process, but at the same time it should be acknowledged that ideas and theories are a "quasi-perceptual intellectual" activity which mediates intellectual experience with the experience of an aesthetic experience. Although quasi-objective also, the

Kantian tradition has always seen the need for an element of disengagement, disinterestedness and impartiality, accompanying this mediation between the viewer and the work of art (Berleant 1970: 120). Believed to be more desirable in terms of "objectivity," no subjective response can live the lie that the "multiple logical steps of discursive reason," governed by the intellect, are entirely separated, or exclusive of, the viewer's sense of intuition, which is always present in an aesthetic experience as a contributing factor of vision, insight, and the "metaphysical perception" of the nature of reality or a work of art. Intuition resembles what Whitehead called "prehension." Taking the viewer "one back before knowledge and recognition," intuition can be said to be part of the *Erwartungshorizont* in the sense that aesthetic intuition as a sensory presence is "alien to [the] direct apprehension of propositional truth in the distinctive mark of intellectual intuition" (Gilmour 1986: 54).<sup>12</sup>

In effect, one could say that intuition, sensory data, and the intellect, are all involved in the process of understanding which mediates the "whole explanatory procedure which precede and accompany it" (Ricoeur 1979: 101). To an extent, understanding is also regulated by the viewer's *Erwartungshorizont*, in that it expects a work of art to inform him/her of something, to bring to

<sup>11</sup> See also Hasenmueller (1989:279); Berleant (1970: 184); Wolff (1983: 11, 18, 21-22, 35); Odmark (1979: 197); Rabinow & Sullivan (1979: 83); Stumpf (1966: 418); Bourdieu (1987: 203-205); Rankin (1986: 15); Lefevre in Spariosu (1984: 220); Bakhtin (1982: 276).

<sup>12</sup> See also Berleant (1970: 114-119).

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fruition through a response dialectically merged in a response, the consideration of a new conceptual system of thinking. Appreciation, we can say, is apprehending a work of art in a particular way.

## Understanding

Understanding art is theorizing about it, formulating the appropriately relevant abstractions of value and developing an explanatory hypotheses about the nature and meaning about art. Here the foundationalist philosophy of the mind, which views mental contents as counterparts of objects, and treats symbols as complements of reality, can be of use to us. Artists modify our understanding of what is real by changing the notion of reality. By accepting foundationalism into the system we notice that the viewer's understanding always situates into his/her system of values, or opinions, a relationship with other's values and opinions. Understanding is thus an intersubjective relation, postulated by Dilthey's dialectic character of *Erklaren* [explanation] and *Verstehen* [understanding or comprehension]. *Auslegung* [interpretation, or exegesis] is linked to *Verstehen* to bring about a recognition of what a foreign subject means or intends on the basis of the expression of our psychic lives [*Lebensäußerungen*]. More than sim-

ply a mode of knowledge, therefore, understanding is also a mode of being (Gilmour 1986: 68).<sup>13</sup>

As being concerns consciousness, so we can say that all consciousness is conscious of something else intended by conscious that denotes the structure of an act by which the subject imagines or conceptualizes, or is conscious of, a work of art; thereby bringing it also into being. The allegorical nature of language is perhaps no less "allegorical" than human intentions in this regard. The convergence, or merging of S1, or S2, with O1, or O2, in fig. 3, is thus a conception of intentionality governed by the viewer's encounter or engagement with a work of art. To an extent, it involves an aesthetic attitude, encompassing a purpose, a belief, and a viewer's attention. Interestingly, the Italian *intendere* means both the understanding of "to know" and "to mean" on the one hand, and "to intend" on the other hand. The intentions we have, stemming from our *Erwartungshorizont*, and the value of our theoretical hypothesis, are, in the words of St. Augustine, "*intentio animi*," in the sense that the attention of the mind, and the *Einstellung* of the mind's vision, are related to the will of being, and are thus the soul's responsibility (Summers 1986: 310-311, 314).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See also Berleant (1970: 122); Ricoeur (1974: 7); Ricoeur (1979: 73, 87); Bakhtin (1982: 282); Rabinow & Sullivan (1979: 87, 150-152).

<sup>14</sup> See also Freund (1987: 136-137); Berleant (1970: 78).

## Summary

We are now in a better position to understand and answer the question of subjective interpretation. Interpretation we can say is, an intrinsic part of the aesthetic experience. It encompasses the "beholder's share"<sup>15</sup> (Alpers 1972-73: 44), regulating the whole process of the interaction between S2 and O2 and underlying all thought and communicative processes of the thinking eye, following, and in some ways 'preceding,' analysis. This dynamic interaction in Sedlmayr's theory of perception, is seen as a process of reconstruction, re-articulation and actualization of the work of art within the *gestaltetes Sehen* of the viewer.

Interpreting, however, is also an organic and contingent variable that can alter with the changing status of the elements we recognize in the work of art; and reciprocally, the varying interpretations of a work of art may effect our evaluation of it. This is because interpretation is conditioned by the work of art, but only in a form that allows the "reader" to bring it about. The different "topics," or centers of interest, in a work of art throw themselves into "relief," like a volume in space, only not all focus points can be scanned on the same altitude or with the same attitude. Despite the fact that an art work, in order to be significant, requires the interpreter's

belief in its presenting of a truth prior to itself, works of art can only *pentimenti* hide as much as they reveal about themselves. A kind of plurivocity surrounds a text making it open to several readings and constructions. Yet the interpretative strategy of the interpretator is not purely the result of an individual decision by S1 or S2. The intentionality and empathy of a viewer should rather be seen as being dependent on the prior existence of the shared world of meaning within which the subjects of human discourse constitute themselves. As a collective phenomenon, works of art "live" in the public intersubjective sphere of the market place of solidarity and consensus. They are open to interpretation by the private eye whose *Verstehen* in the *Einstellung* brings it into the dogma, or skepticism (deconstruction), of the values present in the cultural world (Blinder 1986: 22).<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

The language concepts that I have discussed in this article, namely, subjectivity, imagination, method, theory, value, meaning, attitude, intuition, intellect, and interpretation, are all part of what can be termed the aesthetic experience of a work of art. I have tried to show how the mode of this "polythetical experience" can be derived at through the conceptual tools which we use to

<sup>15</sup> This term was coined by Gombrich.

<sup>16</sup> See also Vanbergen (1986: 102); Rankin (1986: 18); Freund (1987: 25); Suleiman & Crosman (1980: 20, 25, 108); Gay (1976: 32); Black (1984: 180); Rabinow & Sullivan (1979: 5, 11, 91); Ricoeur (1979: 90, 92); Hasenmeuller (1989: 277).



formulate our ideas in order to enhance our future experiences, and respond more appropriately to phenomena; while at the same time being an immediate, naturalistic, tautological, and qualitative experience, that is prelogical, intrinsic, non-cognitive, and situational in the sense that each phase of experience serves as a kind of experience, that, like language, is never isolated, but rather, is involved in the socio-cultural and psychological production of, and in, a human aesthetic experience (Fisher & Nodine 1979: 221).<sup>17</sup>

John Dewey, the American pragmatist, wrote much on the subject of the aesthetic experience. He believed that mankind did not simply know

individual things, but had to function as a mediator between himself/herself and his/her environment. Only through the perception of an aesthetic experience, a projecting of his/her actions, did the viewer rehearse his/her future action in his/her imagination, *mode futuri exacti*. By ordering and integrating aesthetic events in this way, the viewer is able to fuse his/her impressions into an organic whole, to become a total seeing being (Stumpf 1966: 416).<sup>18</sup>

Yet the viewer, as a seeing being, and a perceiver of a work of art, has continued to apply perceptual theories to the gambit of visual spectatordom. In article 3 I will pay attention some of these theories.

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<sup>17</sup> See also Berleant (1970: 6-7, 55, 86, 91-95, 99-102, 135, 148, 150); Freund (1987: 28).

<sup>18</sup> See also Berleant (1970: 149); Gilmour (1986: 137); Schultz (1962: 214-215).

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Fig. 3



