

ART AND COGNITION

The **Art and Cognition** virtual conference: The event took place between November 2002 and February 2003 and is no longer active.

Modérateurs:

Gloria Origgi (CNRS, Institut Jean-Nicod), **Noga Arikha** (Institut Jean-Nicod, Paris)

Guest Panels:

Giorgio Biancorosso (Columbia University, New York), **Mario Borillo** (Institut de Recherche en Informatique de Toulouse, CNRS), **Laura Bossi** (neurologue, présidente de biotech),
Nicolas Bullot (Institut Jean Nicod, University of British Columbia), **Roberto Casati** (Institut Jean-Nicod, CNRS), **Alain De Cheveigne** (IRCAM, CNRS), **Thi Bich Doan** (Consultant), **Jérôme Dokic** (Institut Jean-Nicod, EHESS), **Maurizio Ferraris** (Université de Turin, Italie), **Tamar Gendler** (Cornell University), **Maurizio Giri**, **Bernard Gortais** (Artiste multimédia), **Alain Grumbach**, **Guillaume Hutzler** (Laboratoire d'Informatique Paris 6), **Claude Imbert** (Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris), **Andrew Kania** (University of Maryland), **Carlo Landini**, **Paolo Leonardi** (Università Bologna), **Dominic Lope**, University of British Columbia, **Pascal Ludwig** (Association ArtCognition), **Patrizia Magli** (Istituto Universitario di Architettura Venezia), **Pascal Mamassian** (University of Glasgow), **Stephen Mc Adams** (IRCAM, CNRS), **Richard Minsky** (The Center for Book Arts), **Amy Morris** (Italian Academy, Columbia University), **Nirmalangshu Mukherji** (Delhi University), **Jérôme Pelletier** (Institut Nicod), **Caterina Saban** (Artiste), **Marie-Catherine Sahut** (Conservateur, Musée du Louvre), **Marco Santambrogio** (Università di Parma), **Didier Sicard** (Professeur de Médecine à l'Université de Paris V), **Barry Smith** (University of Buffalo), **Dan Sperber** (Institut Jean-Nicod), **Mark Stevens** (critique d'art, romancier), **Bernard Stiegler** (Directeur de l'IRCAM), **Robert Williams** (University of California, Santa Barbara)

The conference is organized by the Euro-edu Association and sponsored by DRRT Ile-de-France.

- The unity of the kind artwork

Roberto Casati (Institut Jean-Nicod, CNRS)

- Pictorial language

Avigdor Arikha (Painter, Author)

- Postural sense and human figure in Renaissance art

Francois Quiviger (Researcher, Librarian, Webmaster, Warburg Institute)

- Art as enaction

Alva Noë (University of California, Berkeley)

- Pictorial composition and emotional response

David Freedberg (Columbia University - Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America)

- The neurological basis of artistic universals

V.S. S. Ramachandran (University of California, San Diego)

- Beauty and the mind: lessons from Kant

John Armstrong (University of Melbourne)

- Objects and aesthetic attention

Nicolas Bullot (Post-doctorant, Institut Jean Nicod, University of British Columbia)

- The artwork and its creator

Alain Grumbach (ENST, CNRS)

- Ambiguity and intention

David Cohen (critique d'art, éditeur, Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture)

- General Discussion

Noga Arikha (Institut Jean-Nicod, Paris) and **Gloria Origgi** (Institut Jean-Nicod, CNRS)

The unity of the kind artwork

Roberto Casati (Institut Jean-Nicod, CNRS)

(Date of publication: 18 November 2002)

Abstract:

The concept of an artwork is unitary, in a way that transcends the differences between artistic media. This unity is puzzling. I programmatically explore two ways of cognitively account for the unity: a narrow way, according to which we are endowed with an artistic module, and a broad way, which requires that works of art are understood in the context of social interactions and practices.

(Translated from Italian by Marcel Lieberman)

It is not easy to identify in a precise way the role that works of art play in our cognitive life. Yet, works of art, like all artifacts, are essentially linked to our cognitive life. A study of the relationships between art and cognition is thus a necessary step towards understanding artistic phenomena and artifacts. A variety of possible outcomes can emerge out of the study of this interaction.

1. The study of artistic artifacts considered as cognitive products can give us access to mechanisms of the mind that go unnoticed in normal cognition.
2. The study of cognitive mechanisms that form the background to artistic practices can enable us to bring into focus certain philosophical problems, for example, the question regarding the "definition" of a work of art and its conditions of identity.

In this article I'll examine an additional problem, which is different from, and in some ways more ambitious than the one posed by works of art considered as an object of cognitive and philosophical study: namely, the question that in a certain sense precedes the examination of topics such as 1 and 2:

3. The study of cognitive activities allows one to clarify and eventually solve the problem of the unity of the kind work of art.

I take it for granted that there is a problem regarding the unity of the kind. Or rather, that there is a unity of the kind and, what is more, that it is a problematic one. Besides the clear linguistic indication ("work of art"), our attitudes towards symphonies, architectural works, films, paintings and sculptures are much more similar to one another than are the attitudes towards, say, a painting by Picasso and a family photo. But this is just the problem: what is it that entities as diverse as a Picasso and a symphony have in common that outweighs the numerous and undoubtedly greater resemblances between a painting and a family photo?

We can examine two types of solutions, radically different from one another, that are based on the study of cognitive mechanisms. The first, which won't be discussed in this paper, is a "circumscribed" solution and appeals to the idea that there exists an artistic faculty or pseudo-faculty that is activated every time we encounter objects considered works of art. This would explain why such objects, as dissimilar as they are, end up in a single category. The theory of the "pseudo-module" seems to have a certain explicative power while using a limited hypothesis. I won't examine its validity; I prefer instead to present another theory, one that is completely different and much broader. This hypothesis places artistic artifacts within a social dynamic. It is in virtue of their becoming becoming elements of such a dynamic that artifacts acquire the wholly extrinsic property of being artistic. Up to this point, the "broad" theory does not differ from a sociological study of art. It adds, however, a fundamental question: why is it that not all artifacts become part of a social dynamic that makes them artistic? The explanation of this dynamic is subject to cognitive constraints, and the study of such constraints can enable us to make a prediction regarding the properties of artistic artifacts.

A mistaken but widespread theory of art

In order to characterize the second, broad theory, let us take a brief look at those things that seem obvious and that generate dubious rationalizations. When one speaks of cognitive theories applied to art, often the only thing one has in mind is a diagram: in one box there is the artist's mind, in another the mind of an observer, which are connected by an arrow that splits in the middle to make room for a box containing the work of art. (I could draw the diagram below, but refuse to do so in order to avoid spreading it even further). This diagram rationalizes and perhaps only illustrates common-sense intuitions regarding the function of cognition and the fact that art might be a type of expression. Through the work, the artist supposedly expresses himself or sends a "message" to his audience. An artist has something "to say". And the audience must reconstruct what the artist meant: the audience's task is that of an interpreter who, by observing or listening to the work and on the basis of personal knowledge and other background factors, is able to read the artist's message.

The message theory is surely a cognitive theory. But it is faced with a number of problems.

The main problem that interests us is that it doesn't explain the unity of the kind "work of art" among its diverse manifestations, apart from attributing to architectural works and dance the task of transmitting messages. In connection to the first problem, it doesn't explain why works of art are admired by people who know little about the history of art, why they survive the test of time (how is it possible to admire works by inaccessible cultures, whose message can no longer be reconstructed?), it doesn't explain why artists like talking about their works and why they apply labels to them (what purpose would it serve, given that the works already express what the artists mean?). Moreover, given that the sender of the message might not have in mind any receiver, or not know who the receiver is, one ends up losing sight of the receiver himself. At the same time, the intentions of the majority of senders are inaccessible: whether because the artist is no longer living, or because no one is so transparent to themselves and it isn't clear that artists really know what they intended to say. The result is that the work, rather than transmitting the elusive intentions of an artist, ends up with the responsibility of expressing the "spirit of an age". Lastly, the message theory does not explain why the artist chose such an implausible way of sending "messages". Why

hide messages in a medium that requires so much work on the part of the one receiving the message?

There is certainly some cognitive work at play. But it doesn't seem plausible that it's the one required by the message theory.

The theory of conversational prompts

The alternative theory could be called the theory of conversational prompts. The theory claims that artistic artifacts are objects produced with the chief aim of provoking some type of conversation about their production. Artistic products don't serve as a type of "communication" between the artist and the public: they are not bearers of "messages". Rather, they are objects that must attract attention (and thus must not be instrumental, or hide their instrumental side) within a linguistic context in which they are used as objects of discussion. I won't enter into further details, which might seem somewhat definitory: definitions are notoriously useless for understanding common-sense notions. I would like to show how this hypothesis can work by showing how it is set within a series of anthropological observations regarding the use of artistic artifacts.

The theory explains why artistic artifacts are able to survive through time (if one thinks about it, this survival is quite strange, and at any rate hardly compatible with the idea that artistic products contain a message). They pass the test of time because conversation never stops; it is always in need of topics. Even when it is no longer possible to know the terms of the conversation in which the product was initially inserted as a stimulus, it remains possible to recover the product within a new conversation. It must be noted that the theory does not say that the artist must form the intention of seeing his product placed within a specific conversation (which most probably is the general one of his time), but in any conversation. This fact imposes constraints on the structure of works of art. They are objects that must be able to lend themselves to conversation.

Similarly, the theory explains why works of art pass the test of space, or rather why they can be appreciated by communities that are quite distant from the original community of the work's creator.

The theory explains why artistic products have the aspect they have. Artistic products must solve a variety of problems

- maximize novelty
- attract attention (be sufficiently different from instrumental artifacts)
- be sufficiently complex (through their apparent form, or through the history of their origin) to maximize conversational elements

The theory explains the fluctuation in the esthetic and economic values of artistic products. Having good qualities does not suffice for being a good conversational prompt: there must also be a conversation in which such qualities can be noticed. By postulating the existence of conversations, the theory explains why artistic products survive, are fashionable subjects, and die. (Likewise, it is not enough for a metal to have excellent qualities: resistant to acid, malleable, yellow, in order for it to be of great worth. There also needs to be a context of exchange that confers value to the metal). In the same way, the theory explains the difference between great art and popular art, simply by postulating the existence of different conversations with different rules: among a myriad of conversations (that provide the basis for popular art) one proclaims itself "high". Fine art is nothing other than popular art with an army behind it.

The theory thus explains the existence of degrees of artistic quality, and why certain things are considered art by some and not by others. It explains why a local artistic culture finds the works of another culture of little interest, while recognizing that they are artistic artifacts.

The conversational theory explains the origin of art and artistic artifacts. There is no origin! Works of art were discovered: or rather, it was discovered that certain objects entered into circulation within a community and caused people to talk about them.

It explains why instrumental objects can be works of art (as in the case of architecture, which some esthetic purists seek to expunge from the category of art). The possibility of being inserted within a conversation doesn't seem to depend upon the type of object to be inserted.

The theory explains why artists like to talk about their work and adorn it with explanations (this is particularly difficult to explain in a theory of communication or expression). It is a way of launching a conversation that will give life to the product.

The theory explains why paintings have labels and musical pieces have titles: they are points of entry into a conversation. It therefore explains why museum visitors head straight towards the labels, and place great importance on knowing the author and the subject.

It explains why an artist's biography interests us; and it explains why we are satisfied by the fact that the biography is in some way reflected in the work. It enables us to use the work as a narrative prompt.

The theory explains why works of art are acquired with no regard for the artist, like invitations to a conversation that are disconnected from the person of the author.

Finally, the theory's hypothesis that artists produce works with an eye towards possible conversations about their products, allows us to solve almost immediately the problem regarding the unity of the kind work of art. Works of art are objects created with the chief aim of making a conversation possible. The main proviso is meta-representational: the author must have the intention that his work be a conversational prompt. The proviso excludes cases of artifacts that are accidentally, but not essentially, currency for conversational exchange, like mathematical theories or political discourses which are not works of art.

The conversation theory and the time of a work of art

The intention of creating a work of art doesn't focus on the moment of creation, nor the moment of reception, but has a projection into the future; it is focused on the theme of the conversation. The difference between the message theory and the conversational theory concerns a deep metaphysical aspect of works of art: their relation to time. The conversational theory is by nature projective and has an

articulation that unfolds in the future. Works of art have an evolution, linked to the exercising of discussions that change in the course of time. The message theory is temporally static and concerns a fixed point in the past. In the message theory time essentially concerns the packaging of the message: the moment at which the author consigns the message to the work. An eventual interpretation constitutes an extrinsic aspect, and therefore does not introduce a new temporal element.

The intuition that guides the message theory is that works of art are like packages, wrappers ("vehicles", a "medium"). One needs to unpack them in order to reach their hidden essence, the message itself. The artist leaves the message in the work just as a castaway does with a message in a bottle. The precise methods of the unpacking process cannot be foreseen a priori by the artist who doesn't know on which beach the bottle will wash up, or whose eyes will read the message. For this reason, one must leave room in the message theory for the notion of an open work: the sender's intention would be to produce a message that is at least partially indeterminate, that partly constrains interpretation, but leaves space for the receiver. The notion of an open work is a clear case of theoretic artifacts generated by the message theory. Only if one thinks that works must necessarily be interpreted in order to extract the artist's intention, must one then give an open structure to such an intention, faced with the mutability of possible interpretive contexts. But the necessity of "recovering" the artist's intention doesn't exist, given the inexistence of such an intention. Naturally, the artist can have intentions, but these concern the use of the work and not its interpretation. Emotions, messages, authors' intentions for communicating a message, substitutions of experience: these are possible, but accidental, ingredients of the dynamic that leads to the production, and assures the circulation, of a work of art. Works of art are not signs. Rather, they are more like toys.

What is a conversation? Empirical hypotheses

The conversational theory makes use of a concept, namely conversation, which is certainly indeterminate. What is a conversation? Can there be inner conversations (meditation)? Which conversation does the artist have in mind, a specific or general conversation? In fact, the theory shifts the indeterminacy of the concept of a work of art to the indeterminacy of the concept of conversation. In itself, this might be an advantage of the theory, to the extent that the concept of artistic artifact has fuzzy borders.

The fact that conversations are different in time and space does not create problems in so far as some conversational elements - the choice of topos, the way of developing it - are subject to cultural universals. Here, the theory makes an empirical prediction that will have to be tested: if what counts are not the conversations actually taking place, but the generic aspects of conversation, a study of the latter should bring to light some elements of works of art that usually go unnoticed. Where does the study of cognition come in regarding the conversational theory? In the fact that not all subjects are good for conversation and assure successful conversations. Studying the normative constraints of conversational success will enable us to make interesting empirical predictions regarding the content and form of artistic artifacts.

Discussion

Complémentarité des théories

Thi Bich Doan

19 nov. 2002 6:50 UT

Le choix de fédérer en un genre unifié l'ensemble des oeuvres d'art en posant l'hypothèse d'une dynamique sociale est pertinente dans la mesure où l'oeuvre d'art est définie en tant que telle par consensus d'une communauté sociale et culturelle. Toutefois, les critiques de la théorie du message au profit de celle du déclencheur de conversation sont à nuancer, les deux hypothèses pouvant coexister sans s'exclure mutuellement, sous réserve d'un élargissement des définitions de "message" et de "conversation".

La théorie du message reste insuffisante dans son interprétation de codage/décodage d'un message unilatéral au contenu pré-déterminé. Mais l'art, dans la relation intime qu'il entretient avec les sens et l'affectif, peut précéder la cognition en permettant d'exprimer quelque chose qui dépasse les capacités de verbalisation et d'entendement. L'artiste ne cachera pas ses messages dans un véhicule au mode d'emploi ardu, il explorera au contraire le vecteur qui lui paraît le plus à même de l'aider à trouver ses intentions.

La théorie de la conversation peut alors venir en complément ou même en renfort de la théorie du message. Elle intègre la valeur sociale et marchande de l'oeuvre d'art, la désacralise dans sa fonction purement créative tout en lui octroyant une valeur symbolique et spéculative. De là le rôle d'attracteur, spontané ou provoqué, de l'oeuvre ou plutôt de l'artiste reconnu et son prix/signature en tant qu'objet de conversation. Il sera cependant difficile de réduire la force d'une véritable énergie créatrice à une réponse dictée par des attentes conversationnelles lorsqu'on la voit par exemple transgresser les normes et conventions sociales.

Loin d'être incompatibles, les deux théories peuvent donc présenter un caractère d'inclusion réciproque et de mise en existence mutuelle, qui brouille la piste des origines et relègue les oppositions de faits et d'opinions aux contingences. Elles soulignent l'impossibilité mais aussi paradoxalement la liberté de cerner un "genre" ou un champ basé sur l'indétermination des éléments qui le constituent.

Complémentarité monodirectionnelle

Roberto Casati

19 nov. 2002 8:10 UT

En un sens, on peut considérer que la théorie du message et la théorie conversationnelle sont complémentaires : la théorie du message doit être complétée par une approche plus large, qui pourrait bien être la théorie conversationnelle. La question intéressante concerne le complètement inverse : la théorie du message est-elle nécessaire à la théorie conversationnelle ? Je ne

le crois pas, car il est douteux que la théorie du message soit correcte, donc a fortiori elle ne peut pas aider d'autres théories. Les raisons pour penser que la théorie du message ne soit pas correcte sont diverses, et j'en ai donné quelques unes dans le texte. Sûrement, elle a une prétention de généralité en tant que théorie de l'art. Mais il est difficile de voir comment les œuvres architecturales véhiculeraient des messages. Et même là où on croirait trouver des mécanismes « messagers » plus intuitifs (le cas de la musique et des émotions) on a trouvé maintes difficultés dans l'individuation du message : l'arbitraire de l'« interprétation » fait penser qu'aucun message ne soit vraiment contenu dans les œuvres musicales.

Quel problème pour l'architecture et la danse ?

Gloria Origgì

19 nov. 2002 20:29 UT

Parmi les arguments que Roberto donne contre la théorie du code il y a un constat d'impossibilité de transmettre des messages par le biais de l'architecture et de la danse.

Or même si je ne partage pas la théorie du code, je ne vois pas quel serait le problème d'expliquer une oeuvre architecturale ou un ballet en termes de message. On pourrait par exemple penser que les éléments de base d'une oeuvre architecturale codifient certains significations et que la composition des ces éléments peut codifier un message. Quelle est la difficulté spécifique que tu vois dans le cas de l'architecture ou de la danse?

Le

Roberto Casati

20 nov. 2002 10:11 UT

La thèse n'est pas que la danse et l'architecture ne peuvent pas véhiculer des messages : la thèse est qu'elles ne *doivent* pas en véhiculer. Cela me semble un fait difficile à contester, et constitue une critique définitive de la théorie du message. On peut naturellement faire des acrobaties et trouver des « messages » un peu partout : faute de mieux, on a proposé que ce qui est véhiculé, est un certain esprit de l'époque, etc. Mais cela banalise la notion de message.

Réponse à complémentarité monodirectionnelle

Thi Bich Doan

20 nov. 2002 12:15 UT

La théorie du message même complétée par la théorie conversationnelle (la première n'étant pas nécessaire à la deuxième) n'est pas suffisante pour refléter le rôle de l'art, mais elle trouve sa place dans l'étude de la réception des oeuvres, par exemple pour légitimer des dépenses publiques ou répondre à des besoins pédagogiques. L'oeuvre d'art est d'abord créée matériellement avec ou sans message de l'artiste, elle doit être ensuite "recréée" socialement pour exister aux yeux de la communauté, et se prête alors à toutes sortes d'interprétations intuitives ou raisonnées. On considère généralement que l'artiste possède la faculté de révéler par son oeuvre des "richesses cachées" de notre environnement ou de nous-mêmes, c'est cet aspect a priori peu accessible auquel il nous convie qui lui confère son prestige et qui nous incite à trouver un "message" quitte à l'inventer dans nos conversations. C'est l'incapacité d'aller au coeur de la démarche de l'artiste, qui lui échappe d'ailleurs peut-être autant qu'à nous, qui nous pousse à construire des théories, tout du moins à tenter de l'expliquer verbalement.

Ce n'est pas tant le contenu du message qui compte que la possibilité de faire émerger par le rapprochement créateur/oeuvre/spectateur une nouvelle forme d'appréhension ou de communication. L'émotion, la stimulation intellectuelle, la prise de conscience sociale ou individuelle, véhiculées par l'oeuvre, dans la mesure où elles peuvent être transmises et discutées, ne sont-elles pas une forme de message, un message interactif et évolutif ?

Une oeuvre architecturale ne peut pas véhiculer de message aussi clairement qu'un tableau comme Guernica mais une construction de type mussolinien peut nous faire réagir par une sensation de monumentalité oppressante, un immeuble atypique de Le Corbusier nous faire réfléchir aux commodités de l'habitat, de même qu'une chorégraphie de Carlotta Ikeda peut nous montrer la liberté de créer la grâce en dehors des critères habituels de beauté plastique. Quelque chose d'immédiat "passe" entre l'oeuvre et le spectateur/auditeur, qui dépasse le cadre étroit du message codé et n'a pas besoin de la conversation pour exister.

Transgression et unité

Roberto Casati

20 nov. 2002 13:35 UT

Deux questions principales dans le dernier message de Thi Bich Doan. D'abord, la transgression des normes et des conventions sociales serait un contre-exemple à la théorie conversationnelle, et serait plutôt à ramener à une 'force créatrice'. Deuxièmement, une remarque sur la fluidité des 'genres'. Sur la première question : je ne pense pas que la transgression soit un problème ; elle est même un aspect typique d'un comportement artistique dont le but est d'attirer l'attention et d'engendrer une discussion. Sur la fluidité des frontières du genre 'oeuvre d'art' (qui s'oppose à l'idée, que j'avais accepté, de son unité) : je me demande si elle est si importante que ça. Je m'étonne, chaque fois que je rentre dans un musée généraliste comme le Louvre, de l'énorme ressemblance entre les objets exposés, si éloignées que soient les cultures d'où ces objets proviennent. Il peuvent paraître très différents, mais il faut mitiger cette impression en considérant les possibles qui ne sont pas réalisés. Je crois que l'intuition que nous avons d'une unité du genre 'objet d'art' est trop forte pour la considérer comme un hasard.

Transgression vs provocation et Unité vs genre

Thi Bich Doan

20 nov. 2002 22:44 UT

La transgression est à distinguer de la provocation qui caractérise certaines oeuvres n'ayant pas d'autre objectif que de faire parler d'elles. Elle tend généralement à faire prendre conscience de cadres qu'elle juge arbitraires et les discussions représentent plus un moyen qu'une finalité.

L'unité, caractère de ce qui est unique, qui possède une cohérence interne et ne s'applique pas forcément à l'aspect extérieur, paraît être une notion moins restrictive pour englober les oeuvres d'art que le genre, défini comme une catégorie d'objets possédant des caractères communs et sous-entendant une certaine ressemblance.

Intuitivement, nous semblons reconnaître une oeuvre d'art, mais cette reconnaissance est-elle encore évidente hors d'un lieu institutionnel ? Et que dire de la perplexité d'un spectateur de Beaubourg qui ne comprend pas qu'une série de pupitres de musique disposés en spirale représente une oeuvre à ne pas approcher ou de celui du Palais de Tokyo qui peine à distinguer les oeuvres contemporaines des objets utilitaires du bâtiment ?

L'intuition de l'oeuvre d'art pourrait être engendrée par la profondeur d'une émotion esthétique, ce qui aurait le mérite de pouvoir s'appliquer à toute discipline artistique, mais ces élans sont plutôt rares. Elle est alors remplacée par la reconnaissance de ce qu'on a déjà vu, de ce dont tout le monde parle, une autre forme de "sensation forte" mais cette fois plus courante, plus "conviviale". Un des problèmes de la théorie conversationnelle est le risque qu'elle confère de manière prématurée le statut d'objet d'art à ce qui aurait dû et devra passer l'épreuve du temps.

Exemples ou contre-exemples ?

Dan Sperber

19 nov. 2002 22:11 UT

Certaines oeuvres d'art très atypiques (au point que leur qualité d'oeuvre d'art est vivement contestée par beaucoup) remplissent très exactement la condition de Casati: ce sont "des objets produits dans le but principal de susciter quelque conversation sur leur production." Je pense par exemple à l'urinoir intitulé "Fontaine" de Marcel Duchamp ou à 4'33" de John Cage (pendant 4 minutes et 33 secondes le pianiste tourne les pages d'une partition vide et ne joue rien) qui se sont révélés des déclencheurs de conversation hors pair. Comment se fait-il, si la théorie conversationnelle est juste, que ces oeuvres ne soient généralement pas reconnues comme des oeuvres d'art paradigmatiques de l'histoire de l'art, ni même comme les meilleures oeuvres d'art de Duchamp et de Cage?

Les oeuvres les meilleures

Roberto Casati

20 nov. 2002 10:09 UT

4'33" de Cage et l'Urinoir de Duchamps sont probablement les deux oeuvres les plus connues des deux artistes. Cela s'accorde bien avec la théorie conversationnelle. Sperber soutient qu'elles ne sont pas le plus appréciées, ce qui en revanche constituerait un contre-exemple à la théorie. La question porte sur ce que c'est, pour des oeuvres, que d'être appréciées, et des critères qu'on utilise pour dire qu'une oeuvre est plus appréciée qu'une autre. Avons-nous des statistiques? Il s'agit là d'un des problèmes les plus intéressants à mon avis, le fait qu'on discute souvent en esthétique de notions d'ordres, ou quantitatives. Je fais donc, à titre de proposition, l'hypothèse suivante : la théorie conversationnelle postule une corrélation entre la quantité des conversations engendrées et la mesure de l'appréciation. Je conteste donc que l'Urinoir ne soit pas l'oeuvre la plus appréciée de Duchamps, et que 4'33" ne soit pas l'oeuvre la plus appréciée de Cage. Je fixe, dans cette hypothèse, la signification du terme « appréciée ». L'hypothèse est falsifiable.

L'Eternel retour?

Jose Luis Guijarro

21 nov. 2002 11:22 UT

Même si je suis presque tout à fait d'accord avec R.C., il y a quelque chose qui m'échappe dans son idée. Est-ce que TOUT ce qui est motif de conversation peut devenir (un jour ou l'autre) ART de ce fait seulement ? Cela m'étonnerai vivement !

Ne serait-il pas plus « général » de soutenir que l'art est le résultat d'un traitement d'information INDIRECT (Sperber dixit !) dont la représentation de premier ordre serait VALORISER et celle de deuxième ordre X ?

[VALORISER (X)]

Naturellement, pas tout ce qui est valorisé devient ART par la suite ! Le problème dans cette formule générale (et dans celle de R.C.) est de savoir comment décrire et expliquer cette VALORISATION ... « artistique ». Ou, dans la formulation de R.C., qu'est ce qui fait qu'une conversation soit sur, ou bien instaure ... « l'art »

On est plus ou moins de nouveau au commencement : qu'est ce que c'est l'art ?

Ça doit être ça, l'éternel retour. Salut ! JLG

Sujet vs déclencheur

Roberto Casati

21 nov. 2002 13:06 UT

"Est-ce que TOUT ce qui est motif de conversation peut devenir (un jour ou l'autre) ART de ce fait seulement ? Cela m'étonnerai vivement !"

Pouquoi pas?

A noter que "etre un motif de conversation" ne suffit pas pour faire d'un objet une oeuvre d'art. Il faut encore qu'il soit produit (récruté) avec l'intention d'en faire un déclencheur (non pas un motif) de conversation. Cette intention est normalement reconnaissable à un examen de l'objet en question, si le contexte est approprié.

Oeuvre d'art?

Mario Borillo

20 nov. 2002 15:57 UT

Dada et après...

Durant ses séjours estivaux à Saint Cirq Lapopie, André Breton, se promenant avec ses amis sur les berges du Lot, recherchait un certain type de petits galets, les variolites, dont la contemplation des formes et des couleurs, par les sollicitations de l'imaginaire auxquelles elles se prêtaient, donnait lieu à des dialogues, des conversations au sein du groupe qu'il n'est pas exagéré de qualifier de poétiques. Même si, à ma connaissance, ces propos n'ont jamais été publiés.

Si l'on veut bien admettre que les variolites et les échanges langagiers auxquelles elles donnaient lieu, avec toutes leurs singularités d'origine, de contemplation, de conservation... relèvent bien de la sphère de l'"art", selon quels critères pourrait-on le justifier?

Au delà de cet exemple, de cette question, il se pourrait que l'un des traits caractéristiques de l'art contemporain soit l'exploration de perspectives dans lesquelles la recherche de formes, de modalités inédites de l'expérience mentale, constitue l'essentiel. Mais lesquelles jusqu'ici, et comment les caractériser?

Galets et pierres de paysage

Roberto Casati

20 nov. 2002 21:32 UT

Les galets semblent échapper à la sphère de l'art, mais la théorie conversationnelle tient compte du fait que les galets n'ont pas été produits avec l'intention de constituer un sujet de conversation.

L'objet trouvé artistique est un des cas limite qui testent toute théorie unifiée de l'art.

Il existe des objets intermédiaires qui ont fasciné les artistes, comme les « pierres de paysage », des pierres qui, coupées, semblent représenter des paysages, en vertu des plis et des veines dans le rocher. Je dirais que les pierres de paysage sont à la notion de représentation ce que les galets de Breton sont à la notion d'objet d'art.

La frontière est nette, mais fine : on peut la franchir aisément. Les artistes du Baroque peignaient des petits villages, des demoiselles sur les pierres de paysage, et ainsi faisant, ils conféraient une valeur représentationnelle aux plis du rocher. On peut utiliser avec une fonction représentationnelle des entités ou des propriétés qui, en elles-mêmes, n'ont pas une telle valeur. On peut recruter des propriétés physiques pour et les plier à des fonctions utilitaires.

La relation entre les discours et ce sur quoi ils portent (expériences et situations)

Maria Rossi

20 nov. 2002 21:51 UT

La Théorie du Déclencheur de Conversation (abrégée TDC dans la suite) est une théorie attirante en raison de sa parcimonie, mais sa portée explicative est sans doute insuffisante dans sa version actuelle. Première remarque, on peut douter du fait que la TDC puisse résoudre le problème de la nature des œuvres d'art (leur spécificité et l'unité de leur genre) car la TDC explique un phénomène qui n'est en rien spécifique aux œuvres d'art, le déclenchement de conversations. En effet, la théorie pourrait tout aussi bien s'appliquer à de nombreux autres phénomènes cognitifs et sociaux. Par exemple, les événements sportifs ou politiques sont de puissants déclencheurs de conversation : ils pourraient avoir, eux aussi, leur « propres TDC ». La TDC doit donc résoudre le problème de la spécificité de ce qu'elle cherche à expliquer : quelle est la spécificité des conversations à propos de l'art ? Deuxième remarque, on pourrait suspecter la théorie de n'expliquer que superficiellement les intentions et les effets qui président à la mise en place d'un dispositif artistique. Ce caractère apparemment superficiel semble lié à deux traits caractéristiques de TDC. Premièrement, la théorie est formelle au sens où elle ne prend pas en compte le contenu des discours dont elle constate l'occurrence, i.e. elle ne s'occupe pas de « ce qui est dit » lors de chaque occurrence conversationnelle. Deuxièmement, la théorie est silencieuse dans ses principes sur le rôle de

l'expérience esthétique, ou plus généralement de ce dont on fait l'expérience avant de discourir sur une œuvre. La version actuelle de TDC est donc problématique parce qu'elle ne donne ni les causes et ni les facteurs qui expliquent pourquoi les conversations s'ancrent sur les œuvres d'art.

Une possible défense de TDC

Gloria Origi

21 nov. 2002 9:12 UT

Peut-être on pourrait essayer de défendre la théorie du déclencheur de conversation en disant que les limites de sa portée explicative sont compensés par son pouvoir prédictif : elle permet en effet de faire des prévisions sur quels objets remplissent les conditions pour être des œuvres d'art.

Rappelons-nous d'ailleurs que cette théorie cherche à expliquer un phénomène très particulier, c'est-à-dire, l'unité d'un genre sous lequel on regroupe les objets les plus variés, de Guerre et Paix à un graffiti sur un mur. Je doute qu'on puisse produire une théorie qui dit plus sur le contenu de l'expérience esthétique et qui arrive à expliquer l'unité de l'œuvre d'art (la seule solution serait de retomber sur la théorie du « module esthétique » que Roberto rejette au début de l'article)

L'expérience esthétique est sans pertinence

Roberto Casati

21 nov. 2002 9:41 UT

Les événements sociaux et politiques – et même les découvertes scientifiques – déclenchent beaucoup de conversations. Mais ils ne sont pas produits avec l'intention de déclencher des conversations (si ce n'est que par accident), ce qui les rends différents des produits artistiques, pour lesquels le déclenchement de la conversation est inscrit dans l'intention créatrice. La TDC se fonde sur une clause métareprésentationnelle, qui concerne l'intention de l'artiste de créer un produit capable d'affecter d'une façon très spécifique (possibilité d'utiliser le produit pour le déclenchement de conversations) certains états d'esprit de ceux qui manieront ce produit.

La TDC est assurément formelle, dans la mesure où elle est relativement indifférente aux contenus, si bien des œuvres, que des conversations les concernant. Elle n'est pas pour autant vide, car elle pose - de façon hypothétique – un certain nombre de contraintes sur ce qui peut déclencher une conversation particulière dans un contexte où les conversations sont données.

La théorie est par contre libre de toute référence à une (prétendue ?) expérience esthétique. Il s'ensuit que, si la théorie est vraie, l'expérience esthétique ne joue aucun rôle dans la caractérisation des œuvres d'art. Je formule cette thèse de façon conditionnelle. Elle est toutefois compatible avec l'existence de l'expérience esthétique (qui pourrait d'ailleurs s'appliquer à des choses qui ne sont pas de œuvres d'art, comme le ciel étoilé.)

Spécificité, contexte et interlocuteurs

Thi Bich Doan

21 nov. 2002 21:54 UT

Le problème de la spécificité des conversations à propos de l'art et a fortiori de la nature de l'art paraît difficile à résoudre par la seule explication des causes et des facteurs qui en orientent le thème. Il peut être intéressant de prendre également en compte le type d'interlocuteurs et le contexte dans lequel émerge et se poursuit la conversation. Contrairement à un événement sportif, politique ou médiatique, l'art en tant que sujet de discussion requiert au préalable des motivations et un univers culturel communs. Il constitue parfois même un moyen subtil ou inconscient "d'inter-reconnaissance" sociale. Certains milieux, lieux, circonstances et caractères semblent se prêter davantage aux conversations sur l'art, est-ce une constatation utile à la TDC?

Spécificité?

Roberto Casati

22 nov. 2002 13:00 UT

On object (Thi Bich Doan, Nicolas Bulot) que la généralité de la TDC s'accorde mal avec la spécificité du discours ou du phénomène artistique; il serait donc intéressant de mieux préciser en quoi consiste ladite spécificité...

Variété des effets cognitifs (i.e., perceptifs, émotionnels)

Maria Rossi

22 nov. 2002 15:04 UT

L'asymétrie 'conversationnelle' (postulée par Roberto) entre l'art et les autres domaines (science, politique) me semble très difficile à prouver. Le point essentiel ici est de savoir si «l'intention créatrice» des œuvres est «déclencher des conversations». Il me semble que cela n'est pas le cas, parce que LES intentions qui président à l'organisation d'un dispositif artistique sont aussi - voire d'abord - de produire une grande variété d'autres effets, tels que des effets perceptifs, moteurs, émotionnels ou conceptuels mais

non-conversationnels. Un argument parmi d'autres : certains choix au cours de l'élaboration d'un dispositif artistique ne peuvent pas être expliqués par l'intention de déclencher une conversation, mais sont liés à des effets cognitifs plus spécifiques - e.g., des effets spatiaux ou spectraux dans les œuvres musicales, des effets optiques dans les rotoreliefs de Duchamp (1935), des effets du type Ganzfeld dans le minimalisme. La notion d'expérience esthétique renvoie à la variété de ces effets cognitifs. En d'autres termes, parmi l'ensemble des effets cognitifs produits par une œuvre x, les effets conversationnels ne peuvent être qu'un sous-ensemble de cet ensemble plus vaste. Les analyses qui comme celle de Levinson (1996, 15), dans une tradition kantienne, conçoivent le plaisir esthétique comme celui qui est pris dans la relation à l'œuvre comme étant pour et en fonction de l'expérience qu'on en a me semblent plus ouvertes que la TDC actuelle à une prise en compte de cette variété des effets cognitifs de chaque œuvre. Certes (cf. remarque de Gloria), si on suit cette ligne argumentative, on pourrait avoir à conclure que le problème de l'unité du genre n'a pas de solution claire ou pas de solution du tout.

La spécificité : le modèle stratégique

Maria Rossi

22 nov. 2002 15:46 UT

On peut concevoir un dispositif artistique à partir d'un modèle stratégique d'après lequel l'œuvre dépend d'un contexte spatio-temporel (une situation) et d'un groupe d'agents interagissant avec l'œuvre dans la situation. L'œuvre procède à des interventions en produisant des effets cognitifs variés (e.g., perceptifs, émotionnels ou conversationnels). Mais la nature des interventions dépend des contextes, de l'histoire et des stratégies choisies par les agents. Une théorie formelle et générale de l'œuvre d'art se limite à décrire les traits généraux de la possibilité de ces interventions (la TDC s'occupe des traits généraux des stratégies conversationnelles). Il semble important aussi de rentrer dans le détail des stratégies, ce qui suppose de prendre en compte la variété des effets cognitifs qui peuvent être utilisés dans les stratégies (d'où l'utilité des sciences cognitives, mais aussi de l'histoire), et notamment de s'intéresser au contenu des conversations. Les stratégies ne sont pas nécessairement conscientes, elles n'ont pas nécessairement de messages à délivrer. Cependant, on peut étudier leurs effets cognitifs et comportementaux. La spécificité de l'œuvre d'art, selon ce modèle, est repérable à deux niveaux : (i) un niveau général : les œuvres d'art sont des dispositifs hors du commun qui permettent de développer assez librement des dispositifs de présentation d'artéfacts et d'événements affectant les facultés de l'esprit humain, et (ii) un niveau particulier : chaque œuvre est un dispositif particulier dont l'organisation répond à des contraintes stratégiques et locales.

La conversation comme objet d'art

Caterina Saban

24 nov. 2002 13:46 UT

Il me semble difficile de formuler une théorie unitaire des arts où l'intention de l'artiste (en ce cas la conversation) ait un rôle si déterminant. La conversation c'est parfois un des effets d'une œuvre d'art, comme d'ailleurs peuvent l'être des phénomènes plus passifs comme pour exemple une sorte de condensation ou d'identification. C'est vrai qu'il existe dans la production artistique contemporaine ce tentatif de déclencher une conversation à tout prix: dans le meilleur des cas, la conversation pourrait alors devenir elle-même un objet de réflexion esthétique. Cela, de toute façon, ne suffit pour la transformer nécessairement en fait artistique.

Autre spécificité : la reconnaissance institutionnelle

Thi Bich Doan

25 nov. 2002 0:13 UT

Une œuvre devient œuvre d'art à partir du moment où elle existe, par sa force d'impact, aux yeux d'une autorité qui a les moyens et le pouvoir de la présenter ou la confirmer en tant que telle, à un public le plus large possible, et lui permettre ainsi d'acquérir une valeur symbolique et économique. Les critères qui président à ce choix sélectif sont un amalgame complexe de qualités esthétiques, pertinence intellectuelle, force créative, audace, révélateur social ou émotionnel, renommée, opportunisme, manipulation, effet de mode, investissement, pari... bref un ensemble d'éléments qui se combinent de manière diverse selon les artistes, les œuvres et les époques. Cette reconnaissance officielle rejoint la TDC dans le sens où elle fait abstraction des qualités formelles de l'œuvre pour se focaliser sur l'élément déclencheur, ici des "conversations d'ordre prescriptif au sein d'une haute sphère d'influence". L'art ne se réduit bien entendu pas à cette catégorisation, mais vouloir expliquer et généraliser un phénomène par essence insaisissable - car adressé et reçu à la fois par nos sens, notre corps et notre intellect -, peut difficilement faire l'économie d'un recadrage approximatif. D'où la nécessité de l'aborder par différents angles, tous justifiés, et l'impossibilité d'en préciser exactement la spécificité. La TDC a été avancée pour tenter de cerner l'unité du genre "œuvre d'art" en en postulant l'existence, il sera difficile d'en savoir davantage sur la spécificité de l'œuvre ou de sa conversation, si ce n'est en énumérant sans espoir la liste infinie et évolutive des caractéristiques propres à chaque œuvre.

On conversation

Paolo Leonardi

28 nov. 2002 8:41 UT

People who are not good at conversation, but want to be, have recourse to some repair strategies. They train themselves and select some topics on which to engage in conversation.

For instance, they become up to date on international affairs, on football, on next elections, on the weather, on the quality of shoes, on trains performances, on the spreading out of small crimes, on the declining morals, on the legal and illegal immigration, on some new technological gadgets, or the like. In this way, they overcome the problem. In any circumstance, what's new is a good conversational topic, and a comparison with what has gone is never out of the question. What was new too sometimes is a good conversational topic by itself. There are even some fans, the historians, who spend their lives on it, and there are people who buy history books and read them, before getting asleep, or during the weekend, and keep them on the closest and most visible shelves in the library. What is new is Art, then? Many men act, producing news, to have people talk of them Saddam Hussein does, Jacques Derrida and Nanni Moretti do, as did the man who deface Michelangelo's Piety and Andy Warhol with his philosophy.

Naturally, in talking of them, sometimes we have a fringe concern with their intentions what intrigues us most are their deeds, which we can occasionally invent or reshuffle if the real ones wouldn't satisfy our audience and ourselves. The real people and the real deeds are a suggestion and an excuse for us storytellers and conversationalists.

If Art were a conversational prompt, most human activities art would be Art people converse on any topic, and people good at conversation can show how sophisticated any topic is.

On Leonardi on conversation: topic vs. prompt

Roberto Casati

29 nov. 2002 10:06 UT

It is important to distinguish between conversational topic and conversational prompt. The characterization of artworks as objects created or selected with the intention of constituting a prompt to conversation restricts sufficiently the range of application so as to exclude the counterexamples suggested by Leonardi. Many people can converse, and elaborate conversational topics; to be able to create a conversational prompt is a different sort of capability, and issues in different activities, objects, etc.

Reply to sAban on conversation

Roberto Casati

29 nov. 2002 10:10 UT

Saban écrit: "Il me semble difficile de formuler une théorie unitaire des arts où l'intention de l'artiste (en ce cas la conversation) ait un rôle si déterminant." Cependant, je maintiens qu'un passage par l'intention (de l'artiste) n'est pas contournable. Comment distinguer entre 4'33" et n'importe quel autre silence?

Bullot a des difficultés avec l'unité du genre

Roberto Casati

29 nov. 2002 10:19 UT

La différence entre la TDC et la théorie plus vaste préconisée par Bullot est que la conversation n'est, d'après Bullot, qu'un des effets cognitifs d'un objet d'art, alors que pour la TDC c'est un élément définitoire (ou presque). A noter que la TDC ne nie pas que dans l'intention de l'artiste figurent d'autres effets cognitifs ; mais la TDC considère toute intention portant sur un certain effet comme subordonnée à l'intention globale, qui veut faire de l'objet un déclencheur.

Faute d'une intention globale qui gère hiérarchiquement les autres, on perd l'explication de l'unité du genre « œuvre d'art ». Donc, Nicolas Bullot devrait :

-soit proposer une théorie alternative qui livre l'explication de l'unité,

-soit nier l'unité.

Doan et la spécificité

Roberto Casati

29 nov. 2002 10:27 UT

Thi Bich Doan écrit qu'un élément déclencheur serait lié à "des "conversations d'ordre prescriptif au sein d'une haute sphère d'influence", et je souscris à sa thèse ici, qui explique la différence entre art démotique et beaux arts (les beaux arts, ce sont des arts avec une armée).

En revanche, je ne comprends pas sa définition de l'art comme « un phénomène par essence insaisissable - car adressé et reçu à

la fois par nos sens, notre corps et notre intellect » : la plupart des phénomènes cognitifs sont bien de ce genre, et ils sont loin d'être insaisissables.

Le problème des définitions de l'art

Thi Bich Doan

30 nov. 2002 21:43 UT

S'il est possible de décrire une oeuvre d'art, d'analyser les motivations de tel artiste, de retracer a posteriori dans leur contexte historique et social l'évolution de courants artistiques, il paraît en revanche plus compliqué de trouver une définition à la fois exhaustive et "générique" de l'art. En témoignent la multiplicité des angles d'approche, les réactions, polémiques, incompréhensions, passions qu'il génère, la diversité de ses supports d'expression, jadis cloisonnés, aujourd'hui élargis et mélangés, qui rendent encore plus floues et perméables ses frontières.

Si on se limite à la définition de l'art en tant que processus créatif, il correspond à une recherche de quelque chose que l'artiste aurait sans doute du mal à exprimer verbalement. Il permet par un biais d'expression sensorielle, corporelle, intuitive, spirituelle... une forme de liberté et de spontanéité qui peut servir de prolongement ou de complément au processus cognitif. Il paraît difficile de réussir à comprendre intellectuellement, même si l'on peut par ailleurs en donner une interprétation rationnelle cohérente, ce qui justement transite (du créateur à l'oeuvre, de l'artiste ou de l'oeuvre au spectateur) autrement que par l'intellect. Un problème inverse serait de profiter de cette zone ambiguë d'échange non-verbal pour mystifier des attitudes ou des réalisations qui ne possèdent pas les qualités de justesse ou de "magie" qui caractérisent certains chefs d'oeuvre.

Tant que l'on n'aura pas intégré la possibilité d'un mode d'appréhension autre qu'intellectuel, qui repousserait en quelque sorte les limites actuelles de certaines de nos capacités cognitives, il sera difficile d'espérer comprendre complètement ce phénomène dont l'émergence et la teneur nous sont au préalable inconnues, mais qui constitue peut-être justement un moyen d'exploration privilégié d'une part encore obscure de nous-mêmes.

On Casati's prompt

Paolo Leonardi

1 déc. 2002 20:08 UT

People who exercise to become good at conversation select topics that prompt it, and on which it is easy to be prompted. Breaking news are one such, perhaps the best. There are many others, as I suggested. Of course, most of them are no art.

Toward a comprehensive theory

Maria Rossi

1 déc. 2002 23:22 UT

According to Casati, « Bullot has difficulties with the unity of the kind (artwork) ». I agree, insofar as we conceive the meaning of 'unity' as dependant on a unique and simple criterion (= strong unity). Let me explain the reasons why I am skeptical about this alleged strong unity. First, a summary of our discussions: (1) It is obvious that artworks do prompt conversations. (2) It remains controversial to claim that 'prompting conversations' explains the unity of the kind: thus, the TCP (or TDC in French) remains controversial. (3) There is a partial agreement on the indeterminacy and historicity of the concepts 'art' and 'artwork'. Now, some complementary inferences. Given (3), we have to acknowledge the vagueness of the concepts of 'art' or 'artworks', and the fact that many different criteria are used in the application of such concepts. Therefore, we cannot find one and only one criterion of unity of the kind. If TCP/TDC claims to have found such a criterion, it is false because this pure criterion does not exist at all. This point may explain (2). Nevertheless, we have to find what are the most important criteria (for having a better understanding of art). For this, we need a comprehensive theory (I will not give it in 300 words). Moreover, we can imagine a weaker version of TCP, principled on (1), that would study the prompting of discussions as one of many fundamental cognitive effects of artworks.

Ready-mades: A general question

Jeffrey Galko

21 nov. 2002 1:02 UT

I had a general reaction to this article about art and artworks. Whenever I think about the subject of art and aesthetics, I almost inevitably think about the problems posed by ready-made art objects. By ready-mades I mean those objects that become artwork because someone decides that they are art and places them in the museum. So a blender becomes a work of art if someone of special importance places it in the right place.

I think that ready-mades point to two large theoretical areas that need to be addressed. First, perhaps what we need is a more detailed theory of art production in order to understand what art is. Would we say that the manufacturer of the blender and the person who has declared it art are co-creators of the art work in question? The manufacturer may be sited in the label of the piece of art. Perhaps we would benefit from distinguishing two phases of artistic production: the material production phase and the fiat production phase where the art work is placed in a context to be appreciated.

Secondly, if we accept the ready-made as art, which some may not, their artistic status seems to depend on the relation they bear to their immediate surroundings. I am thinking here of the problem of why the broken television in my room is not art while a similar one in a

different place (namely a museum) could be construed as such.

Varieties of Ready-Making

Roberto Casati

21 nov. 2002 9:42 UT

Ready-mades need not be artifacts; one can take a stone and put it into a box in a museum, and make an art object out of it. Or, to take another example, land art modifies, to some extent, existing landscapes, which are not artifacts themselves. The Conversational Prompt theory is tailor-suit to objects like those, of course; its main motivation was to give theoreticians the capability of dealing with very strange limit cases, such as ready-mades, and with the seeming bewildering variety of things that are called "artworks". Ready-mades acquire their artistic status because they are "selected" with the intention of inserting them in some conversational scheme.

Tentative de compréhension du monde

Pascale Cartwright

22 nov. 2002 11:23 UT

Si la théorie du message est erronée, la théorie du déclencheur de conversation, malgré sa relation nouvelle avec le temps, et le fait qu'elle se passe effectivement de la théorie du message, me paraît encore réductrice. Il faudrait pouvoir inclure la conversation intérieure dans la définition du mot conversation, et considérer que l'artiste a l'intention de déclencher en lui-même une conversation ou méditation, ce qui est encore réducteur. Car nul ne peut nier que l'intention de l'artiste n'est pas systématiquement tournée vers autrui. Il me semblerait plus englobant de considérer toute oeuvre d'art comme une tentative de compréhension du monde. En effet, une tentative de compréhension s'accompagne souvent d'une tentative d'explication, on retrouve là notre théorie du message. Mais également, une tentative de compréhension s'accompagne d'un désir de provoquer une réaction de la part d'autrui, qui pourrait aider à la compréhension, ce qui nous ramène à la TDC. Cependant, une tentative de compréhension du monde peut être uniquement la manifestation d'une caractéristique spécifique à l'être humain, en tant qu'individu ayant un cheminement à suivre et désirant comprendre pour progresser, sans pour cela ni se formuler son intention, ni s'adresser à quiconque d'autre que lui-même. Ce qui différencie dans ce cas l'artiste du scientifique, qui part de la même intention, c'est que sa tentative de compréhension utilisera des médiums différents de l'explication rationnelle ou de l'expérience scientifique, évoluera dans une autre dimension, et sollicitera une zone du cerveau différente.

Expliquer le monde peut aussi être valorisé

Jose Luis Guijarro

23 nov. 2002 12:02 UT

Je crois que, bien que beaucoup d'oeuvres d'art aient été conçues pour "expliquer le monde", d'autres (par exemple, l'art décoratif) n'expliquent rien du tout.

Donc, "expliquer le monde" peut être mis en valeur dans le traitement de l'information artistique, comme tout autre intention (i.e, l'intention de rigoler, pourquoi pas?).

Il semble clair, cependant, que la théorie de la conversation de Roberto a besoin (dans certains cas) d'une conversation interne de l'artiste avec lui-même qui me semble un peu poussée.

Ma théorie de la valorisation comme représentation de premier ordre expliquerait, si elle était près de ce qui se passe réellement, l'art de n'importe quel point de vue (acteur, récepteur, etc.) sans avoir recours à la théorie du message qui, comme cause (ou condition) de l'art, me semble tout à fait erronée, bien que, naturellement un message peut aussi être mis en valeur de manière artistique.

Salut!

Comprendre et conversation intérieure

Roberto Casati

24 nov. 2002 13:42 UT

Je ne suis pas certain de comprendre dans quel sens les artistes "essaient de comprendre le monde" par leur production artistique (peut-être essaient-ils par d'autres biais, évidemment, mais la question concerne leurs oeuvres). Il faudrait d'abord comprendre cela, si possible en discutant d'un exemple?

Sur un sujet différent: La conversation intérieure me paraissait un exemple possible d'application élargie de la notion de conversation. Il y a une indétermination notionnelle de la notion de conversation qui pourrait en effet se transmettre à l'évidente indétermination de la notion d'art. Mais je crois que c'est une notion sûrement à débattre.

Par exemple

Pascale Cartwright

24 nov. 2002 17:47 UT

Essayer de comprendre n'est pas uniquement l'intention de l'artiste, c'est celle du scientifique, du curieux, du croyant et de l'individu ordinaire.

L'artiste lui, essaie de comprendre à travers son œuvre – qui n'est pas utilitaire.

Par exemple : Beethoven, à travers ses œuvres cherche à comprendre et pour cela à reproduire la cohérence interne et l'équilibre du monde sous forme de vibrations sonores. En effet, reproduire aide à comprendre, expliquer aide à comprendre.

L'œuvre met en mouvement un processus cognitif de question-réponse non formulé sur la réalité du monde qui nous entoure et son fonctionnement. Ce processus cognitif est déclenché par la stimulation des sens et non de la pensée rationnelle. C'est ce qui explique pourquoi certaines œuvres sont considérées comme œuvres d'art et d'autres non. C'est que malgré l'intention de l'artiste qui est commune, le processus cognitif n'est pas systématiquement déclenché.

L'artiste, peintre, sculpteur, musicien, poète, écrivain, photographe, chorégraphe ... tente de comprendre en « représentant » ou en « expliquant à sa manière » le monde ou une partie du monde tel qu'il le ressent, et l'exprime de manière globale.

La difficulté étant que la compréhension du monde est loin de nous être accessible. L'œuvre d'art nous émeut car elle fait vibrer les cordes de la compréhension.

Comprendre peut aussi se mettre en valeur!

Jose Luis Gujjarro

24 nov. 2002 19:09 UT

Comme tu dis, TOUT LE MONDE veut comprendre. Mais quand une "compréhension" devient ART c'est parce que, comme tu fais dans ton message, tu PARLES sur elle (Roberto dixit) et tu la VALORISES (comme je soutiens). [Auparavant, c'est le compositeur qui l'a ainsi valorisée, naturellement].

Donc ...

Beethoven ne nous aide pas à comprendre le monde

Roberto Casati

29 nov. 2002 10:37 UT

Cartwright écrit, en proposant un exemple pour sa théorie de l'art comme compréhension du monde : « Beethoven, à travers ses œuvres cherche à comprendre et pour cela à reproduire la cohérence interne et l'équilibre du monde sous forme de vibrations sonores. En effet, reproduire aide à comprendre, expliquer aide à comprendre. »

J'avoue la plus grande difficulté à comprendre le sens dans lequel les œuvres de Beethoven pourraient tout faire cela. En pianiste amateur j'ai travaillé assidûment un certain nombre de Sonates, j'ai étudié mon Rosen sur le style classique, je connais certains des principes qui inspirent la composition de Beethoven, mais je ne me sens pas particulièrement à l'aise avec l'idée que, disons, Les Adieux représentent quelques aspects du monde et sa cohérence, ou véhiculent des intuitions quelconques sur le monde. De nouveau, je suis absolument prêt à discuter d'une théorie de l'art comme compréhension du monde, mais j'ai besoin pour ce faire de davantage de détails.

Réponse à Roberto Casati - I

Pascale Cartwright

1 déc. 2002 12:50 UT

L'écoute d'une sonate pour piano de Beethoven me laisse sans voix. Elle déclenche par contre chez R. Casati le désir de se lancer dans une bonne conversation, ce qui m'étonne quand même un petit peu. Tous deux sommes quand même d'accord sur le fait que nous avons affaire à une œuvre d'art. On pourrait éventuellement en déduire que la perception de l'art est un processus non pas commun au genre humain mais spécifique de chaque individu. Il n'y aurait alors pas une mais des définitions de l'art. Et c'est peut-être bien le cas. Et il faudrait commencer à explorer de ce côté-là.

Je suis cependant de plus en plus septique. Je ne suis pas si sûre que Roberto Casati croie lui-même en sa théorie du déclencheur de conversation. R.C. dit d'autre part que Beethoven ne cherche pas à comprendre le monde ou ne nous aide pas à comprendre le monde. Pourtant la musique n'est elle pas rythme, ondes, vibrations ? Et nous, ne sommes nous pas également rythme ? Notre respiration est rythme, le battement de notre cœur est rythme, l'alternance veille-sommeil est rythme, le monde qui nous entoure est rythme, l'alternance jour-nuit, les plantes, les saisons, la lune, les planètes. La lumière est rythme, le son est rythme. « Tout est rythme(Hölderlin)...de même que l'œuvre d'art est un unique rythme céleste » Quand l'artiste crée l'œuvre, quand nous l'écoutons et quand nous l'interprétons, ne nous mettons nous pas en « résonance » avec ce rythme à la fois simple, multiple et cohérent ? Et n'avons-nous pas accès alors à la cohérence et à l'équilibre du monde qui nous entoure ? Pascal (ou un autre) a dit quelque chose de très proche : « ce qui fait qu'une œuvre est une œuvre d'art, c'est la part de Nature qui est en elle. » Beethoven n'a-t-il rien cherché d'autre que de comprendre cette cohérence et de la « mettre en œuvre » ?

Réponse à Roberto Casati (suite)

Pascale Cartwright

1 déc. 2002 13:02 UT

Pour comprendre cela de manière plus simple, voilà un exemple non-artistique : Les ondes sonores peuvent déclencher dans le cerveau une réaction de compréhension totalement indépendante du langage articulé et de la pensée même quand elle n'est pas formulée. Par exemple, la jeune mère qui entend dans la rue un bébé pleurer sans du tout y faire attention, voit instantanément le lait couler de ses seins alors qu'elle ne pense même pas à son propre bébé qui est ailleurs.

Pour revenir à l'art, les philosophes cherchent la même chose « Pour vivre heureux il faut que je sois en accord avec le monde » (Wittgenstein).

Peut-on imaginer Beethoven entrain de composer dans l'intention de déclencher un certain type de conversation ? Je ne le peux pas. J'ai parfois l'impression que la TDC est une sorte de plaisanterie sympathique dans le but (réussi) de lancer le colloque art et cognition... Si j'offense R. Casati en disant cela je lui présente mes excuses car ce n'est pas mon intention. Mes critiques sont celles d'une personne très ignorante.

First VALUE, then CONVERSE

Jose Luis Guijarro

22 nov. 2002 15:27 UT

PART 1

In the seventies, I read a book by one Marie Louise Pratt on a theory of speech-act approach to Literature that marked my subsequent thinking on art and literature. She claimed that there were two NECESSARY CONDITIONS for art: (1) the displaying one (which is almost identical to what Roberto has in mind for, by displaying the information, one treats it as something to be watched, talked about, etc.) and (2) The elaborativity condition (which I have found to be a very extended notion in many authors, for example in Ellen Dissanayake's interesting books).

After meeting Dan Sperber and reading some of his ideas, it occurred to me that I could turn Pratt's notions into some kind of cognitive frame. I therefore used Sperber's distinction between representations which are, as it were, represented DIRECTLY in our mental box of representations and those that are represented INDIRECTLY, that is, inside other representation(s). Origgi and Sperber claim in their joint paper on the origin of language that this possibility (i.e., embedding representations) is a human characteristic (although there are some indices of it in close species, but not with the richness that we use it) that made language possible.

I thought that this notion was a very important one, since it could not only explain the rise of human language, but a lot of other things typically human, such as, say, ART. I said the other day, that ART, in the first place, therefore, could be schematically represented as:

ART = DISPLAY (X)

That is as a HUMAN ATTITUDE (as Sperber and Wilson name it in their "Relevance" book).

So, if you see a pebble near a river you process it like X; but, if you think that it has some qualities that are worth watching, you display it (putting it in a box in a museum is one way of doing that): D (X).

The interesting thing about displaying something is that you do it with a purpose. Now, Roberto claims that the purpose is to convert it into a conversational topic. But to my mind, you don't talk about anything if you don't think it has a certain VALUE. So, I would think that the important topic to think about would be to be able to DESCRIBE that value.

Part II

Jose Luis Guijarro

22 nov. 2002 17:01 UT

Now, as it is clear that as religion is general in the human species (see Pascal Boyer' book (2001) on that topic), it should be also be accepted that some kind of ART attitude exists in every human being (even in those that process, say, Falcon Crest and not Ulysses in such a way). So, the valuing attitude that is connected with it should have some very general characteristics suitable for ALL the human race.

However, values are almost always socially marked, as everyone knows. Is there some kind of UNIVERSAL value? I came across Ken Van Kleeve's idea that living beings, at least, had one: to preserve their genes (i.e., their life or that of their offspring). From there, I speculated that the art VALUE could not be the "elaborativity" one, because, as said, a river pebble, could be processed as art, although it might play some part in it, once branched, as it were, to its social milieu. No: it had to be something else.

Relevance theory claims that in order to process information with some effect, we have to set it against our mental context. But, what of the first processing of information when we are just born? Of course, I don't claim that our mind is a clean slate; I favour the

modularity notion of Sperber, and so SOME context is always available.

But what if the art VALUING resembles this first encounter with information in newborns? They create their own subjectivity as their processing goes on. Could THIS process of personality creation be searched in the ART experience? After all, the first guys and dolls that painted some of their representations on rocks and so created a NEW way of actually seeing what could not be seen before that move, and THAT should have changed their "personality", should it not? Moreover, perhaps "love at first sight" (when, for instance, everything in the context is against it) is a renewal of a somewhat similar process. It is a high valuable one, although it may lead to problems and death, as it did in Juliette and Romeo's case!

Part III

Jose Luis Guijarro
22 nov. 2002 17:03 UT

I know, this is still a wild speculation which is full of unclear outcomes. But, what I want to submit is the gist of my position, namely:

ART IS AN ATTITUDE THE ATTITUDE IS ONE OF VALORISATION THIS VALORISATION MUST BE A GENERAL HUMAN ABILITY which has to be DESCRIBED and EXPLAINED (I have tried a path which is full of pitfalls; what I would ask is whether somebody else could speculate on this issue as well. We may well end up with not only one general mental disposition but with an interconnecting functioning of a number of them)

Cheers!

Symphonie ?

Pascale Cartwright
24 nov. 2002 6:46 UT

Qu'est-ce qu'une symphonie de Beethoven essaie de VALORISER ? La musique ? Le thème révélé par son titre ? La symphonie ne se suffit-elle pas en elle-même ? Et peut-on imaginer qu'il y ait eu intention de l'artiste de déclencher une conversation même si l'œuvre a effectivement déclenché des conversations ? Peut-être a-t-il eu l'intention de déclencher une émotion, mais pas une conversation. L'artiste n'a-t-il pas eu pour seule intention le désir de comprendre, par des moyens qui sont les siens et qui ne sont pas scientifiques –la composition musicale- la structure du monde qui l'entoure ?

Une oeuvre d'art ne valorise RIEN!

Jose Luis Guijarro
24 nov. 2002 15:23 UT

Pascale Cartwright semble m'avoir malinterprété. Je n'ai jamais dit que une symphonie, un plat de cuisine, un tableau, un roman, etc. valorisent rien du tout!

Ce que j'ai dit c'est que NOUS valorisons des sons, des mets, des images, des textes, etc. d'une certaine façon (qui reste à décrire et expliquer) et que c'est CETTE FAÇON DE TRAITER L'INFORMATION que ces objets fournissent ce qui les rends des oeuvres d'art.

Donc: l'art n'est pas "dans" les objets ni dans ses constituants; l'art n'est pas l'action de l'artiste; On pourrait même dire que l'art n'est pas exactement une façon d'interpréter un message quelconque (car pour les interprétations on a besoin du contexte social). Non.

L'art apparait avant cela: l'art se déclenche quand on adopte une attitude valorisante d'un certain type. C'est après cela que l'on en parle, que l'on l'interprète, etc.

Conversation explains value

Roberto Casati
28 nov. 2002 16:16 UT

José-Luis Guijarro suggests a theory of what an art object is. The theory is that it can be whatsoever object, provided it is valued, that is, considered as valuable, by a subject, and possibly then inserted in a conversation pattern (a special case of which could be the simple displaying of the object in a showcase).

I do not think Guijarro's theory marks a substantial point over the conversational prompt theory.

The conversation theory claims that an art object is whatsoever object that has been produced or selected with the intention of making a conversational prompt out of it. What exactly is the difference between (a) "valued" and (b) "produced or selected with the intention of making a conversational prompt out of it"?

I can see two main possibilities, among others.

1. "Valued" could just mean "selected", so that the two theories simply do not differ. 2. An object could be valued, along some parameters, and then inserted in a conversation pattern. However, where does the value of the object come from? We are after some value that could explain the fact that the object is considered artistic. (Just monetary or affective value won't do, per se.) Now,

the conversation theory explains where the value can come from, of course: it is a function of the object's ability to fit into a given conversation pattern as a prompt.

Hence, either interpretation of "valued" is not sufficient to make me prefer Guijarro's theory. In the first case, we just have a terminological variant of the conversation theory. In the second case, the conversation theory has an explanation of the valuation theory, as it explains the source of valuation.

Reply To Roberto FIRST PART

Jose Luis Guijarro
29 nov. 2002 12:11 UT

Roberto thinks (perhaps rightly) that:

"José-Luis Guijarro suggests a theory of what an art object is ".

This is however not what I wanted to say. What I had in mind was to make sure whether, in talking about ART, we were all pointing to the same REALITY out there (I said "object out there" for REALITY, I know, and here is, I think, the source of R's misunderstanding, I suppose. I should have specified that this "object" is not the result of an artistic activity AT ALL. Not "the work of art" as it sometimes called. Sorry about that, Rob!)

For that reason, the following is not EXACTLY what I thought I said:

"The theory is that it can be whatsoever object, provided it is valued, that is, considered as valuable, by a subject, and possibly then inserted in a conversation pattern (a special case of which could be the simple displaying of the object in a showcase). "

No. The object I am trying to point to is a HUMAN ATTITUDE : THEREFORE, any information that we receive and insert in a first order representation might become ART. What is that first order representation? Something like "[DISPLAY (whatever)]".

Let's go now to a more substantial part of the debate (in another message, just in case!)

Reply to Roberto SECOND PART

Jose Luis Guijarro
29 nov. 2002 12:14 UT

Roberto says:

"What exactly is the difference between (a) "valued" and (b) "produced or selected with the intention of making a conversational prompt out of it"? I can see two main possibilities, among others. 1. "Valued" could just mean "selected", so that the two theories simply do not differ. 2. An object could be valued, along some parameters, and then inserted in a conversation pattern. However, where does the value of the object come from? We are after some value that could explain the fact that the object is considered artistic. (Just monetary or affective value won't do, per se.) Now, the conversation theory explains where the value can come from, of course: it is a function of the object's ability to fit into a given conversation pattern as a prompt".

I am not able to see a clear explanation of why some objects that have ability to fit into a given conversation pattern as a prompt turn up to be artistic, while other fail to do so. We are all talking about the black tide in the North of Spain. Does it mean that this black tide is in some sense artistic? We all enjoy gossip conversation but, as far as I know, Camilla Parker and the Prince of Wales are not considered art ... yet!

So, let us suppose that what Roberto and I have in mind is either exactly the same (as in 1) or that my idea has a weaker explanatory power than his (like in 2). I agree on both possibilities which don't solve my problem, nor (as far as I am able to follow him) Roberto's.

I wanted to find out what this special valuing (that which turns the embedded representation of whatever into ART) in order to have a full explanation of this phenomenon. If we suppose that I accept R's view over mine, I want to solve THE SAME PROBLEM!. Why is it that if I attend my doctorate courses in a mini-swimming suit, which, I believe would give people around here a lot to talk about, is not considered artistic at all, whereas Marcel Duchamp urinal is an object with an artistic value attached to it nowadays (not in his time, though, as it caused a great scandal in the public).

What I think is that, even if the receptors at that time didn't think that the urinal was of any value as an artwork, Duchamp probably thought it had and my question is WHAT IS THE (value or conversational, it' immaterial to me) COMPONENT THAT turns this urinal art but fails to turn my almost naked body in the doctorate class into another art object? Be it what it may, I think this is, at least UNFAIR!

Cheers!

Guijarro on going to class indecently dressed - possibly art!
Roberto Casati

30 nov. 2002 11:51 UT

I guess that if one goes to class indecently dressed, he or she does it for some interesting reason, and people will worry quite a lot and speculate about the reasons.

Would people think that the *main* reason was that the indecently dressed teacher intended to produce an event-like conversational prompt (as opposed to other reasons I do not dare to name)? They would then consider the performance as artistic – that much the conversational prompt theory predicts, and that much seems to square with common sense.

On one point, however, the conversational prompt theory needs an important supplement. What is it that makes people realize that a certain object was produced or selected with the intention of creating a conversational prompt? How is the meta-intention of the artist readable off the product? Some homework is needed here.

I agree with Roberto TOTALLY in this point, but ...

Jose Luis Guijarro

30 nov. 2002 16:35 UT

I certainly agree with Roberto in these two points:

(1)"anything" may become ART, even a semi-naked Pebble ("guijarro" means "pebble" in Spanish!).

(2) Homework is needed to describe the type of prompting that creates ART. I am very much interested in this last point.

Here is my not too smart speculation on it, again:

Art is currently described as CREATIVE. Art which is not creative, it is argued, is not really art, but copying, cheating, whatever.

My tentative idea which was almost destroyed, (and rightly so, for it also needs a lot of elaboration to be of any value) by Dan Sperber in a private conversation last month, was that this CREATIVE element could be represented as a felt change in the subjectivity of individuals. My idea was that every mystical experience, if you happen to have had it, and every real ART experience, which I think we all have had one or several times, did some change in our subjectivity.

I tended to view this SUBJECTIVITY in a relevance theory frame. According to that theory, new outside information MUST interact with existing internal one in order to have cognitive effects. What I imagined was that new-borns, by definition, lack social information (not hardwired information, naturally!) and they have to acquire it slowly by slowly becoming SUBJECTS in that process. Now, the VALUE of art would be, in my terms, a sort of re-enactment of that creative process which would produce the enthusiasm which we all experience when we do/receive REAL (?) art.

But for my speculation to work, you have to change the focus, from a behavioural trait (i.e., promptings in a conversation) to a cognitive one(i.e., the mental handling of representations and metarepresentations).

Another type of counterexample?

Dan Sperber

23 nov. 2002 14:46 UT

Many pieces that we have no hesitation to identify as works of art have been intended for a public of one, as the Goldberg Variations (allegedly written by Bach to be played by the harpsichordist Goldberg to Count von Keyserling during his nights of insomnia), or for no public at all, as in the case of paintings on tomb walls in Ancient Egypt. One could also mention the sketches that so many painters have produced for their own use, but that have found their way into art collections. For obvious reasons, it is hard to maintain that these are "objects produced with the chief aim of provoking some type of conversation about their production." Don't they raise a problem for the "theory of conversational prompts"?

Even sketches can be valued

Jose Luis Guijarro

23 nov. 2002 16:30 UT

It looks as if Roberto's speculation falls short in covering cases like the ones mentioned by Dan. I can see no such a problem with the DISPLAY proposition I elaborated. One may display ANYTHING: a sketch, a silent concert, a private letter, a war report ...

This would explain why Caesar's well known reports on the civil and the Gaul wars HAVE BECOME nowadays items of the Roman Literature without changing one dot. What has changed is OUR WAY OF PROCESSING them: Before, they were processed as X, and now, we process them as D (X).

Ain't that a simple (!) and elegant (?) way of explaining such apparently mysterious cases?

It is also true that, as Sperber told me in a private conversation, those limiting cases become art because we already know what the considered typical cases of art ARE in the first place! And here is, I think, the gist of the matter which I have been trying to solve with my speculation on the "creation of personality" momentum. Very likely it is a wild speculation, but at least it is something -which,

moreover, would explain why totally NEW art-results are most valued by authors and receptors. The additional problem is that "TOO new" is something refused as art in very many occasions...

What I think Duchamp and Cage have done with their often cited "objects" is to try to prove that whenever you have the right ATTITUDE towards anything you may consider it art. For me, they wanted to do away with the message conception of art and concentrate on our human disposition. But perhaps you feel I am going too far?...

Modifying the theory

Roberto Casati

24 nov. 2002 13:50 UT

Things produced with the intention of being used by one single person or by no-one, and that are taken to be artworks nevertheless, constitute a problem for the theory of the conversational prompt. We would need here to go into the difference between a definition of an artwork and a characterization of what artworks are. I do not consider the theory to be definitory (as I said in the paper, so I need to give at least the hint of an alternative account). The concept of an artwork is a mind- or response-dependent concept, in the sense that it expresses the property that objects have to strike us as appropriately similar to things that have been produced with the intention of being considered as a conversational prompt; that is, as appropriately similar to (extensionally) things that are usually considered as artworks. Cages's 4'33" is so similar in one sense; self-addressed sketches are appropriately similar in another sense. No, problem, as the dimensions of APPROPRIATE similarity are many, and we have to look for them.

A modification that admits too much

Tamar Szabo Gendler

27 nov. 2002 22:33 UT

Casati replies to Sperber's challenge of artwork with an audience of none as by suggesting that we admit as art things that "strike us as appropriately similar to things that have been produced with the intention of being considered as a conversational prompt; that is, as appropriately similar to (extensionally) things that are usually considered as artworks." I have two worries about this response:

(a) It will admit too much: Mona Lisa screensavers, dropsheets (canvasses that cover surfaces to prevent paint from dripping on them), illustrations on toothpaste tubes, logos on credit cards, etc.

(2) It suggests a highly observer-relative conception of what art is. I can expand the number of works of art in my house simply by coming to see (or treat) certain ways that they resemble paradigmatic works of art as "appropriate."

Perhaps Casati wishes to endorse one or both of these implications -- but if so, he should be up-front about them....

Not Too Much, Just Enough

Roberto Casati

29 nov. 2002 10:50 UT

The main idea behind the modification of the definition is that there is some indetermination at the borders of the concept of an artwork -- which everyone seems to accept anyway. Making the concept both response dependent (in the "appropriate" way, I do have some homework to do on "appropriate", of course) and with paradigm structure seems to be just enough to justify that my (ugly) Mona Lisa screen saver and mousepad are somewhat "artistic", and are so marketed, as opposed to "dull" ones. But then we want to restrict the range from "x is artistic" to "x is an artwork", and I admit that the modified definition seems to apply better to "x is artistic" than to "x is an artwork". OK. The counterexamples offered in the discussion (Sperber, Nagel) all concern cases in which artistic objects have been not created with the intention of prompting a conversation. They would be inserted in various speechless practices (magic, religious, etc.). I think I can allow myself a little boldness here: How do they know those objects are artworks then? Maybe they are just religious objects, and I think we treat many religious objects as non-artworks. My explanation is that those religious objects which are treated as artworks are judged to be similar to objects that are artworks for the conversation theory. I do not really want to sell this, but is there an alternative account? Why are those religious icons artworks?

historical parameters of artwork

Alexander Nagel

27 nov. 2002 17:16 UT

Roberto Casati's conversational theory of the artwork purports to be a general theory of art, but seems to me to apply only to a modern context of thinking about art. The Byzantine clerics who laid down the theory of the icon in the eighth century and afterwards would have been surprised, to say the least, to hear that it was the job of art to "maximize novelty". They thought it was the job of the image to transmit and preserve prototypes, that is to minimize novelty. And it is hard to imagine that conversation was an important part of the functionality of art in any context where images were primarily associated with magical or apotropaic practices. One way around this is to historicize the question, for example by arguing that these cases are instances of image-making but not of art-making in the sense

Casati intends. In that case, it might prove useful to adopt something like Hans Belting's schema of a history of images that only cedes place to a modern "era of art" in the renaissance. This solution probably will not be satisfying to philosophers. In that case, I would like to see the contributors to the discussion address directly the issue of the historicity of definitions and functions of art making.

Two replies to Nagel: 1. Accepting the challenge

Roberto Casati

29 nov. 2002 9:54 UT

Nagel: "... I would like to see the contributors to the discussion address directly the issue of the historicity of definitions and functions of art making."

This is an important question. Let me spell out a sense in which I am sympathetic to its spirit. I was trying to warn against an all too simple characterization of the concept of an artwork (and of art), the concept that is the working notion in the on-the-rise cognitive approach to art. My question, in a sense, was: what are cognitive scientists talking about when they talk about artworks and claim they are studying them cognitively? The question is indirect, in the sense that I propose a very general characterization of what an artwork is, and I use it as a benchmark against which I'd like to test alternative characterizations (the message theory, say). I expect other characterizations to be widely insufficient on some or other account, relative to the one I proposed, which claims that artworks are created with the main purpose to be conversational prompts, and that things are classified as artworks when one reads off that intention in them.

In this sense I am sympathetic to Nagel's warning: We have to be very careful about our working concepts.

Two replies to Nagel: 2. Defining 'art' historically

Roberto Casati

29 nov. 2002 9:56 UT

Now what about Nagel's own concept of an artwork?

Nagel presents a counterexample to the conversational prompt theory. Some artworks have no conversational prompt function! They were designed – say – to be used in speechless rituals (or anything you like). Name such artworks 'icons'.

I have a very simple question about that. How do we know that icons are artworks? What is Nagel's working concept of an artwork? Does it – can it – include both icons and Picassos?

Nagel would probably say that there is no overarching concept to encompass icons and Picassos. The account is normative: it entails that he who deems icons as artworks in the same sense in which one would deem Picassos as artworks would be making a mistake. The mistake would depend on the fact that one does not know that the concept of an artwork is historical, it changes over time. Call this an "historicist" account of the meaning of 'art'.

Now talking of the historicity of the concept of art is relatively slippery. If really the concept of an artwork is historically tainted, there will be many different concepts at stake, and we should consider the two occurrences of 'art' in, say, 'Roman art' and in 'Op art' as mere homonyms. Are they more than homonyms? Then we need an account of how it comes about that they are. No way one can escape this issue. [Incidentally, I assumed, without argument, that there is a unity of the genus 'artwork', which can be taken to hold also diachronically. That is, I endorsed the basic assumption made by cognitive scientists, just to better expose its weaknesses. But I do think that there is an unity.]

A simple way out here is to claim: Icons are NOT artworks! But this, of course, is compatible with the conversational prompt theory, given the definition of 'icon' given above, and the counterexamples evaporates. And now it is up to "historicists" to tell us why the conversational prompt theory is wrong, that is, why are icons to be considered artworks after all.

I can offer that much by way of help: icons are considered artworks because they look so much like paradigmatic artworks (such as Michelangelos and Picassos). This explains "historicists" basic ambiguity about the concept of an artwork: they know that icons are not artworks, but accept that they are sufficiently similar to artworks to be considered as such. It is up to them to judge whether this account is satisfactory. And it is up to them to come up with a better account.

l'art décoratif et l'art des autistes dans la théorie de Casati

Jérôme Pelletier

30 nov. 2002 11:04 UT

1. Certains aspects des produits artistiques sont décoratifs. Il y a même un art décoratif. La théorie de la conversation (TDC) rend-elle compte de ces aspects des produits artistiques? Il me semble que la TDC suppose une conception quasi-romantique de l'art où les aspects de nouveauté et d'originalité priment, des aspects qui sont loin d'être essentiels dans l'art décoratif.

2. La TDC définit l'activité de l'artiste en termes métareprésentationnels puisque, selon la TDC, l'artiste a l'intention que l'utilisateur du produit qu'il créé reconnaisse que ce produit a été créé avec l'intention de déclencher des conversations. L'artiste a donc une méta-intention. Que penser alors des produits artistiques des sujets dépourvus de capacité métareprésentationnelles comme certains autistes?

Pelletier sur la décoration et l'autisme

Roberto Casati

30 nov. 2002 11:38 UT

Pelletier propose deux contre-exemples à la théorie du déclencheur conversationnel (TDC) ; le premier concerne l'art décoratif, le deuxième l'art des autistes.

La TDC explique les aspects artistiques des décorations, qui sont bien évidemment créés aussi avec une fonction propre.

En revanche, sur les dessins des autistes, en admettant que ce qui caractérise les autistes est l'absence du module meta-représentationnel, elle est contrainte de normer, et de nier qu'il s'agit de produits artistiques. Mais c'est un problème général pour toute caractérisation de l'art. Quel est le critère qui permet à d'autres théories de considérer les dessins des autistes comme artistiques ? Je crains que ce n'est que le fait qu'ils sont vu comme ayant des ressemblances avec d'autres dessins normalement considérés comme artistiques.

L'évolution de l'art et l'autisme

Gloria Origgi

1 déc. 2002 20:29 UT

En réponse au commentaire de Jérôme Pelletier, Roberto écrit :

« Quel est le critère qui permet à d'autres théories de considérer les dessins des autistes comme artistiques ? Je crains que ce n'est que le fait qu'ils sont vu comme ayant des ressemblances avec d'autres dessins normalement considérés comme artistiques »

Montrer les ressemblances entre les dessins des autistes et d'autres formes d'expression a néanmoins eu des implications plus importantes que celles que Roberto semble disponible à reconnaître à toute étude « comparatif » de ce type.

Par exemple, l'article de Nicholas Humphrey : « Cave Art, Autism and the Evolution of Human Mind » (1998 - Cambridge Archeological Journal) comparait l'art pariétal d'il y a 30 000 ans et les dessins des autistes. Les ressemblances frappantes entre ces deux formes d'expression permettaient de repenser l'émergence de l'art pariétal par rapport aux capacités de communication et symbolisation humaines. Et d'avancer l'hypothèse libératoire que l'émergence des capacités artistiques n'est pas nécessairement liée à l'émergence des capacités communicationnelles (une implication partagée par la TDC et par la théorie du message).

Pictorial language

Avigdor Arikha (Painter, Author)

(Date of publication : 18 November 2002)

Abstract: The language of painting is pictorial: not verbal but visual. It is sensed, not comprehended. But many art historians are increasingly concerned with what a painting represents, and not so much with its visual intricacies. This is an analogical sideline that leads away from art into cultural history that is probably at the root of the dominant confusion in art of our time. The nature of the pictorial language will be examined here.

The science of vision can tell us something about what is going on in the brain when one is looking at a painting. It remains to explain how this process triggers a properly aesthetic experience. It is possible, I believe, to reconstruct the processes at work in cognizing a painting in such a way as to acknowledge the specific nature of the work of art. It is by understanding pictorial language. In what follows, an account is given of the pictorial language - that is, of the kind of visual experience that is uniquely offered by paintings, as opposed to other objects.

The perception of a work of art, unlike the perception of an image, is such that we usually tend to recognize what we see, thus to see what we already know. Whereas image perception is automatic deciphering, art-sensing happens through the passage from passive to active seeing and sensing; and it takes a particular kind of attention for passive vision to be turned into emotionally resonant, active seeing. The viewer perceiving passively a Rembrandt portrait as an image only, will miss its pictorial emotion. The passage from passive to active perception engages the processes that define "art cognition". Art cognition in the sense given here generates a complex neuronal firing, by which we tend not only to taste but also to recognize by what we already know. The reason for this is that retinal activation triggers associations (percepts) determined by past experiences. The past visual experiences of looking at paintings, reminiscent of other paintings, can trigger a cascade of varied emotions, intensified by the recognition of the pictorial language, thus probably engaging both hemispheres of the brain.

Art cognition requires not only knowledge but discernment, and favourable viewing conditions: without light at its full spectrum (natural light) the perception of colour is falsified. Although art cognition engages all levels, it is first by feeling that it is activated, when a viewer is struck by a work of art conveying a visual experience. A visual experience is immediate and is not necessarily conveyed by subject matter, but by the pictorial language itself.

For example, Chardin's famous [HYPERLINK "http://www.ac-nancy-metz.fr/Pres-etab/JeanLurcatBruyeres/lyceejeanlurcat/louvre/chardin3.html"](http://www.ac-nancy-metz.fr/Pres-etab/JeanLurcatBruyeres/lyceejeanlurcat/louvre/chardin3.html) \n _blank [Le Gobelet d'Argent](#) (oil, 1767-68, Paris, Louvre, M.I. 1042) has no story to tell, and yet, it conveys a visual impact. Three apples, two chestnuts, a bowl with its spoon and a silver goblet are the theme of a painting that conveys a moving visual experience, although the subject is indifferent. What moves us is the painting itself.

We are at first struck by the reflection of the apples on the upright silver goblet, the eye is drawn from the reflection of the apples to the apples themselves, and from the apples to the opaque bowl, from its oval rim, to the goblet's oval rim, and back from the oval to the round apples, two showing their stems and one turned backwards, and finally to the chestnuts. Two oval rims, three apples, two chestnuts, opacity and reflection in a rhythm of three-two - in a sequence of one-two-three and one - the one is the spoon in the bowl, seen from below. Slightly darker and opaque, the back of the spoon handle creates the syncopation and sets the tension in the Gobelet d'Argent.

One can, of course, interpret this painting without sensing it, without seeing it, using it as a document, by carrying it through analogies: the apple's species, the goblet's style, its eventual owner, his society, its political implications, and so forth, entering a lengthy cultural discourse. Without saying anything about the painting itself. However, art history is the history of works of art, and was at its beginnings a history of exceptions that perpetuates these exceptions, and teaches seeing, not reading. Viewing a painting at a first glance does not differ much from wine tasting: both engage discernment. It is followed by the formal pleasure derived from the unfolding of the pictorial syntax, which carries the subject or the theme.

Similarly to the function of grammar in a string of words, the pictorial constituents operate the picture - dot, line, form and colour in a state of tension - that underlie depiction. It is analogous to a succession of segmental phonemes that constitute a sentence. A visual proposition, the way in which Chardin's still life can be turned into a pictorial event, when its formulation follows internal logic, when every dot in it relates to a line, the line to form, the form to space, the centre to edges, the colour to value, harmony to contrast, pull to counterpoint and syncopation. Finally every authentic pictorial continuum has a flow, within its simultaneity, guiding the eye with movements and halts as in music. Furthermore, a sharp line will affect perception differently from a soft one, so that soft and sharp lines together constitute a graphic duet. However, unlike a proposition formed by words, the constitutive pictorial elements are not fixed like musical notes or letters of the alphabet, but are fluctuating marks traced on a surface, inflected by subjectivity. This inflection is the origin of style - it causes [HYPERLINK "http://www.nyu.edu/classes/garcia/resource/apap/413scr.jpg"](http://www.nyu.edu/classes/garcia/resource/apap/413scr.jpg) \n _blank [Rembrandt's](#) line to differ from [HYPERLINK "http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass/ixbin/hixclient.exe?_IXDB_=compass&_IXSR_=oh5&_IXSS=_IXMAXHITS_%3D1%26_I_XFIRST_%3D1%26_I_XDB_%3Dcompass%26%2524%2Bwith%2Ball_unique_id_index%2Bis%2B%2524%3DOBJ944&_IXFIRST=1&_IXMAXHITS=1&_IXSPFX_=graphical/full/lg&_IXimg=ps143603.jpg&submit-button=summary"](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass/ixbin/hixclient.exe?_IXDB_=compass&_IXSR_=oh5&_IXSS=_IXMAXHITS_%3D1%26_I_XFIRST_%3D1%26_I_XDB_%3Dcompass%26%2524%2Bwith%2Ball_unique_id_index%2Bis%2B%2524%3DOBJ944&_IXFIRST=1&_IXMAXHITS=1&_IXSPFX_=graphical/full/lg&_IXimg=ps143603.jpg&submit-button=summary) \n _blank [Holbein's](#), affecting the perceiver's feelings distinctly.

Although subjectivity is the mark left by an artist and remains imprinted as style, it is only the root of a graphic or pictorial sequence, similar to the way an axiom is related to the sentence it justifies. And yet, the existence of such a syntax has largely been overlooked, although artists have always known it intuitively. Line, form and colour in concordance can be recognized universally and communicate directly on the visual level by impact, igniting a cascade of feelings or aesthetic emotions. These feelings can be pleasurable or not, depending on the angle of cognition. And this cognition provokes recognition, presumably of beauty. Beauty can be defined as perfection, a state of equilibrium between fragility and potency. It provokes the viewer's infinite craving - a craving that cannot be quenched.

Imitation and beauty were declared obsolete concepts not only because of overuse, but because of the utopian ideologies that started with romanticism. However, beauty is always there when recognized. On the other hand, mimesis remains a need as in mitosis. One cannot resist the need to hold by graphic or painterly means a figure, a face, or a view that strikes one's feelings. The fleeing visual event imposes its urgency by which its trace is fixed on a plane. Even a photograph, which is not a trace but only a reflection, can be subjected to an angle and become art, as in the cases of Nadar or [HYPERLINK "http://www.dienes-and-dienes.com/CBManLeaping.jpg"](http://www.dienes-and-dienes.com/CBManLeaping.jpg) \n _blank [Cartier-Bresson](#) - and both moved from painting to photography. Although a photograph is not achieved by the hand, but obtained mechanically, it is still the work of the painter's eye.

There wouldn't be perfection in art without the evolution of the hand. The endeavour to capture visual data is manifest from the onset of lithic technology, and was determined by the hand-motion which unfolded continuously in order to achieve perfection. The palaeolithic artist strived for perfection of line in his depictions no less than later artists. The graver by which lines were incised into the rock was soon followed by a tool by which not only the single line would be achieved, but multiple lines - namely the brush. The invention of the brush is as crucial in the evolution of art as the wheel is for motion. They are both permanent and essentially unchanged. Diversifications of the brush remain very narrow: it is still made of animal hair tied to a stick. Without the brush there wouldn't have been painting. The drawing or painting tool is an extension of the hand, and the first motion a novice has to learn is how to hold and move this tool in order to master it in such a way as to make it transmit the slightest tremor.

It is this tremor that moves the discerning viewer.

We can suppose from palaeolithic paintings that they had methods of holding and moving these early brushes, probably made of an animal's tail, but written evidence appeared late, first in China, in the Southern Ch'i period (479-591). It implies first of all the exercise of the hand in order to master the brush, which is not unlike a beginner's first piano lessons, which consist in learning to hold the hands above the keys, and touch, and press, and hammer. The weight and touch are as important in mastering the piano as they are for the brush. The essence of technique is to master the hand before the subject. In Cato's words: 'grasp the subject the words will follow' - *Rem tene verba sequuntur*. The methods actually didn't really differ. The intensity of a line demanded the same hand movement for a Lascaux or Altamira artist as they did for Mu'chi, or [HYPERLINK "http://www.louvre.fr/img/photos/collec/ag/grande/rf4113.jpg"](http://www.louvre.fr/img/photos/collec/ag/grande/rf4113.jpg) \n _blank [Dürer](#).

What remained hidden was the awareness of the pictorial language, of which there is no mention in Western art-treatises prior to the

second half of the nineteenth century. Though the notions of beauty, grace and liveliness were there since Antiquity, one did not venture beyond proportion, perspective, technical recipes and perfect execution. Although the pictorial grammar and syntax was, subliminally, always there, it was first formulated as "grammaire et syntaxe de la peinture" by Jacques-Louis David. The notion of a pictorial grammar was carried on by the decorative arts and received an extraordinary impetus in Britain, during the 1840s, following the reform of industrial design, in the battle for good taste in interior decoration. It was started by a number of artists, among whom August Northmore Welby Pugin, Richard Redgrave, and William Dyce, who, in his lecture on ornament delivered to the students of the London School of Design (1849), said:

"Ornamental design is, in fact, a kind of practical science, which, like other kinds, investigates the phenomena of nature with the purpose of applying natural principles and results to some new end".

Although that "new end" was meant to be the mechanical skill, another end beyond that horizon was painting as painting - not painting a tale or a yarn any longer - a principle that would explode during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Modernist theory of abstraction, and above all the spirit that presided over the Bauhaus with Kandinsky and Klee, continued the ideals started by William Dyce, [HYPERLINK "http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/grammar/propositions.html"](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/grammar/propositions.html) \n _blankOwen Jones, Christopher Dresser and William Morris. Klee's investigations into the constitutive elements of the picture gave Modernism its grammar. A painting was not regarded any longer as an illustration but had to be seen as autonomous, through its own language. Klee's approach was influenced by metaphysics, mysticism and music. He actually deconstructed the constitutive elements of a picture, demonstrating all its hidden formal possibilities and thought that our art-cognition is wider than it was in the past and therefore extends beyond the optical. What he probably meant by "optical" is actually what we name illusionism - Zeuxis's grapes. Modernism was about non-illusionist painting, up to the appearance of Pop-art, which brought the image back into the picture, doing away with pictorial syntax.

In spite of the fact that art has moved away from the general to the particular, from the collective to the individual, in an accelerating path, since the seventeenth-century, the regression of the 1960s perpetuates a setback, one that influenced art cognition negatively.

It took painting tens of thousands of years to move from the undetermined cavern walls to the determined surface of a painted plane, and not so long ago to painting from observation, rather than from memory. However, the pigments have remained the same. Palaeolithic art attests to a knowledge of minerals and even painting mediums in a speedy technique and graphic as well as chromatic formulation that remains, in many cases, paradigmatic. The caverns' rugged walls were often treated so as to use their irregularities, which were incorporated in their engraved, drawn or painted elements. These early artists clearly understood that the painted surface ought to be transformed into a pictorial plane, although it is likely that such a concept did not yet exist; but the segmentation of visual data is naturally based on limits, on spatiotemporal edges, which are and were spontaneously detected by the human visual system. The plane is determined by its limits, by its edges, be it a rectangle, a square, an oval or a tondo. It imposes foreground and background, and its edges determine the power of the centre. This fact was recognized by Leon-Battista Alberti, who defined the pictorial plane as "known not by its depth but only by its length and breadth and by its quality. Some qualities remain permanently on the plane in such a manner that they cannot be changed without altering the plane itself."

Hence, it is the shape of the plane that dictates its activation and its eventual transformation into a pictorial space. The formulation - the pictorial syntax - is, however, closely knitted with technique, because the chemical aspect of pigments conditions the visual one. So does the correspondence between colours perceived in reality and the pigments on the palette, that continue to challenge art cognition to the present day.

Discussion

What is pictorial language?

Roberto Casati

18 nov. 2002 11:08 UT

"Pictorial language" is a term that can refer to many different things. We can take it to hint to a research programme in cognitive science about inner structures of the mind, or, more modestly, as a useful metaphor for phenomena in picture perception that allegedly resemble understanding of sentences of a language. (Looking at a still life by Chardin would be somewhat like processing a sentence whose content is about the silver cup, the apples, and so on. The painting is a sign, like the words in the sentence.)

Whatever the intended interpretation of the term "pictorial language", it appears as if we are here in front of an empirical hypothesis about the way the brain processes paintings. A way to test the hypothesis is to look for, in paintings, traces of the linguistic workings of the mind, which would show that the brain operated under linguistic constraints.

However, no matter what we could find that resembles linguistic activity in paintings, there are phenomena, such as illusionistic paintings, or even artistic photographs, that do not appear to have been generated under linguistic (in some to be specified sense) constraints, but as mechanical renderings of the distribution of light and color in an environment. (Unless, of course, one endorsed the doubtful notion of a "language of vision".) Hence the question: What is really "linguistic" in paintings. And: Aren't we here in front of a largely unspecified metaphor?

Defining terms

Noga Arikha

18 nov. 2002 16:55 UT

In reply to Roberto, I would venture to say here that the expression 'pictorial language' does not refer to verbal language, but rather to the visual code within the painting. Much as works of art such as paintings do indeed 'render', as Roberto says, 'the distribution of light and color' and so on, they do not do so in the way that signs denote their referents. The pictorial language described by Arikha here is, precisely, *not* linguistic: it is internal to what a painting (say) is, it defines it as an object whose qualities are such that it coexists, at most, with the realm of verbal language.

Depiction and description

Gloria Origgi

19 nov. 2002 20:11 UT

I do not think that the analogy between language and painting is a "largely unspecified metaphor" as Roberto suggests. Language is not just a "code" that allows us to transmit messages. We use it to represent the world around us: the finer is our description of the world, the more informative will be our classifications. Thus, the analogy is valid if we see language as a way of representing the world, and not just a way of transferring information about the world.

In his book : "The languages of art", Nelson Goodman proposes an analogy between *description* in language, that is a way of representing an individual as something else (as when I describe "Brutus" as "The man who killed Caesar") and *depiction* in art, which is also a way of representing things as. As descriptions in language may be particularly rich and original and give us access to a new insight, depictions may also give us access to new combinations of properties of our world that improve our knowledge of the world. I still find this analogy illuminating.

pictorial language

Simona Morini

20 nov. 2002 10:47 UT

To compare pictorial language with language is something that has sense only in our culture. As Gloria Origgi rightly says, the analogy is valid if we see language – and art – mainly as a way of representing the world. But there are other ways of using language, and art. Think of Japanese art. What characterizes a piece of art is not what it represents, but what you cannot see. Painting is just a hint, something that mediates the visible and the invisible. The sentiment of art arises from the invisible, the visible is just a mean to go beyond it, it is something that must be completed by the observer. Allusion is much more important than description. Twilight is more important than full light (in Tanizaki's work we are invited to look for chromatic variations in the dark, enlightened only by a candle). The primary role, in Japanese art is played by what is somehow "between": between beauty and ugliness, light and darkness, right and wrong. Beauty, in this world, is never something stable, objective. It isn't wholly "inside" the work of art, but is also a contingent product of the feelings, thoughts, situation of the observer. It is something changing, it often arises in unexpected ways. One is tempted to say that art and beauty is something that can be "generated" by the work of art without being "in" it. This is why, for example, Japanese can see beauty in imperfection, even in ugliness. Thus understanding pictorial language, here, resembles more understanding poetry than understanding ordinary language. What we probably need to study, then, are the many different ways in which we give sense to things. Simona Morini (Università di Siena)

Scientific Methodology

Richard Minsky

20 nov. 2002 13:32 UT

Avigdor postulates that pictorial language has a grammar and syntax, though not necessarily the same grammar as spoken or written language (as Noga Arikha points out). His essay gives me the sense that this language is built up over the centuries through the contributions of many artists, and it is through the interpretation of this language that art is perceived. Simona Morini suggests that pictorial language is more like poetry than, say, journalism, in that it is metaphor. Much as I like that, if what Avigdor's essay says is that grammar and syntax apply to pictorial language, pictorial language can be used in ways comparable to either poetry or prose. In fact, the examples given suggest that Klee produced both paintings and technical manuals using pictorial language.

This is a very different view from Roberto Casati's view of art as a conversational ploy, though not in contradiction to it. I am in agreement with Casati's point of view. My 1981 exhibition at the Allan Stone Gallery in New York was titled "Ten Conversation Pieces." It included paintings, photographs, collages, bookbindings, and, at the opening, my one-performance band, Old Man Rivet and the Rivetheads, performing one short piece titled "I Want To Be Riveted."

Regarding Avigdor's hypothesis, Roberto says: "A way to test the hypothesis is to look for, in paintings, traces of the linguistic

workings of the mind, which would show that the brain operated under linguistic constraints."

This would not be a valid test of the hypothesis that this is the way the brain processes paintings. Scientific methodology requires the null hypothesis to be tested. A proper test would seek one example of the brain processing paintings in a non-linguistic way. In order to do this we would need to define what constitutes a linguistic system of neural interaction, and that definition would need to be inclusive of visual, aural and written languages.

I think it is sufficient to note that there are many paintings, and schools of painting, which are based on the type of formal grammar and syntax that Avigdor's essay suggests. That provides a lot of fodder for dissertations and art historians, and for many conversations.

Question de définition !

jean-francois Doucet
20 nov. 2002 15:19 UT

Dans la mesure où l'analogie entre image et langue n'est pas nouvelle (voir les allusions au Bauhaus), mon attention a été attirée par "Le langage pictural " de Avigdor Arikha. Je ne retrouve malheureusement pas dans l' article les définitions de la langue qui auraient clairement délimité les éléments picturaux d' un tableau et les éléments linguistiques de la langue. Il semble qu'on puisse établir un parallèle entre le représentant(image),le représenté (motif) et la distinction classique du signifiant et du signifié. Mais le parallèle, me semble-t-il s' arrête là : à trop vouloir assimiler les éléments picturaux aux mots d' une phrase, on éprouve la satisfaction de concevoir une grammaire picturale. Mais rien ne prouve que cette satisfaction soit féconde ... une grammaire des éléments picturaux permettrait-elle de peindre automatiquement d' autres toiles à la façon de la musique algorithme ? Peut-être, mais je voudrais bien voir le résultat !

Minsky on the Null Hypothesis

Roberto Casati
21 nov. 2002 13:19 UT

Minsky criticizes one point I make about pictorial language. Apologies for quotes :

"Regarding Avigdor's hypothesis, Roberto says: "A way to test the hypothesis is to look for, in paintings, traces of the linguistic workings of the mind, which would show that the brain operated under linguistic constraints."

Minsky: "This would not be a valid test of the hypothesis that this is the way the brain processes paintings. Scientific methodology requires the null hypothesis to be tested. A proper test would seek one example of the brain processing paintings in a non-linguistic way. In order to do this we would need to define what constitutes a linguistic system of neural interaction, and that definition would need to be inclusive of visual, aural and written languages."

Actually, my point was about production, not about perception of paintings. But Minsky's warning is appropriate.

To Simona Morini

Avigdor Arikha
23 nov. 2002 10:36 UT

What a relief to read your piece. You brought to light this very fragile ,and now again, threatened subtlety, that allows us to discern between art and non-art, masterpiece and rubbish.

Reply to Roberto Casati

Avigdor Arikha
18 nov. 2002 22:13 UT

If a painting, like this Chardin, is a visual proposition that is perceived as an image only, the emotion provoked by its strictly pictorial experience, is averted. The 'interpretation' transforming a pictorial masterpiece into a mere image by decoding it, is misleading into analogies that are non-pictorial. In other words, a masterpiece can be extinguished by seeing it as an image, not as art. Whereas seeing a painting in a state of sensing provokes a neuronal firing that is felt but not yet understood. The pictorial language is actually pre-lingual and acts through impact, not significance. Avigdor Arikha

Regressive Sixties?

Hans U. Iselin
19 nov. 2002 18:51 UT

To consider the art of the Sixties as a purely regressive phenomenon is equivalent to negating the changes that have taken place in the evolution of visual perception and aesthetics during the second half of the twentieth century. Many works of art of this period may look

primitive at first sight yet are the product of a process combining masterly techniques with a pictorial message that is best described by the late Vladimir Tatarkiewicz's disjunctive definition of art: "art is a construction of forms, or a reproduction of things, or an expression of experiences capable of producing pleasure, emotion or shock"

The message of the Altamira masters is different from the messages delivered by Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer or Ellsworth Kelly because the environment in which the art of Altamira was produced differed fundamentally from the environment of a twentieth century artist. Mastering the brush or the pencil stroke is still as important for the artist as it has been for Hokusai, Holbein or Rembrandt, but the fact that the human hand is being challenged progressively by robotics has had an impact on the process of creating art long before the phenomenon could be recognized by the general public.

Point and Line to Plane

Richard Minsky

20 nov. 2002 13:27 UT

Avigdor Arikha's text may be a work of art, according to Roberto Casati's definition. It certainly prompts conversation.

I was surprised at the credit given to Klee in the essay: "Klee's investigations into the constitutive elements of the picture gave Modernism its grammar." and: "Klee's approach was influenced by metaphysics, mysticism and music."

The Pedagogical Sketchbooks certainly contributed to the genre of pedagogical artists' books, but if the Bauhaus is what gave Modernism its grammar, I would give the credit first to Kandinsky for *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and *Point and Line to Plane*. But I don't know that I would give the Bauhaus that credit solely, important as its contributions may have been. The Constructivists and Futurists certainly made great contributions. Not all contributions to the "grammar" of an artistic movement are made by pedagogues, and I think of Cézanne and the students of William Merritt Chase, as in the "Precisionist" paintings of Charles Sheeler, who, like Nadar, also was a painter/photographer. And let's separate the notions of "abstraction" and "non-representational."

As for the conversationally provocative statement: "the regression of the 1960s perpetuates a setback, one that influenced art cognition negatively."

That contradicts Avigdor's earlier emphasis on the importance of the brush, the hand, and the quality of the line. Franz Kline made those three elements the subject of hundreds of paintings. I regard Kline as the definitive manual on using edge definition techniques to create illusionistic space. Clyfford Still, Morris Louis, Mark Tobey, Rothko, and many others came out of the "Modernist" school, combining the movement of the brush with a spiritual approach, while focusing on the "push/pull" of the image plane. At the same time, Willem deKooning advanced the work of 19th c. painters like Turner, Ryder and Whistler.

Devant Chardin

Marie-Catherine Sahut

20 nov. 2002 13:37 UT

En lisant Avigdor Arikha, en particulier ce qu'il dit du Gobelet d'argent de Chardin, qui n'a « pas d'histoire à raconter », je songe à ce que Gide écrivait à propos de Chardin et de Cézanne : « Là du moins j'étais bien certain de n'admirer que la peinture ». Je partage ce point de vue. Je me demande toutefois quelle est la nature de notre activité cérébrale devant les natures mortes de Chardin. Le Gobelet d'argent ne raconte rien, mais par ce fait même il raconte beaucoup. Au plaisir de la vision plastique se mêlent très vite l'étonnement devant la simplicité (par contraste avec les tableaux du temps ou par analogie avec la peinture moderne), une sensation frappante d'intemporalité, la nostalgie du passé (celui de Chardin ou celui de notre enfance), des questions sur la « magie » de l'art (comment évoquer tant avec si peu ?), sur la vie quotidienne de Chardin (ce sont ses objets), etc. Toutes choses qui accompagnent la sensation visuelle, mais ne lui appartiennent pas. J'ai finalement l'impression que, devant Chardin, il est plus difficile qu'avec tout autre de procéder au partage des rôles dans cet « embrasement neuronal complexe » qu'évoque si justement Avigdor Arikha.

In what sense are seeing and sensing NOT active?

Jose Luis Gujjarro

21 nov. 2002 9:58 UT

In what sense are seeing and sensing NOT active? In my world, both processes are ALWAYS active, so the distinction A.A. is drawing between image perception and art-sensing looks pretty shaky to my mind.

It would only make sense to me in the case we would agree in saying that the ACTIVE bit refers to a DISPLAYING attitude while processing the information of a work of art.

I understand ATTITUDE as a sort of high order proposition in which the relevant data are processed. This high order proposition could be:

[DISPLAY (whatever)]

Now, this attitude elicits a series of additional processes which make us perceive and consider the "whatever" bit in a different light. We may concentrate in the new perceptual considerations and EVALUATE them according to all sorts of personal preferences, some of

which are well described by A.A.

In a De Sica film of the 50s, *Miracolo a Milano*, the protagonist, Toto, achieves the feat of making his very poor neighbours VALUE a sunset as a work of art by DISPLAYING it before them, i.e., by telling them to watch it as if it were a performance. This is precisely what I have in mind!

art cognition and ordinary perception

Dan Sperber

21 nov. 2002 15:22 UT

A request for clarification. Arikha writes:

"The perception of a work of art, unlike the perception of an image, is such that we usually tend to recognize what we see, thus to see what we already know. Whereas image perception is automatic deciphering, art-sensing happens through the passage from passive to active seeing and sensing; and it takes a particular kind of attention for passive vision to be turned into emotionally resonant, active seeing. The viewer perceiving passively a Rembrandt portrait as an image only, will miss its pictorial emotion. The passage from passive to active perception engages the processes that define "art cognition".

Typically, when we see an image, we tend to recognize what the image is an image of (of the Eiffel Tower, of Einstein, of a rose, and so on). The recognition involved in the perception of a work of art must go beyond this. Is it the recognition of the way in which this particular work of art is both related to, and different from, other works of arts (of the same artist, of the same tradition, of the same genre)? To what extent is the "discernment" involved the ability to see the work of art as belonging to a family or to a genealogy of works of art (drawing, for instance, on "the past visual experiences of looking at paintings, reminiscent of other paintings")? What is the relationship between recognizing the work of art as a work of art among works of art, and what Arikha calls the "unfolding of the pictorial syntax"? More generally, what might the relationship, if any, between a genealogical model (an "epidemiological" model, I am tempted to say) and a grammatical model of art?

elucidations

Avigdor Arikha

21 nov. 2002 15:54 UT

I owe some elucidations: To Hans U. Iselin: The regression that occurred, as I see it, in the 1960s was not due to painters such as de Kooning or Kelly, but to Non-painters who were encouraged by the belief in "closing gaps" with non-painting.

To Richard Minsky: You are certainly right about Kandinsky's celebrated theoretical writings. However, Klee's so called 'Pedagogical Sketchbook' is only a minuscule extract from Klee's notes that were published posthumously under the title 'Das Bildnerische Denken', 542 pages, Basel, 1956 Avigdor Arikha

The Thinking Eye

Richard Minsky

22 nov. 2002 1:03 UT

I did not mean to disparage Klee's opus magnum. In English, *The Thinking Eye* was published in New York in 1961 by Wittenborn. The small issue I was addressing was the statement in the original essay that Klee "gave Modernism its grammar." My comment was intended to note that in both chronological precedence and distribution of published theoretical pedagogy, Kandinsky was particularly influential in this genre, from *Der Blaue Reiter* and *Über Das Geistige in Der Kunst* of 1912 to *Punkt und Linie Zu Fläche* in 1926.

Kandinsky

Avigdor Arikha

22 nov. 2002 16:46 UT

Richard Minsky is right from the chronological point of view, but not only: Kandinsky's influence was evident. Though, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, as well as *Punkt Linie zu Fläche*, continue further Christopher Dresser's principles, they are slightly deterministic and sound canonical, as if K. was an icon painter lost in abstraction. This is not the case with Klee and I think that we owe him, as well as Mondrian, a greater debt. But this is only my point of view. Finally, art is not objective...

to Dan Sperber

Avigdor Arikha

21 nov. 2002 19:48 UT

What I mean by "the unfolding of the pictorial syntax" is its qualitative recognition: the formulation as well as the intensity and perfection of execution. Thus, execution is part of the pictorial syntax. Without the performing hand there wouldn't be the trace, the touch, the brushstroke that triggers the 'delectation', the pictorial emotion. What is painted, the subject-matter, comes second. Pictorial recognition is not akin to image recognition which is a 'precept'. Pictorial recognition is conditioned by visual sensitivity and leads to a nonverbal experience.

En réponse à Avigdor Arikha

Didier Sicard

22 nov. 2002 19:10 UT

Le déchiffrement d'un tableau peut être remplacé par la surprise face à l'inconnu subitement révélé : " oui, c'est cela, l'artiste nous montre un nouvel ordre du monde inconnu auparavant, il nous révèle un ordre caché des choses ", il bouscule notre raison, notre conformisme et littéralement nous dépasse. La trop grande compréhension sensuelle du langage pictural liée à une analyse grammaticale rigoureuse risque de nous faire passer à côté de l'étonnement face à la beauté d'une langue étrangère inconnue entendue le soir dans un train ou d'une musique étrange nouvelle. Le langage pictural peut aussi solliciter d'abord un regard passif, brusquement arrêté par la surprise de l'étrange. Alors seulement peut se mettre en route le regard actif. Ainsi, regard passif brusquement allumé, regard actif, fruit d'une instruction, se complètent-ils pour que cette étrange relation entre un Sil et un tableau provoque simultanément complicité, désarroi, interrogation et excitation.

Where we are now

Noga Arikha

22 nov. 2002 19:26 UT

In organizing a conference on the relationship between the experience of art and the scientific study of cognition, we wish to emphasize the necessarily interdisciplinary nature of such an enquiry. Indeed, not only is a subject-matter of this kind focused on the establishment of a dialogue between disciplines, but this focus itself requires a multi-perspective brainstorming session - the one which we have set up here. The diversity of points of

I don't think so. Yet, the first step towards finding a meeting-ground would require an agreement, not on what constitutes 'art' and what not (some of the messages have been addressing this question) but on the criteria necessary for establishing how view on display points to the difficulty of establishing a common, non-slippery ground from which to begin a fertile discussion. However, it is by pointing to this difficulty that we may arrive at its proper starting-point.

My own perspective is that of a humanist interested in science rather than of a scientist interested in the humanities (as well, inescapably, as that of daughter of artists familiar with the vagaries of artistic creation). From this position, I have noticed with interest (as has Dan) a tendency among some of the cognitive scientists and philosophers here to single out as examples for their arguments precisely those figures - such as Duchamp - which, historically, stand explicitly in contraposition to what artistic experience has otherwise been throughout history, both in the Western world and elsewhere.

This tendency might point to a need for philosophers to concentrate on works which seek to embody a conceptual attitude to artistic experience. Does it also indicate an impossibility for the conceptual examination of what happens when we gaze at 'traditional' art, the art that provokes emotional experiences, rather than thoughts, in the first instance?

the perception of a work of art differs from that of an ordinary object. The one question implies the other. But we need to settle for a set of phenomenological considerations and empirical studies of what is historically given as an art object: the goal is not to interrogate the validity of this category, nor to deny its value - quite the contrary. And to take its value fully on board entails recognizing the historicity of art objects; what we must avoid is the denial of the humanist perspective within the scientific one, and vice-versa.

La libre joie

Marie-Catherine Sahut

23 nov. 2002 23:12 UT

Je souhaiterais apporter au débat le point de vue développé par Jean-Pierre Changeux dans son dialogue avec Paul Ricoeur:

"Dans le cas, par exemple, de la contemplation d'un tableau, on peut concevoir, de manière encore hypothétique mais plausible, que les architectures du plaisir esthétique engagent, en premier lieu, les aires visuelles de l'écorce cérébrale qui analysent la forme, la couleur, la distribution dans l'espace, éventuellement la simulation de mouvement.

Remontant dans la hiérarchie corticale, une "synthèse" succède à l'analyse, le cerveau reconstruit les formes, les couleurs et les figures en un tout cohérent qui occupe la mémoire de travail. La capture du rythme, des formes et des couleurs, de leur harmonie, active sélectivement les mémoires stockées dans le compartiment à long terme, donne du sens au tableau ou plutôt fait surgir une multiplicité de sens parfois contradictoires.

L'oeuvre d'art mettrait à contribution le niveau le plus élevé de la hiérarchie des fonctions cérébrales : celui des intentions et de la raison. Elle créerait l'harmonie entre la sensualité et la raison sans recours obligé au raisonnement explicite. C'est la libre joie sans délibération formulée ! Mais l'art possède une dimension supplémentaire, la faculté d'éveil, le pouvoir évocateur qui fait surgir dans le cerveau du spectateur images, mémoires, souvenirs, gestes, et suscite le rêve. Il donne à penser. Il invite au rêve partagé d'une authentique "vie bonne", avec cette liberté de dire et de faire comprendre dont seule la poésie est capable, mais ici sans le recours au langage. Il parvient en fait à ce que ni le droit ou la morale sous leur forme normative, ni la science avec son langage d'objectivité rigoureuse ne peuvent : développer l'imaginaire, susciter de nouveaux plans de vie commune, en quelque sorte rêver un futur partagé et harmonieux"

(La nature et la règle, 1998, pp. 338-339).

Il me semble que le discours du neurobiologiste est ici en cohérence avec celui du peintre (AA). Il est vrai qu'un même "appétit" de peinture les unit (JPC se déclare "iconophile").

Je retiens seulement que JPC emploie un vocabulaire plus restrictif. Là où AA parle de "langage pictural", JPC définit l'art comme une expression "sans délibération formulée". Cela évite des confusions.

the 'pictorial language' issue

John Zeimbekis

27 nov. 2002 22:08 UT

Do you succeed in understanding the picture by virtue of its density? Or do you project concepts over a syntactic scheme (the surface of the picture) which truth-conditionally claims a unified space, in which case semantic density would be a result of interpretation, rather than its condition? In the latter case the processing would be more substantially linguistic-style, even if the syntax is not discrete.

L'oeil et la main

Marie-Catherine Sahut

1 déc. 2002 15:21 UT

Avigdor Arikha est à la fois peintre et historien de l'art, j'aimerais lui poser une question. Dans son texte, il parle de l'expérience de celui qui regarde une œuvre d'art, non de celui qui crée une œuvre d'art. Quand AA peint, et parce qu'il peint obligatoirement d'après nature, j' imagine qu'il doit mener une activité scopique particulièrement complexe, partagée entre son motif et son tableau en cours d'élaboration. Il s'est déjà " expliqué " sur ce point, non sans paradoxe:

" Sa main opère. Son œil suit. La main va, aveugle, source du regard. Qu'aura t'il peint ? Ce qu'il aura vu ? Ce qu'il aurait aimé voir ? La main aura accompli quelque chose. Elle l'aura déçu. Egaré dans une zone insoupçonnée. Instrument de perdition ou de révélation " (1966, dans Peinture et regard, 1991, p. 240).

Une main qui court plus vite que les yeux ! Voici un terrain d'expérience pour les sciences cognitives. J'aimerais savoir si, à la lumière des découvertes récentes, il est possible d'en savoir plus : métaphore ou réalité ?

reply to Marie-Catherine

Avigdor Arikha

2 déc. 2002 9:38 UT

Oui, en effet, quoique la main suit le regard, je crois, qu'en saisissant un objet (ou sujet) visible, la main précède l'oeil, si la saisie est fulgurante. Cette fulgurance crée l'écart entre la copie mécanique et la saisie vive d'une ressemblance, l'écart imprimant alors une modification qui sera sous-jacente à la ressemblance, qui sera finalement, le style du peintre. Cet écart n'est donc pas vu ni voulu, il est produit subconsciemment par la main seule.

Postural sense and human figure in Renaissance art

Francois Quiviger (Researcher, Librarian, Webmaster, Warburg Institute)

(Date of publication: 25 November 2002)

Abstract: This paper focuses on the relationship between postural sense and the human figure, such as the latter has been codified, elaborated and represented in Renaissance art. It analyses how postural sense made possible artistic developments in which painting moved away from what one may call a cognitive naturalism and processed its own visual vocabulary.

(Translated from French by Marcel Lieberman)

To view the text along with the animated images, click [HYPERLINK "http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/postures.htm"](http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/postures.htm) \n _blank[here](#).

Writing on Renaissance painting in terms of cognitive science, far from reducing images to the application of faculties that were as yet unnamed, consists instead in examining how the intuition of their presence led to pictorial developments. It thus involves finding points

of intersection between the artistic approach and the information and forms produced by the central nervous system, not as diagnostics of the image, but as material for its production.

In the history of painting — and the history of ideas concerning Renaissance painting — there stands out a certain parallel: one between figure and proprioception. This parallel is the topic of the present paper: to examine the connections between the representation of the human figure and the sense that produces its inner image. After briefly defining the postural sense, I'll show how its presence gave rise to certain developments in Renaissance art.

Proprioception, or postural sense, yields a constant flow of information about the position of the body's parts at every waking moment. Proprioceptors, which are found in muscles and around joints, provide the nervous system an inner image of the human figure by means of which it is able to anticipate and coordinate movement. Upon this figure, which originates in the muscle tissue itself, is superimposed an inner body-image that is separate from its material basis. This inner image can give rise to the phenomenon of phantom limbs: the feeling that amputated arms or legs are still attached to the body, causing at times sensations of pleasure or pain. Recent experiments have shown that it is possible to make the phantom limbs move and even to amputate them.

Even if the existence of the proprioceptive system was not established until the end of the 19th century, it was clearly already active in the past since movement without it is impossible. However, an early echo of this faculty can be found in the Aristotelian theory of the soul, whose reign extended from the Middle Ages to the 17th century. In the chapter of *De Anima* concerning the sense of touch, Aristotle speaks of the flesh as the intermediary, rather than the organ, of this sense, without however clarifying its nature (*De Anima*, 423b 25). In contrast to modern science, the Aristotelian theory does not distinguish between senses that transmit internal information, and those that transmit external information. Nevertheless, the view of the skin as an intermediary for the sense of touch treats this sense's organ as a kind of inner figure. This lack of clarity in Aristotle's text would undoubtedly enable one to elaborate upon the concept of the inner sentient figure; yet it is precisely on this point that modern neuroscience confirms the existence of this inner figure, not as a poetic reality, but as the anatomic sum of the body, whether immobile or in movement, just as it is transmitted by the proprioceptors to the central nervous system.

In order to better make out the role that this inner figure plays in Renaissance art and culture, one needs to consider two closely related fields: religion and the production of images.

The figure on the cross

The central figure in religion is that of Christ. Beginning in the 12th century, one notes the emergence of a Christianity that is evermore centered around the humanity of Christ and his suffering. The Franciscans, whose influence in the 16th century spread throughout Europe, prescribed an empathic piety that culminated in Francis of Assisi's stigmatization. This episode, which served as an iconographic model, helped diffuse a model of prayer based on the postural imitation of the crucifixion, since it represented the saint in the position of one crucified. This use of posture as an expressive element is not an isolated case in the medieval context: the founder of the Dominican order wrote a treatise in which he matched seven types of prayer with seven different positions ([HYPERLINK "http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm"](http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm) [1](#)). Nor is it rare to encounter posture in Italian mystical texts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Vanna da Orvieto, for example, would meditate upon the passions of the apostles Peter and Paul while assuming their positions at the moment of martyrdom. The mystics' most common hope was to be privileged enough to experience all the sufferings of Christ. Now, such suffering puts into play the postural sense. Or so confirm, at least, the accounts of the Passions as disseminated by the *Meditaciones vita Christi*, a 13th-century text that makes up for the lack of graphic details in the Gospels by providing an overabundance of violent images aimed at fostering an empathic piety for a suffering god. The magnitude of its diffusion is shown by the more than two hundred surviving manuscripts and the fifty editions for Italy alone between 1450 and 1550.

If in order to understand the accounts of the flogging, the crowning of thorns, and the despoliation one requires an external tactile experience of being scratched, stung, or cut, then the description of the nailing on the cross is incomprehensible without the experience of proprioception. The author of *Meditaciones* describes the episode by presenting two possibilities: in the first, he assumes that the cross is already erected; in the second he supposes that it is on the ground and credits the executioners with a certain sense of symmetry. After having nailed the first arm they must pull the other one to the opposite side of the cross using ropes. In either case, it is above all a question of imagining a human figure stretched upon a cruciform frame. Christ's posture, the empathy with his figure, is in some way the expression of the violent infliction of the geometric symbol of the cross upon postural sensation.

Human figures in flesh and bone

Since this theme circulated throughout Europe by way of the *Meditaciones*, it is likely that it determined the perception of the most common object, image and support of prayer in the West—the crucifix. The theme of the crucifixion appears in Flemish iconographic painting, which readily emphasizes the none too burlesque efforts of the executioners. In Italian painting, on the other hand, such depictions are rare, despite the diffusion of the *Meditaciones* in the Italic peninsula ([HYPERLINK "http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm"](http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm) [1,2,3](#)).

A similar three-dimensional imagination of the human figure is also found in artistic training techniques of the 15th century; i.e. techniques used for imagining a figure in order to depict it. In *Della Pittura*, the humanist Leon Battista Alberti (1438) proposed a technique that requires one to imagine a human figure starting from its skeleton, gradually adding layers to it: bones, muscles, skin, robes. His influence held sway up until the 19th century. A number of Renaissance artists also recommended its use: Leonardo, Vasari, Paolo Pino, Francesco de Hollanda, Cellini, Danti, Allori, Armenini and Lomazzo. A drawing by Alessandro Allori provides an instructive example, which one sees put to use in Michelangelo and Raphael ([HYPERLINK "http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm"](http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm) [4,5,6](#)). One also finds traces of it in Ascanio Condivi's description of Michelangelo's Moses:

"A marvelous work and full of art, but much more: beneath the beautiful robes covering [Moses], appears the nude, and the clothing in no

way detracts from the beauty of the body; one sees this in all of [Michelangelo's] clothed figures, both painted and sculpted."

Whereas in thinking about the body one imagines its movements and the emotions it expresses within a narrative context, in the visual arts the body becomes the raw material for the image, deprived of any specific narrative function. It is exactly in this context that Raphael animates Michelangelo's *David* ([HYPERLINK "http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm"](http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm) \n _blank8). In a sketch for the *Massacre of the Innocents*, he studied the positions of the soldiers' moving bodies, without apparently worrying about how to represent the horror of babies being killed. In fact, Renaissance painters and their public considered the human figure not only as the principal element in pictorial composition, but also as the focal point for the expression and appreciation of artistic talent. Following this line of thought, the Venetian painter Paolo Pino in the *Dialogo di Pittura* (1548) advises his colleagues to include in their narrative composition "...at least one wholly mysterious figure, that is forced and difficult, in order to be recognized as a good painter by those who understand the perfection of this art."

One comes across these views once again in the 16th century debate that set sculptors against painters: sculptors insisted that a carved figure required greater intellectual work than a painted figure, since one needed to conceive its appearance from a number of different angles, while a painting is visible from only a single angle. Painters responded that a good painter could show in a single glance all the positions that a human figure can assume. One finds here the same idea of Ascanio Condivi, a close friend and the first biographer of Michelangelo, according to whom the Last Judgment reveals all that nature can do with the human body. During this same period, the artistic training techniques prescribed by Vasari opened up the possibility of superimposing the mental and postural images:

"... the best thing is to draw men and women from the nude and thus fix in the memory by constant exercise, the muscles of the torso, back, legs, arms and knees, and the bone underneath. Then one may be sure that through much study attitudes in any position can be drawn by help of the imagination without one's having the living forms in view."

Since the artist has within himself the anatomical body-image, it is likely that the artist's relation to posture goes beyond memory and extends to his own experience. One finds an example of this in Palma Giovane's self-portrait, whose position is inscribed as just one other variation on the poses of the figures depicted within the work being painted ([HYPERLINK "http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm"](http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm) \n _blank10). A particularly playful poem by the painter Agnolo Bronzino perhaps confirms this superposition between the painter's postural figure and the painted figure. The poem is from the *Capitolo del pennello*, a burlesque fantasy about the brush's role as a generative organ for both the painting and painter, and which makes possible the superposition of the one thousand and one figure poses onto the one thousand and one sexual positions. Bronzino's text begins by extolling an imaginary painting:

"Recently I saw a beautiful depiction of a man and a woman: they were nude painted together in a pleasant (piacevole) act."

The ostensible motivation for the poem is an obviously unimportant painting of two figures — Adam and Eve, Atlas and Hesperis, Venus and Adonis, Anthony and Cleopatra....Bronzino simply notes that the work contains all that one can acquire through study or by nature, and decides to write a piece in praise of the brush that produced it.

"This one is shown on the bed or assumes a tired pose, erect or seated; this one holds something in his hand, that one hides it this one wants to be seen behind someone; that one wants to be painted in front of someone; this one stands, that one seems to fall. I couldn't count the thousand and one acts and extravagant ways; know that variety pleases everyone. It's enough to do it facing or from behind, sideways, foreshortened or in perspective, the brush adapts to every position."

The visual source of Bronzino's postural fantasy has been identified: the *Modi*, a series of engravings made in the 1520s by Giulio Romano and etched by Marcantonio Raimondi ([HYPERLINK "http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm"](http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm) \n _blank9). A Renaissance Kama-Sutra, their pornographic character, suggesting a proprioceptive fantasy involving intertwined bodies, makes it impossible to forget that it was made during a time in which the figure was the principal element in painting, and that it is part of the same tradition of figural experimentation that includes Michelangelo's preparatory studies for the *Last Judgment* ([HYPERLINK "http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm"](http://www.sas.ac.uk/warburg/test/figures/UntitledFrame-6.htm) \n _blank11). Nevertheless, the pornographic character of the *Modi* also serves to remind us that it functions only from the moment in which the observer projects his own tactile and postural experience into the image.

Whether the figure expressed the states of the soul or positions of desire, the task of depicting it seemed to have become an end in itself, indifferent to the narrative function of the religious image. In 1435 Alberti had already criticized, with Donatello in mind, artists who gave their figures highly unnatural poses. These criticisms resurfaced in the 16th century and constitute one of the leitmotifs of the *Dialogo degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie* (Camerino 1564) by Giovan Andrea Gilio:

"When Modern painters have to execute some work their first concern is to twist the head, arms and legs of their figures so that it can be said that they are contorted, and these contortions are often such that it would be far better if they were absent and they have little or nothing to do with the subject of the story."

Gilio's worries are framed in the debate over the role of the image, which opposed Catholics to Protestants. These worries centered on the increasing indifference among painters towards the subject's narrative and sensory constraints, thus endangering the didactic function of religious images. Loyal to medieval mental imagery, he declares:

"In order to show the strength of their art, painters would do better to depict Christ suffering, bleeding, covered in spit, flayed, deformed, ugly and pale to the point of no longer having human form..."

And he adds:

"I often discussed this point with painters. They all responded to me in the same way, saying that [such depictions] would go against the conventions of their art."

We don't know which artists Gilio refers to, but their views confirm the painters' liberation from, if not their indifference to, the constraints

of the subject. They also confirm the reluctance of depicting the sensory violence conveyed by the medieval imagery in meditation handbooks. The body-image, as one learned to represent it in bone, muscle, flesh, and robes, is superimposed on the inner sense of posture which is at once an experience of the real, a personal structure of the visible figure, and a product of proprioception. In the realm of art the latter doesn't serve as a scientific explanation of the image, but as the raw material that is unbound by the constraints and limits of anatomy.

Discussion

L'expérience mystique et l'art

Jose Luis Guijarro

25 nov. 2002 16:26 UT

L'article de François Quiviger (me) montre deux choses : la première est que les efforts des artistes (et, je pense bien, le valorisations de ses concitoyens) pour qu'on les valorise comme créateurs d'ART changent avec l'histoire et, donc, comme j'ai déjà dit, donnent aux valeurs une dimension socio-culturelle évidente.

La deuxième est plus subtile (peut-être, même pas voulue par F.Q., lui-même !) : la relation qu'on trouve souvent entre l'expérience mystique y l'expérience artistique. J'ai pensé à cela quand il mentionne les 7 types de prières chacune avec sa propre position. C'est sûrement une implication un peu poussée que j'ai obtenu, mais comme elle m'intéresse je vais la considérer comme établie.

D'après la théorie de la pertinence, toute information, pour être pertinente, doit pouvoir être traitée ensemble avec l'information que nous possédons, ce qui donne des résultats qu'on nomme « effets contextuels ». Je crois que, dans certains cas, on peut volontairement bloquer cette interaction pour obtenir des résultats ... mystiques !

Les longues prières qui répètent des chaînes de mots sans un sens établi, unies à des manques de sommeil et un jeun prolongé, font que certains moines, comme, St François de la Croix arrivent à léviter !! Certaines postures de yoga (et, paraît-il, des moines dominicains) essayent de « nettoyer l'esprit » (de tout contexte) pour que l'information qui parvient soit perçue comme tout à fait « nouvelle », changeant la personnalité du moine ou yogi. C'est justement ça qui m'a fait penser qu'un composant important de la VALEUR artistique pourrait être celui de changer la subjectivité de celui qui adopte cette attitude, soit l'auteur ou les récepteur.

Avec notre perception de notre corps, donc, nous pouvons essayer de la représenter aux autres, comme les hommes d'Altamira avaient essayé de représenter les animaux qu'ils connaissaient si bien. Mais nous pouvons aussi l'utiliser pour adopter des comportements qui mettent en valeur des nouveaux mondes (c'est peut-être ce que faisait Jackson Pollock) en imitant les postures des yogis et les positions des dominicains.

Valeur artistique et subjectivité

Gloria Origgi

27 nov. 2002 12:44 UT

José-Louis écrit: "un composant important de la VALEUR artistique pourrait être celui de changer la subjectivité de celui qui adopte cette attitude, soit l'auteur ou les récepteur"

Ceci me semble très important. On pourrait penser qu'un ingrédient important de certaines expériences artistiques c'est de changer la perception de notre subjectivité.

Mais il me semble trop de dire qu'il s'agit d'une composante centrale de la valeur artistique. Que dire alors de la valeur artistique que j'attribue à une oeuvre écrite comme un roman, qui comporte un acte de compréhension?

Si on veut une théorie générale de la valeur artistique, il faut tenir compte aussi de ces types d'expérience, comme la lecture d'un roman, qui semblent être très loin de celles capables de déclencher une représentation spéciale de notre corps.

Plusieurs gadgets cognitifs? ...

Jose Luis Guijarro

27 nov. 2002 19:44 UT

Ma spéculation reposait sur le fait que (dans notre culture) le contact avec l'art (comme créateur ou comme récepteur) cherche à trouver une nouvelle expérience (soit dans l'art culinaire, soit dans la musique, etc.). Ce qui n'atteint pas cette originalité est considéré comme du "maniérisme" peu important du point de vue artistique.

Pascal Boyer (2001) écrit: "... un grand nombre de créations culturelles, des arts visuels à la musique (...) réussissent parce qu'elles activent plusieurs capacités mentales qui ont chacune d'autres fonctions très précises. Autrement dit, une bonne partie de la culture humaine est constituée des gadgets cognitifs qui ont le pouvoir de capturer l'attention et qui sont très pertinents du simple fait que l'esprit humain est organisé comme il est" (p. 233)

Je joue avec cette idée en ce moment, en essayant de spéculer sur les gadgets cognitifs qui font possible l'expérience artistique (dont l'un serait le renouvellement de la subjectivité, pourquoi pas ?). Mais j'avoue que je suis bloqué! Au secours!

proprioception and body image

Barbara Montero
26 nov. 2002 3:06 UT

I was wondering if it is correct to think about proprioception as the basis of body image. Certainly it plays a role, but vision is at least as important, if not more. Also, as I understand the experiments involving movements of phantom limbs, visual input is essential.

Comment on Montero

Alva Noë
26 nov. 2002 9:38 UT

Barbara Montero raises an important issue. It is certainly true that Ramachandran's therapy for patients with phantom limbs proceeds by contriving a circumstance in which they experience a visual illusion of the movement of their phantom. What they actually see is the movement of the their intact arm. The visual illusion of the phantom's movement then gives rise to a proprioceptive illusion: it comes to feel as if the phantom is moving. This illusion relieves the phantom arm of very real pains.

Ramachandran's conclusion is that the body image is constructed by the brain to accomodate the coordinated activity of our various sensory modalities, including proprioception. This suggests that if we could contrive new and unusual patterns of association between sensory information in different modalities, we could radically alter the body image. This appears to be supported by subsequent research. See, for example, work on sensory substitution (e.g. by Paul Bach-y-Rita) and also a 1999 article in Nature by Botvinick and Cohen entitled "Ruber hand "feels" touch that eyes see".

I am inclined to think that proprioception is basic for the body image however. The body image is the subject's sense of his or her own possibilities of movement (or so I believe). Proprioception, what Berthoz calls the sense of movement, is probably plays a special role in constructing this implicit sense.

Question: Is proprioception necessary for a body image? Is vision?

Convergence entre Quiviger et Noë?

Dan Sperber
26 nov. 2002 7:14 UT

(An English version of this question is to be found in the debate on Noë's text)

Il y a, il me semble, une convergence intéressante entre le texte de François Quiviger et celui d'Alva Noë. Quiviger suggère bien que le corps représenté dans la peinture de la Renaissance est donné non seulement à voir mais aussi à percevoir avec cette capacité que nous avons d'éprouver spontanément la posture ou le mouvement d'autrui en stimulant en nous une disposition à adopter la même posture ou à faire le même mouvement. L'étude de cette capacité est au centre de recherches et de débats importants depuis, en particulier, la découverte des «neurones-miroir» chez le macaque; elle contribue au développement d'une conception enactive de la perception. Je voudrais donc demander aux deux auteurs de cette semaine s'il voient chacun dans le texte de l'autre un aliment pour leur réflexion, et comment.

Convergences et différences

Gloria Origgi
27 nov. 2002 11:56 UT

Il me semble qu'en effet on pourrait voir l'exemple de la proprioception proposé par François Quiviger comme un cas de perception enactive d'une oeuvre.

Néanmoins, ce qui ne m'est pas clair, une préoccupation qui rejoint l'intervention de Barbara Montero, c'est le sens de la relation entre proprioception et vision dans la construction de l'image de son corps.

Dans l'exemple de François Quiviger, la vision d'une image construite d'une certaine façon déclenche notre faculté proprioceptive.

Dans l'analyse d'Alva Noë c'est la proprioception qui nous permet de compléter l'expérience visuelle.

Le rôle épistémique des oeuvres d'art

Gloria Origgi

27 nov. 2002 10:40 UT

Il me semble qu'un axe de comparaison intéressant des papiers qu'on est en train de discuter c'est leur attitude vis à vis du *rôle épistémique* des œuvres d'art.

Selon Alva Noë, certaines œuvres d'art peuvent nous rendre conscients de notre expérience des percepteurs et, en ce sens, nous donner l'accès à un morceau de connaissance sur nous-mêmes.

François Quiviger explore un autre possible rôle épistémique pour l'art : certaines œuvres peuvent solliciter des facultés perceptuelles (dans son exemple, la proprioception) pour obtenir certains effets cognitifs. L'artiste exploite inconsciemment l'intuition de l'existence de ces facultés dans son œuvre. En ce sens, certaines œuvres peuvent anticiper une découverte scientifique, par exemple, en se servant de la proprioception bien avant la formulation d'une théorie explicite de la proprioception.

Avigdor Arikha reconnaît un rôle épistémique de l'art dans sa capacité de nous faire passer d'une perception passive à une perception active, en provoquant ainsi l'expérience d'« art cognition » qui nous permet de reconnaître ce que nous savons déjà.

En contraste avec ces trois propositions, la théorie du déclencheur conversationnel de Roberto Casati ne laisse pas beaucoup de place au rôle épistémique de l'art. Pourtant, un des facteurs d'unité du genre « œuvre d'art » est notre intuition qu'une œuvre d'art ne sollicite pas seulement nos réponses sensorielles, mais elle nous donne accès à une forme de connaissance.

Ma question est alors : quel est le rôle épistémique de l'art ? Est-ce qu'on peut trouver une définition générale ou il faut voir cas par cas comment et si une œuvre d'art joue un tel rôle ? Pourquoi nos intuitions sur le rôle épistémique des œuvres d'art sont si persistantes ?

thoughts on proprioception

Robert Williams

28 nov. 2002 0:15 UT

I am very intrigued by the idea of proprioception and by FQ's attempt to apply it to the study of (Renaissance) art: it suggests what seems to me to be a potentially very fruitful way of moving from traditional perceptualist approaches to the "visual" art (which have always emphasized vision) to a phenomenological approach that admits of more complex coding even in the experience of perception. The implications for sculpture and architecture would seem to me to be even greater than for painting and the graphic arts. Most excitingly, from my point of view, proprioception offers to contest the whole idea that the visual arts are essentially visual; it exposes the way in which the traditional notion of the visual arts suppresses something essential about them.

I can understand FQ's desire to emphasize the purely tactile dimensions of proprioception, but I wonder whether Aristotelian faculty psychology does not allow for an even more complex formulation of it in the "common sense", where sense data of all kinds is presented and integrated (I am sure FQ has thought about this already; I hope he'll share his thoughts). The filtering and integration of proprioceptions with other perceptions is surely central to the cognitive work that art also reflects (and helps to perform).

Proprioception does seem to offer a more promising way of explaining the apparently less serious engagement with subject-matter in 16th-century art than is customarily offered, or, to put it another way, the emergence of a new subject-matter (that of the body) in 16th-century art, but I question the assumption that it is particularly in the "figure serpentinata", the conspicuously ornamental figure described by the theorists, that a concern with proprioception is most evident. Idealized figures in elaborate contrapposto poses are negations of the body as much as they are representations of it. They must have as much to do with the way proprioceptions are overridden (suppressed?) by the other "inward wits" as with their straightforward representation. Again, perceptions are filtered, not only by cognitive processes as we usually think of them, but also by all sorts of social and cultural codes.

Cognitive cultural anthropology

francois quiviger

29 nov. 2002 1:19 UT

Tout a fait d'accord, of course from the standpoint of Aristotelian faculty psychology individual sensations are the components of perception, but the crunch is in what Aristotle calls common sensibles: rest, movement, figure... Common sensible can be described as multisensory entities which are the building block of the perceived world. Surely the proprioceptive image could have been perceived in these terms.

Common sensible are the stuff which Renaissance painters thought they were representing. The optical approach to painting really begins with Roger de Piles in the last quarter of the 17th century and peaks with Clement Greenberg in the 20th century. It is mostly alien to the way in which medieval and renaissance men seem to have conceived and apprehended images (I discuss this in an article on Bronzino's Capitolo due out soon, will post the reference in the bibliography).

Elongated figures and complex postures contradict / override the anatomical possibility of the body, as much as they use and process it to convey emotions. In this respect masters of disegno like Pontormo or Parmigianino are much closer to an artist like the German Surrealist Hans Bellmer than to 17th century academists.

The proprioceptive image is a life-size map of the human body divided in tactile zones of varying sensitivity and connecting all sensory organs. Zones of sensations are also zones of signification on which culture breeds... In this context cognitive science can certainly provide very sharp tools for the cultural anthropologist.

more thoughts on proprioception

Robert Williams

30 nov. 2002 23:49 UT

I am pleased to see that FQ recognizes the historically conditioned and historically limited nature of the optical approach to painting, going so far as to say that it really begins in the late seventeenth century and reaches a kind of climax in the mid-twentieth! This recognition certainly helps to dislodge the older view, still stubbornly prevalent in the study of Renaissance art and art theory, that the connection between painting and visual experience is a natural and necessary one, and that any account of the history of art in the West is best organized around it. It clears the way for a new account of the history of art in the early modern period, and as FQ suggests, offers a new basis for understanding the relation of "early modern" and "modern" --even "postmodern" -- art, one organized around a new disciplinary model, that of "cognitive cultural anthropology".

I worry just a little, tho', about what FQ says in his last sentences: that the proprioceptive image is a "map of the human body" divided into "tactile zones" and that it is "on" these zones that culture "breeds". His wording suggests that the division of sensation into zones somehow precedes culture, or can be thought independently of culture. If this is in fact what he means, I would have to disagree, even tho' I think his method may still have a great deal to offer.

I too have something forthcoming on this subject, a book, "Art Theory: An Historical Introduction", which will appear with Blackwell in a few months' time. There I am also concerned to emphasize the limits -- conceptual and historical -- of the optical approach to painting, but try to do so within the disciplinary model of art history. I try to suggest that art theory moves toward a notion of art as a self-reflexive mode of engagement with the world, and thus that its cognitive aspect is inseparable from its critical function.

Historicity and proprioception

Noga Arikha

2 déc. 2002 17:33 UT

Robert Williams's point below raises an interesting question regarding a problem raised in an earlier discussion with Roberto Casati, about the role of historicity in our thinking about artworks in their relationship to cognition.

'Cognition' is a new concept, at least its intension is not identical to that of the earlier concept of, say, the 'sensus communis'. RW discounts the notion that "the division of sensation into zones somehow precedes culture, or can be thought independently of culture". It might perhaps be more accurate to suggest that the act of describing our emotive and cognitive experience does not *entail* that we thereby think ourselves out of our history.

A lot, however, might hang on defining the basis for claiming that this is indeed the case - that it is possible to make universalist, atemporal claims about the nature of human cognition and yet bring them to bear on the historically located products of culture. To begin with, our wish to do so might in itself reflect a culturally, historically specific concern with meta-definitions of practices that are already imbued with self-consciousness. And our need for theories about the relation of art to cognition might echo, in some ways, the self-conscious theorizations about art, its role and its ambit, produced in Italy in the late Renaissance; if this is true, we might want to ask, with RW, what such efforts amount to, and what they say about the history of art itself.

A purely contextual study of perception in the Renaissance certainly need not be divorced from the application to it of a scientifically contemporary standpoint, but the methodology does require some development. While Alva Noë uses a very specific sort of artistic experience to advance his claims for phenomenology - referring to artworks that are historically located, although he does not make anything of this within his analysis - FQ does exactly the opposite. Where, I wonder, do these methods meet? Can they meet? And, even more crucially, do the objects of study in each case overlap at all? I put these questions to both.

nature precedes culture

francois quiviger

2 déc. 2002 20:28 UT

he obvious advantage of an online conference is that one has plenty of time to think of questions and replies... In this case, however, it boils down at least in my view to the basic assumption that nature precedes culture. In this respect cognitive sciences tell me as much about the body of a Tibetan monk than that of an Ancient Greek juggler. The instrument is the same but the cultural stringing and tuning varies from period to period. The more I understand the anatomy of the instrument the more I understand what the performer does with it from place to place and from period to period.

Art as enaction

Alva Noë (University of California, Berkeley)

(Date of publication : 25 novembre 2002)

Abstract: Art can perhaps make a theoretical contribution to the study of perceptual consciousness. Theoretical investigations of consciousness (whether in philosophy, psychology or neuroscience) need better methods for thinking about and understanding the qualitative character of experience. I try to suggest here a way of thinking about experience, on the one hand, and art, on the other, that opens up the possibility of genuine collaboration between art and science.

The act of art has turned to a direct examination of our perceptual processes. Robert Irwin

1. *The paradox of perceptual transparency*

When we try to make perceptual experience itself the object of our reflection, we tend to see through it (so to speak) to the objects of experience. We encounter *what* is seen, not the qualities of the seeing itself.

This is a familiar theme in philosophy. An accurate description of visual experience will confine itself to, for example, mere blobs of color. When we talk of what we see (e.g. deer grazing on a lawn), we “go beyond” what is strictly given to us in experience.

Kant attacked this idea of Hume’s and insisted that we falsify experience when we attempt to describe it in these supposedly neutral terms. I am not *more* faithful to my experience of the deer, but less, when I try to describe it in terms of brownish blobs on a green background. To be faithful to the experience as I actually enjoy it, I must talk about the way the experience purports to represent the world. To describe experience, then, is to describe the experienced world. And so experience is, in this sense, transparent.

The transparency of experience poses a problem for any attempt to make perceptual experience itself the object of investigation in the way that has interested philosophers, psychologists and cognitive scientists. This leads us to inquire: can there be a phenomenology of experience, a science of consciousness?

One way to appreciate the paradoxical nature of this problem is to consider it in connection with a similar problem faced by representational painting. If a painter sets him or herself the goal of depicting a scene, then the painter must attend not to the scene itself (as it were), but rather to the way the scene *looks* (i.e. from a given vantage point). This is in part what Ruskin had in mind when he wrote (in his *Elements of Drawing*): “The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the innocence of the eye; that is to say, a sort of childish perception of...flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify, — as a blind man would see them if suddenly gifted with sight”.

One consequence of this is that, although it is possible to make a picture of a room, it is not possible to depict our experience of the room. There can be no pictures of the visual field itself.

Can there be a science of consciousness, then, if the object of consciousness itself is too slippery or transparent or vague to be captured in thought? Is phenomenology possible?

In this short paper I make two claims. First, I argue that phenomenology is possible, but only if we adopt a new conception of experience which I call the “enactive” conception (borrowing a phrase used by the late neuroscientist Francisco Varela and his collaborator Evan Thompson). The basic idea of the enactive conception is that experience is an activity of encounter with the world; it is temporally extended; its character is fixed by laws of “sensorimotor contingency.”

Second, I argue that art can make a contribution to the study of perceptual consciousness. What I call “experiential art” can provide perceivers with occasions to catch themselves in the act of perceptual exploration and can play a role in phenomenological investigation.

2. *The enactive approach to perceptual consciousness*

If perceptual experience is transparent in the way we have considered, then there can be no representation of experience itself in thought, or science, or art. We know, however, that it is possible to represent experience in thought, science and art. (Don’t we?) This entails, then, that experience cannot be transparent in the way we have considered; that we have mischaracterized experience.

One approach, then, to the paradox of transparency is this: we reject the way of thinking about perceptual experience that invites the metaphor of transparency. And what way is that? It is the way of thinking about experience according to which we think of the content of experience as like the content of a picture. The hallmark of pictorial content is that it is given all at once – in high resolution, sharp focus, uniform detail, from the center of the picture to its periphery. A basic fact about perceptual experience is that it doesn’t present the world in this way.

Consider your present visual experience. You look at your room. You experience it as densely packed with details – objects and their spatial arrangements, their colors, and so on. You thus encounter the world as detailed in your experience. But crucially, the fact that you *now* experience the world as detailed does not entail that, *right now*, you represent all that detail in consciousness. It is clear that you do not: some items are in the center of your focus and attention, others are only dimly present, as background detail, and much detail is altogether absent from your current experience.

Importantly, the fact that you are only immediately aware of a relatively small amount of detail is no obstacle to its being the case that you experience the presence of a detailed environment. First, we experience the *environment* as fully detailed, all at once; we don’t experience ourselves as, as it were, simultaneously representing all of its detail. (When you touch something with your eyes shut, you feel its shape, but it doesn’t seem to you as if you are actually making skin-to-item contact with every part of its surface.) Second, the

sense in which we *experience* the environment as present in all its detail, even when we only attend to the environment in this or that limited respect, consists in the fact that we have *access* to the detail, and that we are familiar -- in a basic, practical way -- with the fact that we have access to it.

Consider an example: you may experience the sofa as visually present, even though you only see the parts of the sofa's surface that are not blocked by the coffee table. The table prevents you from seeing the sofa in totality, yet you experience it as completely present. You experience as present *in totality* that which you only experience *in part*.

How can this be?

One answer -- the standard answer offered in cognitive science -- is that we interpret our limited sensory experience in the light of our knowledge. If we didn't *know* what sofas were -- if we didn't have these concepts -- then we wouldn't have a sense of the complete presence of this object. We don't really experience the objects as wholes; we *infer* their wholeness.

This proposal is clearly right to some extent. But it can't be the whole story. I take it that it is a basic fact of our perceptual phenomenology that we do not merely *think* the presence of the occluded bits of the sofa, we *experience* its presence *in a perceptual modality*. Consider, for example, Kanisza's triangle:

The occluded portions of the disks located at the vertices are surely *sensed*, not merely thought, to be present.

Perhaps the most striking example of this phenomenon -- the sense of the perceptual presence of that which is, strictly speaking, absent -- is the fact that we experience objects, such as a tomato on a counter in front of us, in three-dimensional fullness -- as present as voluminous solids -- even though, strictly speaking, we can only perceive the facing sides of objects. Surely the tomato *looks* to be a voluminous whole.

Indeed, we can contrast the sense of the strictly unseen parts of the tomato *as perceptually present*, with the sense of the presence, say, of the space behind your head, or the room next door, or the building next door, or the Eiffel Tower. These other items are also "felt" to be present, but not as *perceptually* present. They are present *merely as thought*. The sofa and the tomato, in contrast, are not *merely* thought to be present as wholes, although they are thought to be present as wholes; they are -- or so I would urge -- *experienced* as present as wholes.

If it were not possible to explain this distinction between that which is unperceived and that which is unperceived but nevertheless perceptually experienced as present, then perhaps we should be forced to admit that the distinction was, in fact, chimerical. But we *can* explain it.

The basic idea is this: the kind of access we have to the things we *perceive as present* is different from the kind of access we have to things whose presence is merely thought or inferred.

Consider, first, that our perceptual lives are structured by "sensorimotor contingencies". When you move toward an object, it looms in your visual field. When you move around it, it changes profile. In these and many other ways, sensory stimulation is affected by movement. These patterns of interdependence between sensory stimulation and movement are patterns of sensorimotor contingency. Perceivers are implicitly familiar with these sensorimotor contingencies.

Consider, second, that your relation to the environment is mediated by patterns of sensorimotor contingency. If you *see* an object, then your relation to it is governed by eye-movement-dependent patterns of sensorimotor contingency. For example, blinking momentarily disrupts sensory stimulation, and turning away changes the sensory stimulation in familiar ways. Stopping your ears, in contrast, makes no difference to your *visual* experience of an object. This is because auditory sensorimotor contingencies are irrelevant to vision.

We are now armed with the tools we need to understand the *experiential presence* of objects whose parts are, strictly speaking, unperceived. Consider, for example, the tomato. It is present *in full* because our relation, even to its strictly unseen portions, is mediated

by distinctly visual patterns of sensorimotor contingency. A movement to the left brings hidden bits of the tomato into view. A step forward and around brings other bits into view. Our relation to the tomato, seen and unseen, is mediated by these patterns of sensorimotor contingency. Moreover, we *know* that it is. We may not know this in any explicit way that we could formulate in sentences. But we know it *implicitly*. This implicit knowledge is manifest in the way perceivers spontaneously crane their necks, peer, and move about *in order to* perceive that which is of interest. The *visual* character of the relation to the tomato comes out in such facts as that, for example, moving the hands, or stopping and unstopping the ears, makes no difference at all to the sensory stimulation received from the tomato.

In contrast, my relation to the Eiffel tower, or to the room next door, is not mediated by any patterns of sensorimotor contingency. Stopping and unstopping my ears, shutting my eyes, turning around, make no difference to my relation to those things. These items are present to consciousness, yes, but only thanks to the power of thought.

Of course there is no sharp line here. I don't see the space behind my head, but the merest movement of the head brings it into view. And if I am in Paris, then walking to the window may be all that is needed to bring the Eiffel Tower into view. I am related by sensorimotor contingencies even to places on the far side of the earth, at least if we are willing to consider very complex contingencies.

Perceptual states are characterized not merely by the fact that the relation between the state and its object is in this way *movement-dependent*. They are also characterized by the fact that movements *on the part of the object* grab our attention. The desk in the room next door might jump up and down without provoking any change in my sensory stimulation. But a movement on the part of the tomato in front of me is likely to stimulate me, thus attracting my attention, provoking further movement on my part. Perceptual states, then, are states whose relations to their objects are characterized by *movement-dependence*, on the one hand, and *object-dependence* on the other.

According to this approach to perceptual experience, the content of an experience is not given all at once, as is the content of a picture given all at once. Rather, the content is given only thanks to the perceiver's exercise of knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies. The content of experience isn't really given at all – it is *enacted*.

Perceptual experience, according to this enactive approach, is itself a temporally extended activity, an activity of skill-based exploration of the environment.

3. *Perceptual experience isn't transparent after all*

One strategy, then, for coping with the paradox of transparency is to give up the pictorial conception of perceptual content. This is the strategy that I advocate. However it is important to resist giving into dogmatism on this score. There remains a sense in which perceptual experience is transparent. We typically reflect on our experiences as modes of access to the world – our thought, our attention dwell in the world conceived of as made up of objects, properties, and facts. Thus, for example, when we take our experiences of the tomato, the sofa, and the cat at face value, we say such things as: "there is a tomato," "that's a nice couch," et cetera. In this case, we enjoy experience in the *mode of transparency*.

But there is another mode in which we can enjoy our experiences. This is the mode of activity. When we reflect on our experiences in the mode of activity, we are reflecting on them as themselves things we do, and on the world as given as affording this or that possibility for movement or action. We rarely reflect on experience in this mode, but we do so sometimes, and we can do so if we wish. Art, or other spectacles (e.g. the performance of a magician) provides a natural occasion for this sort of reflection in the mode of activity.

4. *The project of phenomenology*

Phenomenology is hard to do in the transparent mode, and indeed, it may be impossible. For that to which we can turn our attention, when we are in the transparent mode, is the world itself.

But phenomenological reflection can proceed in the mode of activity, when we reflect on the way the world becomes available to us through our active exploration.

Enter art as a tool for phenomenological exploration. Consider the way a Richard Serra sculpture presents a surprising environmental occasion for phenomenological self-reflection. The pieces overpower and overwhelm, induce giddy disorientation, and generally make us aware of what it is like to be a perceiver, an enactor of perceptual content. When we explore a Serra sculpture we actively explore an environment and the sculpture provides a context in which we are enabled to catch ourselves in the act of exploring the world.

Or consider a Chuck Close painting, a large format portrait whose content dissolves into an abstraction of pixels as move closer, regaining sharpness and form as we move away.

Artists like Close and Serra make experience their subject matter, not by attempting to depict experience itself, but by providing perceivers an opportunity of self-aware enactment.

Artists expose enactment for what it is, and so they enable us to understand our active role in perceptually experiencing the world.

5. Pictures and phenomenology

There has been a considerable amount of investigation of pictures, pictoriality, and the relation between these and perception. A recurring theme in these discussions is the idea that a picture — a line drawing, say — depicts because the drawing gives rise to a representation in us (e.g. the retinal image) like that which we would enjoy were we to look at the depicted scene. Pinker, in his book *How the Mind Works*, writes, for example, that a picture “is nothing but a more convenient way of arranging matter so that it projects a pattern identical to real objects”. The idea is that we experience the depicted scene, when we look at a picture, because the picture produces in us just the effect (or nearly the identical effect) to that which would be produced by the actual scene.

That the brain would need to make assumptions to get from the retinal image to a description of the world is clear: there's just not enough information in the retinal image to specify uniquely the environmental layout. In this way, Pinker suggests that the mechanisms by which we interpret pictures as depicting are the same as those that control how we interpret the retinal image as depicting. Seeing pictures, on this sort of view, is like *seeing* a retinal image. It is vision at one remove.

A similar idea has been proposed by Hayes and Ross, building on the work of Marr. They suggest that line drawings represent because they correspond to psychologically real means of representation in the brain. That is, what explains the fact that the visual system readily interprets the line drawing as having the pictorial content it does have is the fact that the line drawing is like the brain's own drawing of the depicted scene.

There is clearly something right in these proposals. When you view a picture and view it not as a bit of canvass or paper or whatever, but as a picture with a content, then there is a definite sense in which you *see* that which is depicted by the picture. So there must be some similarity between the state you are in when you look at a picture of *x*, and the state you are in when you actually look at *x*.

I am skeptical of this standard view, however, for I am skeptical of the idea that perception proceeds, as it were, from the retinal image to the perceived world. According to the enactive view, we do not construct the world from the retinal image, we encounter it in our active exploration making use of our understanding of patterns of sensorimotor contingency. Perception is not a process of constructing an internal image, so it seems implausible that pictures depict by producing the sort of representation in us that the depicted scene would produce.

It is not pictures *as* objects of perception, that can teach us about perceiving; rather, it is *making pictures* — that is, the skillful construction of pictures — that can illuminate experience. Making pictures is a way of *enacting* experience.

Picture-making, like experience itself, is an activity. It is at once an activity of careful *looking to* the world, and an activity of reflection on *what you see* and *what you have to do to see*. The painter literally enacts the content of a possible experience.

The artist, then, is a kind of *experience engineer*.

Consider: the painter does in fact need to “discover appearances,” as the Impressionists thought. Great care is needed, though, if we are to comprehend what sort of discovery this is. To discover appearances is not to turn one's gaze inward, as it were, to sensation and subjectivity. Rather, it is to turn one's gaze outward, to the world, but to the world thought of in a rather special way. The painter attends to the world not *qua* domain of facts and properties, states of affairs, (et cetera), but rather, to the world as it presents itself to us, as it affords us with opportunities for movement, thought and action, to the world *qua* a domain of skillful perceptual activity.

To make pictures is to take up the phenomenological stance on the world. For this reason, it is to the activity of picture-making, then, that I think phenomenology can turn for instruction about how to do phenomenology. As we have seen, this is the key to the seeming paradox of perceptual transparency: to reflect on experience is of necessity to reflect on the world around us that we perceive. But there are two ways to do this. On one way, we reflect on that world as a domain of facts and states of affairs. On the other, we reflect on the world as a domain for active exploration. The dual-aspect of experience is mirrored, then, in two ways of thinking about the world. Phenomenology, then, aims at the second way.

This has two important implications. First, phenomenology isn't reflection, if we think of this as a kind of introspection. Second, to engage in phenomenology is, if the enactive view is right, to study the way in which perceptual experience — mere experience, if you like — acquires world-presenting content. For the world as a domain of facts is given to us thanks to the fact that we inhabit the world as a domain of activity.

Discussion

La multiplication mystérieuse des événements ARTISTIQUES

Jose Luis Guijarro

25 nov. 2002 15:49 UT

Alva Noë's ideas on the importance of MAKING pictures as a reflection on phenomenology is certainly an interesting one for students of perceptual problems in cognition.

But does it try to give us some kind of hint, I wonder, as to what sort of conversation will be engaged in order for it to "become" a real ART work?

What it doesn't do, and I am positive about that, is to give any solution to the (or is it only MY?) problem of what should be valued to make something (perception among other things) ART.

One may well talk about these possibilities (as A.N. does), considering them part of the conversation that may turn perception into art; one may even value these interesting possibilities ... but this would be, at least in this aspect, a side effect of the action of painting, not it's central character.

However, perceptual problems and their solutions may well become ART as well (for instance, in OP art), when you embed them on the displaying attitude that I think is the origin of art. Once again: EVERYTHING, if properly embedded and processed thereafter may become art (I will go on with that idea in discussing François Quiviger's paper)

Reply to José Luis Guijarro

Alva Noë
26 nov. 2002 9:54 UT

I am afraid I may not fully understand José Luis Guijarro's comment on my paper. I hope he will forgive me if my reply is wide of the mark.

My paper looks at the theoretical value of art and says nothing about the aesthetic value of art. Art can teach us something, whatever else it can do and whatever other value it may have.

It may be that there are things that only art can teach us. It may be that art is a vehicle for phenomenological instruction and that it can perform this function in a way that nothing else can. If this is so, then perhaps this theoretical/phenomenology function contributes to the aesthetic significance of these works as well.

It does strike me that, among works of art that make theoretical contributions, we can distinguish between those that are world-directed, as it were, and those that are experiential. The artists I mention in the paper -- Serra and Close -- are experiential artists. They seek to affect the perceiver and their value as works of art may depend on the kind of affect they have. Other works, I am inclined to think, are not psychological in this way and are independent of the affects they have on perceivers for their significance. I hesitate to name names, but I am inclined to think that Tony Smith (whose work is superficially similar to Serra's) is a world-directed rather than experience-directed artist.

If this discussion has merit, then it shows how understanding the theoretical/didactic aspects of art can help frame an aesthetic account.

Reply to Alva

Jose Luis Guijarro
26 nov. 2002 12:15 UT

I agree with your view that art, whatever it is, might be a good (or even a unique) way to experience the phenomenological problem. As you say:

"It may be that art is a vehicle for phenomenological instruction and that it can perform this function in a way that nothing else can. If this is so, then perhaps this theoretical/phenomenology function contributes to the aesthetic significance of these works as well".

My question, however, is "do you know what art is in the first place?" If so, please, let me know.

Or, to put it in other words: What is the OBJECT/EVENT we are trying to discuss here? I know we have a word to name it, "art", but what kind of thing/event does this word point to?

I have tried to point to an existing OBJECT: a human attitude. And then I have tried to describe it as far as I am able to do at the present moment. For me it is an attitude in Sperber & Wilson's sense: a representation embedding another representation. The first order representation is, to my present knowledge, a VALUE representation of some sort.

Schematically [Value as art (whatever)].

My problem is that, try as I may, I have not yet found a general human value, although, for reasons mentioned in my comment to F.Q.'s paper, I speculated that the "feeling" of a change in subjectivity might be a very likely candidate. Even more so than the so-called aesthetic value. That is, not everything which seems aesthetic to us is immediately treated as an object of artistic experience

although it may be. And, it seems to me, the same might happen with your theoretical function.

How radical is the critical message?

Dan Sperber
25 nov. 2002 16:36 UT

I am somewhat puzzled by the following statement of Alva Noë:

"Perception is not a process of constructing an internal image, so it seems implausible that pictures depict by producing the sort of representation in us that the depicted scene would produce"

Isn't it a classical point in cognitive philosophy/psychology that perception could not be a process of constructing an internal image, for then that image would need to be perceived by some internal device or homunculus who would on this account construct an internal image of the internal image, and so on? Whether or not mental imagery plays a role in it, perception is not tantamount to a process of constructing mental images. So, even if we favor a "standard view" of cognition in general and of perception in particular, this does not commit us to any well-defined view of the "representation in us that [a] scene would produce." Nor does it commit us to any well-defined view of the "representation in us that [a picture of a scene] would produce." So, what is so implausible in the view "that pictures depict by producing the sort of representation in us that the depicted scene would produce"? (Of course, when we recognize a picture as picture, its representation must be significantly different from that of the scene it depicts: we see the frame of the picture, its flatness, its texture, etc. but I take it that Noë's is pointing to a much deeper difference).

The examples of Serra's sculpture and Close's painting are useful to illustrate Noë's positive thesis, but I don't see why Pinker and other "standard" cognitive scientists could not agree with Noë's comments on these cases. It might be useful, in order to better understand the critical message, to have Noë's account of our perception of a classical painting, (e.g. the Chardin discussed by Arikha).

Reply to Sperber

Alva Noë
26 nov. 2002 8:12 UT

central problem faced by contemporary visual theory is that of explaining how we come to enjoy richly detailed, sharply focused, high-resolution visual impressions on the basis of the extremely limited information available in the retinal image. This problem guides research, and most researchers agree on a basic strategy for approaching it: the brain integrates information from successive fixations and builds up a detailed internal representation of the scene. This detailed representation then serves as the substrate, in the brain, of the experience.

There are numerous reasons for challenging this orthodoxy. One is suggested by Dan Sperber: the positing of internal representations may fall afoul of the homunculus fallacy. -- It is one thing to warn against the dangers of committing this fallacy, and another to manage actually to steer clear of it! I agree with Sperber that almost all cognitive scientists do the former; I am somewhat dubious that very many succeed in accomplishing the latter. (Consider, for example, that many contemporary perceptual theorists suppose that there must be a process of "filling in" to make up for the retinal "blind spot". How else, they ask, can we explain the fact that we do not experience a gap in the visual field? I leave it to the reader to work out how this reasoning commits the homunculus fallacy, among others.)

In my paper I give two other reasons for challenging the orthodoxy. First, the orthodox view rests on bad phenomenology: we don't actually have the sorts of "picture-like" experiences whose production the theory seeks to explain. Second, the enactive approach to perception offers an explanation of experience which manages without appeal to the existence of the detailed internal representations.

Sperber asks: "what is so implausible in the view "that pictures depict by producing the sort of representation in us that the depicted scene would produce?" The blunt answer is that perception isn't a process whereby representations are produced in us, contrary to what most cognitive scientists continue to believe, homunculus-fallacy worries notwithstanding. A better answer would begin by posing a further question: can we really expect to explain the power of pictures to depict by appeal to the representational powers of natural pictures (in the retina, in visual cortex)? Wouldn't we first need an account of the pictorial powers of those internal representations, and so on, ad infinitum? Let us dub this the pictorial fallacy.

Rejoinder to Noë

Dan Sperber
27 nov. 2002 14:59 UT

Alva Noë writes: "perception isn't a process whereby representations are produced in us, contrary to what most cognitive scientists continue to believe." Well, it all depends on what we mean by a representation. A common, naïve understanding of the notion uses as a prototype of a representation an external, public representation, in particular a picture or an utterance and then sees a mental representation as an internal equivalent of such an external picture or utterance. Certainly not all, but quite a few cognitive scientists may well be guilty of this naïve understanding of "mental representation." If so, they are open to the kinds of criticism Noë is alluding to.

However more sophisticated cognitive scientists may prefer characterizing a mental representation not by its similarity to a public representation, but by a functional property: a representation is a state or process of the system that has the function of making available to the system information about some state of affairs. This characterization leaves entirely open the question of whether a given type of mental representation is local or distributed, is symbolic, is dynamic, and so forth. The answer need not be the same

for all types of representations. Would Noë deny that an account of how this functional property (of making information available) is realized is essential to the understanding of a cognitive system? Or would he merely be reticent to use "representation" for the realizers of this function (in which case the disagreement between us might be just terminological)?

It seems to me that some such functional notion of representation (by that or another name – I personally stick to "representation") is essential to an understanding of the relationship between art (and in particular figurative art) and cognition. Mental representations of public representations such as pictures are not, I agree with Noë, second-order pictures. However they are, I would maintain, second-order representations (i.e. metarepresentations). Metarepresentations contain information both about the representation they metarepresent and, indirectly, about whatever the metarepresented representation itself represents. It seems plausible that much of the effect of at least figurative art have to do with the tension between these two levels of information (e.g. the stillness of the painting and the movement of the scene depicted).

Reply to Sperber's reply

Alva Noë

28 nov. 2002 8:24 UT

The claims advanced in my paper do not entail or presuppose that there are no representations or that representations are not "essential to the understanding of a cognitive system." In my view, whether there are representations, and whether they are explanatory, is an empirical question. (Just as, presumably, it is empirical whether, if there turn out to be representations, they are distributed, symbolic, dynamic or analog.)

Dan Sperber suggests that representations – where a representation is thought of as "a state or process of the system that has the function of making available to the system information about some state of affairs" – are essential to understanding cognitive capacities such as the capacity to see. I concede this.

Now let us ask: what role do representations of this sort play in vision? The answer to this will depend on what information-processing problem it is that we take vision to be. The orthodox view on this question is that vision is the process of computing a description of the environment on the basis of patterns of stimulation of the retina.

When I say that vision is not a process whereby representations are produced in the perceiver, what I mean is: I reject the orthodox characterization of what the computational problem of vision is. Vision is not a process of building up an internal world-model. There are no central representations in this sense. Or so I claim. In this I am not alone. This is a view that is increasingly attractive to roboticists, psychologists and evolutionary theorists.

In my paper I give a reason for denying that vision is a process whose aim is to generate a world model: we don't have experiences whose content is like the content of such models. (This is the "bad phenomenology" point).

What I didn't say is that even if there were internal world models (distributed, dynamic, or whatever) their existence would not explain visual experience.

One reason why this may be so is that the problem of consciousness does not lend itself to analysis in information-processing terms. If this is so, then representations (in Sperber's sense, or in any other) will never "be essential to the understanding of" consciousness. -- This is an aspect of what is known as the explanatory gap for consciousness.

The enactive view — what Kevin O'Regan and I have called the sensorimotor view – does, I think, offer explanations of experience.

Convergence between Noë and Quiviger

Dan Sperber

26 nov. 2002 7:17 UT

(On trouvera une version française de cette question dans le débat sur le texte de Quiviger)

There is, it seems to me, an interesting convergence between the text of Alva Noë and that of François Quiviger. Quiviger suggest that the body represented in Renaissance painting is given not just to be seen but also to be perceived with this ability we have to spontaneously quasi-experience the posture or the movement of another person by stimulating in ourselves a disposition to adopt the same posture or to perform the same movement. The study of this capacity has been at the center of important research and debates, in particular since the discovery of "mirror-neurons" in the macaque; it contributes to the development an enactive view of perception. I would therefore like to ask this week's two contributors whether they do see in each other's text food for their own reflection, and how so.

divergences

francois quiviger

28 nov. 2002 0:46 UT

I follow Noë's article foundations but diverge regarding their application to images. The notion that art represents perception is both familiar and important, but it is also limited and limiting: for perception provides the raw material which artists use to produce images. Figurative arts are not only about representing perception but about using perception as malleable material to represent and express.

Our ability to shape optical sense data by means of sensory anticipation is at the root of spectatorship since Antiquity. Since we most certainly 'interpret our limited sensory experience in the light of our knowledge', and since image making represents perception then it follows that image making is not about careful looking but about careful sensing : for our experience of the world

is always multisensory.

The Impressionist may well have focused on what they saw - or what they thought they saw - but their approach is only one of many trends in the history of representation and of its appreciation.

The works left by many outstanding figurative artists attentive to the movements of the mind - Bosch, Leonardo, El Greco, Arcimboldo, Goya, Blake, Fussli, Messerschmidt, the Surrealists... - stand in full contradiction of Noë's ideal of an outward gazing art but they certainly confirm his suggestion that the artist is an experience engineer.

Alva Noë touche à quelque chose d'essentiel.

Pascale Cartwright
26 nov. 2002 12:54 UT

Alva Noë touche à quelque chose d'essentiel. « Faire des tableaux est une façon d'énacter l'expérience. » « Le peintre littéralement énonce le contenu d'une expérience possible. » « Faire des tableaux c'est adopter une posture phénoménologique à l'égard du monde. » Ce qui est intéressant c'est qu'il considère les processus mis en œuvre lorsque l'artiste réalise l'objet d'art, que c'est valable pour tous les arts, et qu'il utilise pour cela un mot nouveau (pour moi) : « énoncation ». Si la conception énoncatrice a une dimension temporelle et est réglée par les lois de la contingence sensori-motrice, je pense qu'elle sollicite également d'autres dimensions qui ne sont pas clairement définies par la science (peut-être le seront-elles) et pour lesquelles nous manquons de mots. Le fait que l'œuvre soit par la suite perçue ou non comme œuvre d'art n'est pas ici pertinent, ce qui l'est c'est que ces considérations non seulement peuvent nous aider à comprendre l'expérience perceptuelle mais aussi nous orientent vers une définition valable de l'art.

L'énoncation comme ESSENCE de l'art?

Jose Luis Guijarro
26 nov. 2002 15:57 UT

Je voudrais vraiment comprendre en quoi (et comment) l'énoncation pourrait être tenue comme "essentielle" pour un concept général de l'art.

Pourrais-tu élaborer là-dessus? Merci!

Réponse à J.L.Guijarro

Pascale Cartwright
2 déc. 2002 11:21 UT

Je voudrais bien pouvoir élaborer comme vous le faites. Je relis le texte d'Alva Noë pour vérifier que je l'ai bien compris, et je pense que oui. Cependant je remets ma réponse à plus tard.

Je voudrais d'abord revenir à votre théorie qui est extrêmement séduisante et qui semble effectivement limpide. Valorisation, mise en valeur. On peut en effet imaginer que l'artiste a une attitude (+intention) de valorisation puisqu'il crée quelque chose qu'il considère comme « beau » et digne d'attention. Je me suis alors demandé pourquoi cette théorie ne me satisfaisait pas. Je pense avoir trouvé. Je pense qu'une attitude de valorisation, par ce que l'on crée, et que l'on donne à voir (entendre, toucher, lire, sentir), est une attitude que l'on adopte, non pas dans une perspective artistique, mais pour se rassurer de sa propre existence. En effet lorsque l'on doute de soi, on crée quelque chose de valorisé, par nous même et par autrui, qui, par son existence, nous confirme que nous existons bien en tant qu'individu « valable », et souvent en plus socialement reconnu comme tel.

Or, je crois que l'art c'est bien plus que cela, que l'artiste qui crée, s'il se rassure souvent sur la réalité et la valeur de sa propre existence en créant, s'oublie aussi la plupart du temps en tant qu'individu, pour « devenir », du moins le temps de la création, son œuvre. Il n'y a pas alors d'attitude de valorisation.

Réponse à Cartwright

Jose Luis Guijarro
7 déc. 2002 20:30 UT

P CARTWRIGHT: « On peut en effet imaginer que l'artiste a une attitude (+intention) de valorisation puisqu'il crée quelque chose qu'il considère comme « beau » et digne d'attention ».

JLG: Peut-être l'attitude de valorisation n'est pas nécessairement intentionnelle. Des facteurs de l'environnement peuvent nous forcer à considérer un balai accroché à un mur d'un musée différemment à un balai oublié par quelqu'un. C'est ça l'effet, il me semble, des « objets trouvés ».

P.C.:« Je pense qu'une attitude de valorisation, par ce que l'on crée, et que l'on donne à voir (entendre, toucher, lire, sentir), est une attitude que l'on adopte, non pas dans une perspective artistique, mais pour se rassurer de sa propre existence »

JLG: Les possibles motifs psychologiques qui font que certains gens deviennent des artistes n'ont pas été considérés dans ma spéculation. La question basique est qu'il est probable que seulement les êtres humains aient des expériences artistiques et que, selon moi, cette expérience ne peut exister que dans les esprits qui traitent les représentations de manière indirecte. N'importe quelle représentation, donc, peut se métareprésenter dans une autre qui la valorise. Le problème, pour moi en ce moment, est de trouver une description valable de cette valorisation. S'agit-il d'une valeur avec un seul composant ? Ou bien devrait-on penser à un réseau de composants qui entraînent des effets différenciés ? Les effets de cette valorisation pourraient faire croire au producteur (je n'aime pas parler du créateur, parce que je crois que les récepteurs le sont aussi), par exemple, qu'il devient, « du moins le temps de la création, son œuvre »

The picture's content

Noga Arikha

26 nov. 2002 17:36 UT

seem, as Dan suggests, that Alva's and François's texts converge. They seem to be in agreement over the fundamentally *embodied* nature of artistic experience.

But what is perhaps emerging from this discussion is the difficulty of establishing how the pictorial content of a drawing is the content of a *drawing*.

Alva writes: "what explains the fact that the visual system readily interprets the line drawing as having the pictorial content it does have is the fact that the line drawing is like the brain's own drawing of the depicted scene".

If, for our purposes, we accept one definition of art as a work whose form and content are necessary to one another, then it might be plausible to suggest that the experience of the drawing's pictorial content will necessarily be that of the drawing *qua* artistic object (in virtue of its form) - not fortuitously so, but necessarily, and importantly so.

This might help ground the enactive theory without constraining us to fear that a homunculus will pop out of the suggestion, which Alva goes on to make before qualifying it, that there must be "some similarity between the state you are in when you look at a picture of x, and the state you are in when you actually look at x".

The epistemic role of works of art

Gloria Origgi

27 nov. 2002 10:18 UT

It seems to me that an interesting line of comparison of the papers that we are discussing is their attitude towards the *epistemic role* of works of art:

Alva Noë makes quite a strong claim about the epistemic role that some works of art may play: he suggests that works such as Richard Serra may make us aware of what it is like to be a perceiver, and in this sense give us access to a piece of knowledge about ourselves.

François Quiviger's paper explores another way in which art can play an epistemic role: some works of art may trigger a special perceptual faculty (i.e. proprioception) and using the intuition of the existence of this faculty to obtain certain effects. In this way, some works of art may anticipate a scientific discovery, as in this example, by making use of proprioception long before an explicit theory of proprioception was formulated.

Avigdor Arikha recognizes an epistemic role of art in their capacity to make us go from passive to active perception, thus causing in us the experience of "art cognition" that allows us to recognize what we already know.

In contrast with these three hypotheses, Roberto Casati's theory of conversational prompt seems to leave out the possibility that works of art may play an epistemic role. And yet, one line along which we perceive the unity of the kind "work of art" is the intuition that a work of art doesn't simply trigger a response, but gives us access to some sort of knowledge

My question is: What is the epistemic role of works of arts? Can we find a general definition, or each work of art may or may not make a contribution to our knowledge of ourselves and of our inner cognitive structure? Why our intuitions about the epistemic role of art are so strong?

The doubtful role of cognition

Roberto Casati

28 nov. 2002 15:51 UT

Gloria Origgi asks what the cognitive role of art could be on some accounts of what art is.

The conversation theory of art should could say two things here.

First, the cognitive role of art is accidental. That is, there is nothing specific to art that makes it contribute to cognition. (This addresses more specifically a criticism of Pascale Cartwright posted at http://www.interdisciplines.org/artcog/papers/4/6#_6) Here art contrasts with, say, map making, which is essentially representational. There are art forms in which nothing is represented, unless it be accidentally so.

Second, however, being a human activity, art production is cognitively constrained. So, whatever the traces left by cognition on artworks, such traces may (or may not) be instructive for cognitive scientists. There are those who claim, in a tradition dating back to Marr, that line drawings are interesting cognitive discoveries, as they (so goes the explanation) could activate recognition only insofar as a certain level of perceptual processing actually is in a line-drawing-like format. I have no stance on this hypothesis, but the form of the explanation is clear. However, nothing about line drawings makes them artistic. Engineers draw lines in the same way. So, the question should be turned to those who have or claim to have an account of line drawings meant for artistic use, not of line-drawing production alone. Coming to the conversation theory – one of such accounts of what art could be – the cognitive import of artworks here is exclusively related to their alleged role as conversational prompts. I said nothing about any substantial way in which constraints on conversation could show up in the making of artistic artifacts, but I do expect them to be found.

To sum up. Possibly the workings of cognition show up accidentally in artworks, as the latter are something else (pictures, statues, toys) before and independently of being artworks. Which means that quite a lot of research on “art and cognition” is GROSSLY MISNAMED. It is research about something else.

If the workings of cognition show up essentially, in the sense that we consider them as belonging to pictures as artworks, and not as mere pictures, well, then we do need some general account of what an artwork is. Anyone on offer?

epistemic role, prompts and 'workings of cognition'

John Zeimbekis
28 nov. 2002 23:06 UT

The 'workings of cognition' hypothesis may be wrong while still leaving room for cognitive alternatives and escaping 'conversation theory'. In fact Casati's theory of prompts can be specified to admit a cognitive role but then precisely it is no longer a conversation theory as he defines it.

The notion of a prompt commits Casati to some idea of restriction of response. A prompt does not bear intentions on its sleeve in a reflexive way, yet it does amount to a functional determination: the 'conversation' is not entirely open-ended (it's also not gaping open at the contextual end, otherwise art historians would have nothing to do).

If the prompt is to prompt metarepresentational conversations as Casati claims, then it has to be such that it allows respondents to claim relations between it and something it represents, ie, to find some symbolic values to the exclusion of others. And if this is built into the producer's "intention that his work be a conversational prompt", then that intention seems to be symbolizing in some sense. Then cognitive relevance narrows down to having conversations about the pragmatic status of such meanings. But isn't this a typical concern of message theory?

Either way it is the workings-of-cognition-hypothesis that suffers, while conversations and messages seem to combine nicely to give artworks generally, including figurative ones, cognitive relevance.

Epistemic role and cognitive role

Gloria Origg
29 nov. 2002 16:17 UT

I intentionally used the term "epistemic" to point to a slight different issue than that of the "cognitive role" of works of art.

There is a strong intuition that artworks are a way of acquiring knowledge about the world and ourselves, and in this respect they are quite different from other classes of objects that are able to elicit our perceptual mechanisms, but do not elicit this kind of "epistemic expectations".

I was wondering why artworks raise these "epistemic expectations", and I was exploring some lines of explanations proposed in the papers under discussion.

Enaction et sens commun

Thi Bich Doan
27 nov. 2002 16:27 UT

Le concept d'enaction de Francisco Varela, initialement créé pour élargir la définition de la cognition en dépassant les paradigmes classiques du cognitivisme et du connexionnisme, est particulièrement pertinent dans l'approche du phénomène artistique.

Alva Noë pose le problème de la transparence de l'expérience perceptuelle et s'interroge sur le niveau de justesse de la représentation.

En privilégiant le concept d'action à celui de représentation, et en considérant que nos questions sont à chaque instant définies, qui plus est avec les critères de pertinence du sens commun et de façon toujours contextuelle, Varela permet de dépasser la contrainte de prédétermination du monde (le concept de représentation n'est plus central) et montre le caractère inséparable du vécu (la transparence est toujours relative).

L'enaction, par sa capacité de "faire émerger créateur du monde", se rapproche de l'acte créateur en tant qu'instigateur d'expérience pour l'artiste mais aussi pour le spectateur. Elle ouvre la possibilité à un accès au monde autre, dans le sens où elle fait appel à une forme d'évolution intérieure, plutôt lente et difficile, mais aussi dans une certaine mesure constante et immédiate car en permanence alimentée par nos interactions avec l'environnement. Elle vient se rajouter à l'expérience perceptuelle en l'élargissant par la prise en compte du sens commun à tort délaissé en raison de son ambiguïté déroutante.

L'enaction peut-elle grâce à la force d'impact et de proximité de l'art contribuer à approfondir une manière essentielle d'envisager l'étude de la cognition ?

Does art qua art matter?

Alexander Nagel

27 nov. 2002 17:45 UT

I am not convinced by this paper that art is especially useful to phenomenological awareness.

Noë ties active exploration to movement, and this means sculpture is privileged as an opportunity for this sort of reflection. "There can be no pictures of the visual field itself," so any such role for painting is limited.

This makes me wonder whether it is art qua art that functions as a tool of phenomenological exploration. Or does sculpture function in this way simply by virtue of the fact that it is another object in the world? (The confusion of art and objecthood was, of course, what Michael Fried most disliked about the work of the "minimalists," Serra included.)

If, however, painting can be shown to facilitate such reflection, then perhaps art does have a special role to play beyond the fact that it occupies space in the visual field with other objects. The question hinges on what you think painting is doing. I don't think it is true that "[t]he hallmark of pictorial content is that it is given all at once—in high resolution, sharp focus, uniform detail, from the center of the picture to its periphery." It may be true that there are paintings in which all of the elements are portrayed to an equal degree of detail. But that doesn't mean they are perceptually "given all at once" to the perceiver. Tests have been done that trace the trajectory of the eyes as they rove over the pictorial field, showing that here too there is a dynamic experience at work.

More important, painters exploited this fact. Chardin, for example, was very interested in the relative acuity of center and periphery in perceptual experience, and tried to map it onto the pictorial field. He thus raised the very problem of making "pictures of the visual field itself." It causes difficulties that go back at least to Leonardo's sfumato. How is the experience of the world represented in the painting calibrated with the experience of the painting itself? In representing the results of vision does the painting suffer distortion when it is itself perceived by the viewer?

This, of course, became Cezanne's central problem. Merleau Ponty was interested in him for good reasons. Here it does seem that art becomes a theater for phenomenological thinking. But does it have much to do with the enactive process Noë describes?

Art and objects

Alva Noë

28 nov. 2002 8:16 UT

Alexander Nagel raises important questions and provides an occasion to clarify.

In the paper I make two claims about art as a tool for phenomenology. (1) That some art is experiential – it makes experience its subject matter by providing occasions in which perceivers can reflect on their perceptual processes. (2) That art-making provides a domain for phenomenological investigation. Here I had painting in mind particularly: the painter (even the "representationalist") doesn't record or reflect, but constructs; this construction of content rests on phenomenological investigation.

As for the second point, then, there can be no question that sculpture is privileged. But what about the first point? Do I leave painting out of the story by over-emphasizing the role of movement?

I didn't mean to. Experiential art is art whose content depends on the way it makes experience itself available to the viewer. Not all art does this, but much art does do this. Serra's work is experiential in this sense; I mention the painter Close in the paper. Cezanne is great example of experiential painting, as Nagel points out.

Are the mechanisms by which painting accomplishes this experience-directing function different from that of sculpture? Sculpture requires active exploration – you move around the piece, for example. But isn't this true of the painting as well? Don't we actively look at paintings? As Nagel observes, we move our eyes; we also shift our position, moving about in front of the art work. We also direct our thought processes, thinking about this, then that, placing attention here, then there. (In a separate posting I will say more about this process.)

Does my account fail to do justice to art as art? After all, isn't it the case that any object at all can provide an occasion for thinking

about what it is like to look at it!

In a way this is right. Phenomenology can happen anywhere. But artists – like Cezanne, like Serra – can make experience itself their subject matter. They build special perceptual objects. They make not only objects, but experience-occasions. The art work can guide and inform phenomenological reflection. I think this is a distinctively artistic concern, but one shared by all manner of designers as well.

On Fried: this discussion of experiential art shows how art which might be thought to be “theatrical” can play a distinctive role not available to other work.

A further point

Alva Noë
29 nov. 2002 11:09 UT

Nagel observes that on my account active exploration is tied to movement and that, therefore, sculpture is privileged as providing an occasion for phenomenological self-reflection. He quotes my remark (actually an idea of Wittgenstein's) that “there can be no pictures of the visual field itself” as evidence that I don't extend the account to painting.

In claiming that we can't depict the visual field, I meant not that we can't depict what is seen, but that we can't depict the experience itself. We can depict the environment, and we can make pictures that inform us about qualities of experience. To do the latter is, on my view, precisely to undertake to make experiential art. Cezanne is an excellent experiential artist, so is Chardin, and so is Chuck Close, the painter I mentioned in the essay.

Heterogeneity of Art

Tamar Szabo Gendler
27 nov. 2002 22:06 UT

Noë suggests that “art can make a contribution to the study of perceptual consciousness” -- in particular, that what he calls “experiential art” can provide perceivers with occasions to catch themselves in the act of perceptual exploration and can play a role in phenomenological investigation.” The example he offers is drawn from the genre of sculpture, but -- presumably -- he wishes the lesson to apply more generally.

In his interesting reply, Alex Nagel (“Does Art qua Art Matter?”) helpfully brings out some of the problems with applying a similar thesis to the genre of painting -- at least to certain sorts of painting. But I wonder whether Noë's case might not be better made by looking to a slightly different set of examples.

What I have in mind is cinematic representation -- both in its traditional sense, and in more comprehensive “virtual reality” versions. In extreme cases -- I am thinking here of the technology designed to give one the “experience” of drunk driving, or of “being schizophrenic” -- such experiences are strikingly effective at provoking a more general reflection on the nature of experience as such. And this may well be because (as Noë hypothesizes) precisely because one's “enactive” role in selecting visual stimuli is limited; one sees next what one is shown next.

But it's not clear to me (and here I am agreeing with Nagel) that it is the filmic qua art that does the work here. Neither of the two examples I cited parenthetically (drunk driving simulations or schizophrenia simulations) is -- unless we choose to use the term extremely broadly -- artistic. Moreover, one might think of the self-experiments of William James and others employing mind-altering drugs as falling along a continuum with these.

Again, I think Noë is right in his larger point -- that the reason these experiences are so phenomenologically illuminating is because they involve the breakdown of our normal patterns of enactive control. But, like Nagel, I'm not convinced that this has anything to do with art as such.

Three further questions:

(a) How does Noë's thesis apply -- if at all -- to auditory experience and auditory art (e.g. symphonies, songs)?

(b) What role, if any, does Noë think purely narrative representation (e.g. simple written stories) might play in evoking phenomenological awareness?

(c) How, if at all, does Noë see art's ability to evoke emotional responses as playing a role in his larger thesis?

Tamar's questions

Alva Noë
29 nov. 2002 11:39 UT

About the enactive approach and painting, and about the problem of whether it is art, qua art, that matters, please see my replies to

Nagel and to Lopes.

Tamar asks three other important questions. They're hard questions and I'm not sure I know the answers.

(a) Auditory experience and music

The enactive approach to perception extends easily to auditory experience. As you move in relation to an event, the character of auditory stimulation changes. Your experience acquires representational content, I would say, thanks to your implicit grasp of the kinds of laws governing these changes. Which still leaves the question of music. Frankly, I'm not sure what to say here. For now let me say this: I suspect similar issues are raised by the question of the auditory perception of speech.

(b) Stories

The primary mode of knowledge involved in understanding a story is conceptual rather than sensorimotor understanding. (Of course it may be, as I suggest above, that the perception of speech (whether through audition or reading) depends on sensorimotor knowledge too). So the question is: can the understanding serve as a channel of phenomenological exploration? I believe it can. This is a fascinating issue to explore further.

(c) Affect

What are emotions? This is a deep and, for me at least, unresolved question. I am sympathetic to somewhat cognitivist approaches to emotion, accepting that to have an emotion is also to exercise a range of cognitive capacities. Emotion is, then, to some extent, intellectual. But whatever else is true, emotions are not only intellectual. They are felt, embodied, indeed, enacted. I expect it should be possible, then, to extend an enactive account to the phenomenology of emotion. (I have James in mind, here.) What of the emotional content of art? I suspect this would admit of an analysis, then, along two dimensions: first, intellectual; second, enactive.

The nuts and bolts of enaction

Roberto Casati

28 nov. 2002 15:29 UT

I have three questions – two about the enactive model, one about the way it applies to pictorial production. The first two may be (but I do not know well) part of a standard set of objections to the enactive account of perception, but maybe Alva has quick replies that help the reader better get the theory.

1. There are clear cases in which sensorimotor contingencies are of no help, and yet perception works – in a way that does not seem to be unintelligible, or much too remote from paradigm cases of perception. Consider the perception of distant stars.

2. It is suggested that sensorimotor contingencies are taken to be somewhat known by the perceiver. This knowledge is said not to be propositional. Whatever its precise format, it seems to be a knowledge that has a modal (counterfactual) articulation, insofar as it requires that what is known is that [if one did such and such thing, the world would present him with such and such aspect.] Is the claim really that – say – perceiving a red spot is knowing that if I lit up a yellow light, it would appear slightly different? This appears to be quite a bit of a competence, especially because it is hard to see where the relevant competence can stop.

3. Alva writes: "The painter attends to the world not qua domain of facts and properties, states of affairs, (et cetera), but rather, to the world as it presents itself to us, as it affords us with opportunities for movement, thought and action, to the world qua a domain of skillful perceptual activity." However, the (representational) painter must bear in mind that he has to act on a two dimensional canvas. How is this going to show up in the painter's way of attending to the world? I am asking this because an answer to this would help us enter into the "mechanics" of enaction.

Getting down to basics

Alva Noë

29 nov. 2002 8:35 UT

I reply to each of Roberto's questions in turn.

1. Stars This is a tricky case, for any theory of perception. I am inclined to bite the bullet and say that, in truth, we only barely see stars. What we see (with the naked eye) are glimmers of lights in the night sky, lights cast by objects distant in space and time. Whether this right or not, our relation to these objects is mediated by laws of sensorimotor contingency. Look at a star; now shut your eyes. There you have it! A subtle movement of your body produces changes in star-related sensory stimulation. The sensorimotor contingencies mediating our relation to stars are fairly simple; I think this reflects the fact that we only see them in a fairly simple and restricted way.

2. Knowledge If you catch someone in the act of looking, you will notice that he or she will frequently move around a good deal. She'll crane her neck, say, to get a better look at an obstructed object. These actions are performed effortlessly and automatically. They give evidence, I would say, of the perceiver's implicit knowledge that her relation to objects of perception are mediated by sensorimotor laws, laws with which she is comfortably familiar. Consider: no one is ever surprised to find that if you sit still, you'll have trouble seeing what's going on around you! We are also very familiar with the way the appearances of things change depending on our spatial relation to them (whether these changes are produced by their movement or ours).

3. The painter As a boy I used to draw lots of guns. A friend showed me how to create the illusion of the 3D opening at the barrel's

mouth by making a little filled-in ellipse. I was astonished, and delighted, but I immediately understood. Seen from an angle, that's how the barrel would look. Seen from straight ahead, however, it would look like this...These are simple examples of the way an artist might think about the way appearances change as we move. The artist makes an ellipse at the opening of the gun barrel, but not because he/she judges the barrel's opening to be elliptical, but because he/she has explored the relation between the active perceiver and the perceptual object. Perspective is only one aspect of phenomenology among many that artists have explored.

Hurrah for Transparency

Dominic Lopes
28 nov. 2002 19:17 UT

Suppose that some artists set out to depict the phenomenology of visual experience. The question is what realizing this intention would require. To find out, we need to know what the phenomenological properties of experience are and we need to know what representational resources are available to image-makers. Noë thinks that if vision is transparent then that spells the end for phenomenology and presumably for the depiction of the phenomenology of vision.

He therefore calls the enactive theory of perception to the rescue, but I don't see how it helps. Serra and Close provide opportunities for self-aware perception but what doesn't? The claim must be that understanding Serra and Close requires exploring the thought that vision is an activity. There must be facts about the images that require such an interpretive hypothesis. In the case of the Close the relevant fact is the pixellation of the image. But it is only qua perceptual puzzle that the Close engenders reflection about the activity of perception. Any puzzling or disquieting image will have the same effect. The exact look of the image doesn't thematize thoughts about the activity of perception. It doesn't proscribe thinking perception to be the generation of smooth mental images from retinal pixels!

Maybe we relinquished the standard view too quickly. Why can't we depict phenomenology by depicting the very properties experience represents the world as having? For example, I might paint a picture that shows what it is like to see with degenerate maculae by showing a scene using a distorted colour palette. (I don't think this is a case of the El Greco Fallacy.)

There is another objection not considered by Noë. Pictorial experience is typically twofold: it comprises concurrent experience of the picture surface and the depicted scene. This fact characterizes the phenomenology of pictorial experience. But it is incompatible with the transparency of face-to-face seeing.

The reply is that not all pictorial experience is twofold: there is illusionistic depiction. The real irony, then, is that illusionistic depiction is the only vehicle for depicting the phenomenology of experience and it accomplishes it without violating transparency.

In truth, however, I wonder if art depicts experience except in the most unusual cases. Artists who thought they did this (e.g. Seurat) were actually just messing around with elements of vision or visual processing (we do not experience the world like a Seurat).

Underestimating the challenge

Alva Noë
29 nov. 2002 9:09 UT

One way to "depict experience" would be to depict "the very properties experience represents the world as having," as Lopes in his interesting comments suggests. The question I pose is: what are those properties? For instance, does my experience represent the plate as round, or as elliptical, or as neither (to use a simple example)? How do I depict the roundness of the plate as this is captured in my experience? Artists are now very familiar with techniques for solving this problem. What about other properties, such as, for example, the sense of the presence of things that are out of view, or the sense of the indeterminacy of items at the periphery, or in the distance, or the effects of lighting and shadow? These are not simple problems. And what about properties of the experience that are not properties of the experienced objects, such as the fact that they are of interest? Cannot an artist depict these as well?

These are the questions transparency raises, and they are questions that must be answered by an artist who is interested in capturing experience on the canvas. Other artists – e.g. video artists like Bill Viola – face different problems. Because painting rests on answering these questions, it rests on phenomenology. Because experience is essentially active and embodied (if I am right), the painter must also engage with activity and embodiment.

Lopes writes: "Serra and Close provide opportunities for self-aware perception but what doesn't?" In this he echoes questions posed by Tamar Gendler and Alexander Nagel. I'll make a bald claim in response, hoping that it will meet with response from the participants in this symposium: to engage aesthetically with a Serra or a Close (or a Cézanne or a Chardin), you must engage with these perceptual issues; a full aesthetic encounter with a work by these artists will usefully involve attention to the active embodiment of your perceptual processes. Many non-art objects challenge us in this way too (bridges, vistas, freeway systems, psychological experiments), but only art-objects do this as part of their aesthetic mission.

Enactive or romantic?

Pascal Ludwig
1 déc. 2002 14:41 UT

There are some striking and worrying similarities between Alva Noë's claims about the relationships between art and Experience and the romantic conception of art. Like the romantics, Noë seems to hold the following assumptions: (i) there are deep truths that works of art may help us to uncover (ii) works of art are especially well suited to help us to uncover these truths ; (iii) works of art are not equal with regard to their capacity to uncover them; hence, there is a hierarchy of arts. According to the romantics, the 'deep truths' concerned the nature of God or creation, the nature of Beauty, the nature of absolute spirit, etc... According to Alva, they concern Experience conceived of as 'an activity of encounter with the world'. Alva does accept (ii), since he says that at least some forms of art are especially

well suited to make us aware of the 'true nature' of Experience. This amounts to saying that there is a "privileged" access to Experience and its essence via artistic experience -- a typically romantic claim (compare with Hegel, who thought that art was a privileged route through which the Spirit could become aware of him(her?it?self)). Alva seems indeed to claim that the different forms of art are not equal with regards to the extent to which they make this privileged access possible. This implies a normative conception of art, according to which we (philosophers) can decide which works are interesting (at least as 'privileged' routes to Experience) and which works are not. Thus, trompe-l'oeil and other kinds of illusionistic painting should be deemed poor forms of art. I am skeptical about such claims, because I think the romantic conception is false. On a modest reading of the paper, works of art are not privileged routes to the essence of Experience, but rather occasions to reflect upon particular aspects of multifarious experiences. But this modest reading is consistent with acceptance of the standard view on pictorial representations. To conclude, I raise the following dilemma: if the strong interpretation of the paper is right, should we really accept its upshot? If the modest reading is correct, where is, on the other hand, the inconsistency with the standard view on depiction?

the latter

John Zeimbekis
1 déc. 2002 22:55 UT

I would just like to extend Ludwig's point because I think that if the analogies he points out exist, they could make for a regressive application to esthetics of discoveries in the field of cognition. The extension concerns Kant. Although Kant dealt with esthetic predicates (beautiful, sublime) and primarily as these apply to nature, his theory both (i) establishes normative criteria for artefacts and (ii) ties those criteria to a proof for the existence of a faculty (the claim that teleological judgment is autonomous from practical reason) through claims about the way we perceive objects. I think the similarity with the workings-of-cognition hypothesis is glaring.

The ambitiousness of the workings-of-cognition concept of art similarly risks marginalizing a more modest yet perhaps more relevant procedure, that of explaining why individuals (a) find works in potentially all media and traditions relevant or interesting, (b) do not find that all works in a given medium or tradition or using a certain technique (be it conceptual, op-art, or mere depiction) are relevant or interesting but only that some are.

This suggests that the workings-of-cognition hypothesis is on the wrong track because it focuses on a set of potential artistic materials and their cognitive effects instead of focusing on differences in the manipulation of such materials, which seem to be decisive for whether audiences find works relevant. As I argued in another reply, a broad enough theory of symbolism seems the best candidate for unifying the media and traditions that serve as exclusive paradigms for normative or partial theories. But in addition, it could explain why within a given practice (movement medium genre etc), some of the individuals produced are more interesting than others.

Not even close

Alva Noël
2 déc. 2002 16:30 UT

I wrote "Act as enaction" from the standpoint of philosophical cognitive science. Like many working in this field, I am interested in the nature of consciousness in general and the nature of perceptual consciousness in particular. I am not sure whether this commits me to there being "deep truths" about these matters. I guess I do believe I'm committed to there being truths about these matters. The claim of the paper is really a rather humble one: that scientists and philosophers interested in discovering some of these truths may find it helpful to look to the arts for insights.

This is a far cry from saying "that at least some forms of art are especially well suited to make us aware of the 'true nature' of Experience," a claim Pascal then comments on by saying "This amounts to saying that there is a "privileged" access to Experience and its essence via artistic experience -- a typically romantic claim".

All I meant, and all I said, was that art can be a tool for phenomenological analysis. This claim doesn't rest on any strong theses about true natures or essences or "Experience". It certainly doesn't imply anything about privileged access. (Compare: the fact that telephony is a tool for long-distance communication does not entail that telephony gives us privileged access to anything.)

Pascal writes: "Alva seems indeed to claim that the different forms of art are not equal with regards to the extent to which they make this privileged access possible. This implies a normative conception of art, according to which we (philosophers) can decide which works are interesting (at least as 'privileged' routes to Experience) and which works are not."

(At this point it occurred to me that Pascal might be joking...)

First, I took pains to explain that I was offering a way in which art could contribute to theory, not a criterion for judging art. Second, I noted that not all art can make this kind of contribution to theory, not because some art is inferior, but because art has many different aims and interests and only a some art takes any interest in phenomenological analysis.

I have no idea why Pascal thinks that I would be inclined to believe that "trompe-l'oeil and other kinds of illusionistic painting should be deemed poor forms of art." I don't believe this; I certainly didn't write it.

Pictorial composition and emotional response

David Freedberg (Columbia University - Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America)

Date of publication: 2 December 2002)

Abstract:

What are the protocols for conducting an experiment on the relations between pictorial composition and emotional response? Underlying this question is the problem of establishing and defining correlations between particular kinds of compositions and particular emotional responses. We shall look at problems of evaluative criteria, modes and modality, parallel processing, in order to enquire how one moves from perception to emotion.

What are the protocols for conducting an experiment on the relations between pictorial composition and emotional response? Underlying this question is the problem of establishing and defining correlations between particular kinds of compositions and particular emotional responses. I and my collaborator at Caltech, [HYPERLINK "http://www.vision.caltech.edu/html-files/Perona.html"](http://www.vision.caltech.edu/html-files/Perona.html) [Pietro Perona](#), are examining the problems of evaluative criteria; of modes and modality; of parallel processing; and the more general problem of moving from aspects of vision (say saccadic eye patterns and the problem of saliency) to emotion. The latter move is the crux.

We have not yet settled on the protocols for the experiment suggested here. We will. I remain unmoved by the argument that the kinds of emotion pictures rouse – like those of music – are too refined to fall within the scope of the neurosciences. The argument that the most we can now say about the emotions are on a relatively gross level ought not to block research into the correlations between visual composition and emotion, however refined such emotion may be declared to be (or however contaminated by contextual factors).

In the meantime I offer a case study in Poussin and the history of the modes that seems to me to offer an interesting prolegomenon to the problem, not least because:

- 1) the paintings of Poussin present a kind of compositional clarity not often found in other pictures. In them, I believe, composition is indeed so clear that it is less likely, at least in the context of immediate or "early" vision, to be contaminated by issues of color, iconography, expression, etc.;
- 2) the historical problem of the modes offers an entirely different way of thinking about modality than current conceptions of that notion;
- 3) the historical parallel with the musical modes points once more to the single issue that has for so long stymied serious study of the relations between aesthetic objects and emotion, namely that the emotions are too ragged and irregular to be amenable to any kind of rule or law.

I

The idea of the modes in art (and in painting in particular) was not a common one, at least not until the middle of the seventeenth century. But from then it enjoyed a fairly long vogue. Its introduction into the mainstream of the history of art is due to the influence of one man alone.

On November 24, 1647, the French painter Nicolas Poussin wrote a long letter from Rome to his friend and patron Paul Fréart de Chantelou in Paris. "Those fine old Greeks", he said at one point, "inventors of everything that is beautiful, found several Modes by means of which they produced marvellous effects". What did Poussin mean by the "Modes", and what meaning could they have for us?

In 1647 Nicolas Poussin painted a [HYPERLINK "http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin61.html"](http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin61.html) [Finding of Moses](#) (for Jean Pointel), one of several he did of this comparatively unusual subject, and a scene of [HYPERLINK "http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin34.html"](http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin34.html) [Ordination](#) (part of a cycle of the *Seven Sacraments*) for Paul Fréart de Chantelou. Pointel and Chantelou were Poussin's most important French patrons, though nothing like as important for his art as Cassiano dal Pozzo in Rome, for whom he painted the first series of Sacraments just before his brief return to Paris in 1641-2. Pointel was a banker, a bachelor, and eventually owned 21 of Poussin's loveliest paintings. But Chantelou was evidently not satisfied with his painting of *Ordination*. He was constantly looking over his shoulder, and, as we learn from a famous letter by Poussin to him in November 1647, seems to have felt that Pointel's [HYPERLINK "http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin61.html"](http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin61.html) [Finding of Moses](#) was the better picture. We may think that this is a bit like comparing apples and oranges, and Poussin obviously felt so too. Quite exasperated by Chantelou's nagging, he wanted to settle the problem once and for all.

Then he had an idea. He would try to explain something very basic about pictures to Chantelou. Not having quite the right arguments to hand for painting, however, he turned to an example from the theory of music to explain what may seem obvious to us: that different subjects require different treatments. But he went still further than this, suggesting that different treatments might have different effects on the beholder:

Those fine old Greeks, inventors of everything that is beautiful, found several Modes by means of which they produced marvelous effects.

This word Mode means, properly, the ratio or the measure and the form which we use to do something that constrains us not to move beyond it, making us work in all things with a certain middle course or moderation. And so this mediocrity or moderation is simply a certain manner or determined and fixed order in the process by which a thing preserves its being.

The Modes of the ancients were composed of several things put together; and from their variety there arose certain differences between

the Modes; and from these one could understand that each Mode retained in itself a certain distinctiveness, *particularly when all the things which entered into the composition were put together in such proportions that there arose the capacity and power to arouse the soul of the spectator to divers emotions*. Observing these effects, the wise ancients attributed to each [Mode] particular effects arising from each one of them. For this reason they called Dorian the Mode that was stable, grave, and severe, and they applied it to matters that were grave, severe, and full of wisdom.

And passing on from this to pleasant and joyous things, they used the Phrygian Mode because its modulations were more refined [*plus menues*] than those of any other Mode and its aspect sharper. These two manners and no others were praised and approved by Plato and Aristotle, who deemed the others useless; they held in high esteem this vehement, furious, and highly severe Mode that strikes the spectator with awe.

I hope within a year to paint something in this Phrygian Mode; frightful wars provide subjects suited to this manner.

Furthermore they considered that the Lydian Mode was the most proper for mournful subjects because it has neither the simplicity of the Dorian, nor the severity of the Phrygian.

The Hypolydian Mode contains within itself a certain suavity and sweetness which fills the soul of beholders with joy. It lends itself to divine matters, glory and Paradise.

The ancients invented the Ionian which they employed to represent dances, bacchanals, and feasts, because of its cheerful character. Good poets have used great diligence and marvelous artifice in adapting their choice of words to their verse and disposing the feet according to the propriety [*convenanse*] of speech, So, when Virgil is speaking of love, he has cleverly chosen certain words that are sweet, pleasing and very gracious to the ear. Where he sings of a feat of arms or describes a naval battle or accident at sea, he has chosen words that are hard, sharp and unpleasing, so that on hearing them or pronouncing them they arouse fright. If, therefore, I had painted you a picture in which this manner was followed, you would imagine that I did not love you.

Were it not that it would amount to composing a book rather than writing a letter, I would like to bring to your attention several important things that should be considered in paintings, so that you could fully realize how much I exert myself to serve you well. For though you are very knowledgeable in all matters, I fear that the company of so many insensitive and ignorant people of the kind that surround you may corrupt your judgement by contagion.]

I remain, as always, your very humble and most faithful servant,

Poussin.

Obviously there is much in this letter that requires comment (the relation between reason and the senses, and the predictable parallels between painting and poetry for example); but for the moment I want to concentrate on what may seem the most arcane part of his letter, namely the part in which talks about the modes, and all those strange references to the grave Dorian, the sharp and warlike Phrygian, the suave Hypolydian, the cheerful Ionian, and so on and and so forth.

Where does all this come from? It comes, as Anthony Blunt discovered in 1933, from ancient music theory. In fact, what Poussin wrote about the Modes is little more than a direct plagiarism from Giuseppe Zarlino's *Istituzioni armoniche*, first published in 1558 and reprinted many times for the rest of the century. (To read Zarlino's text in PDF, click [HYPERLINK "http://gallica.bnf.fr/scripts/ConsultationTout.exe?O=N058227&T=0"](http://gallica.bnf.fr/scripts/ConsultationTout.exe?O=N058227&T=0) \n [blank](#)here.) But this is no reason not to take his ideas seriously. After all, while most of us can recognize the possibility that different kinds of music might stir us differently, the idea that different kinds of pictures move us in different ways would seem rather more resistant to formulation in any clear-cut or systematic way. Indeed, scholars of Poussin have mostly avoided doing so altogether. The usual approach to this letter has been to see it in terms of the twin doctrines of decorum and of the *affetti*. That is, Poussin has been understood to be making the rather conventional claim that the expression of the emotions *within* the paintings should somehow be appropriate to the kind of subject to be depicted. Poussin himself wrote in 1637 about another painting which did for Chantelou, the now almost unreadable picture of [HYPERLINK "http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin39.html"](http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin39.html) \n [blank](#)[The Israelites Gathering the Manna](#) that there were "certain natural attitudes within it", which enabled one to see in the Israelites "not only the misery and hunger to which they were reduced, but also the joy and happiness in which they found themselves; the amazement by which they were touched, the respect and reverence they had for their leader, and a mixture of women, children, and old men, and of different temperaments".

It was this latter kind of reading of a picture that was taken up in the famous *Conférences* or lectures in the French Academy of Painting from around 1667 on; and this is exactly how almost all scholars have tried to deal with the problem. In almost futile ways they have tried to identify which pictures were painted in which modes. But to view Poussin's letter in this way seems to me to gloss over what strikes me as the most crucial and interesting passage of the letter. After all, Poussin himself clearly and articulately observed that "each Mode retained in itself a certain distinctiveness, particularly when all the things which entered into the composition were put together in such proportions that there arose the capacity and power to arouse the soul of the spectator to divers emotions". This is the central claim of the letter. It goes far beyond the injunctions in his letters of ten years earlier about the [HYPERLINK "http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin39.html"](http://www.abcgallery.com/P/poussin/poussin39.html) \n [blank](#)[Gathering of the Manna](#) to "read the story" - *lisez l'histoire et le tableau*, he had said then, *afin de connaître si chaque chose est appropriée au sujet*. This notion, certainly, was based on the old parallelism between texts and paintings and on the notion of decorum and appropriateness. The point now was much more radical. It had little to do with *reading* a picture. It implied - no, it stated outright - that a composition may be put together in such a way as to arouse the soul of the spectator to particular emotions.

With music this seems self-evident, common-sensical, intuitive, and consistent with our experience, but with painting? Or sculpture? Or architecture? And could such modes be specifiable for pictures? Could, furthermore, the correlative emotions for the way particular pictures are put together be established? I think that anyone who reflects on these questions will realize instantly that a positive answer

would entail a view of the relations between pictures and spectators that is not solely dependent on context, but is predicated instead on the possibility of being able to establish certain kinds of rules; and that certain kinds of responses are in fact innate. One has, therefore, to ask whether the kinds of correlations Poussin was suggesting might both be universal (which is what the letter implies) and universally applicable. After all, Poussin said that the modes were specifiable and that the effects of pictures on their beholders could be directly correlated with how they were composed and how they looked.

No one, as far as I know, has taken any of this sufficiently seriously to analyze the possibility that Poussin might indeed have been claiming not only something important about responses to images, but something basic. I think he was. Furthermore, I think that what he had to say has powerful implications for the philosophy of mind, and for how we think about the architectonics, as Kant would have put it, of mental operations. None other than Bernini seems to have caught something of this when, pointing to his forehead, he made his famous statement upon seeing the two great *Phocion* pictures in Paris in 1665 - one now in [HYPERLINK "http://www.ariadne.org/studio/michelli/PoussinPhocion.jpg"](http://www.ariadne.org/studio/michelli/PoussinPhocion.jpg) \n _blank [Cardiff](#), the other now in [HYPERLINK "http://www.i-a-s.de/IAS/Bilder/POUSSIN/PHOCION.JPG"](http://www.i-a-s.de/IAS/Bilder/POUSSIN/PHOCION.JPG) \n _blank [Liverpool](#) - that "Signor Poussin è un pittore che lavora di la". (Blunt, incidentally, speculated that both pictures were in the Dorian mode). When I wrote *The Power of Images* I deliberately refrained from suggesting anything either about human nature or about the possibility of innate levels of response - although some critics caught some hint of this. But I now believe that I was not radical enough. My own sense is that Poussin was right, and that one ought to be able to establish a syntax of correlations between pictures and responses; and that that syntax is in principle discoverable through the idea of the modes.

All this is likely to arouse deep scepticism. I am not now primarily speaking of the relations between perceptual rules and how a picture looks. These, too, are relations whose rules may presumably be discovered, and much cognitive work has been done in this domain; but in proposing a *tertium quid*, I am indeed taking a further leap. Even if we assume that we may establish a syntax for the relations between how pictures look and how we cognize them, I believe that there is a further syntactical level: between the look of a picture and the emotions it arouses. And the rules for that syntax, I believe, are universal, innate, and specifiable. The general view is exactly the opposite. This more popular view would hold that the emotions are not subject to reason or to any specifiable set of rules; and that very little if anything can be said about the relations between pictures and feeling that is not purely contextual or idiosyncratic. That, of course, is not a view I share.

II

If the idea of the modes and the specific emotional qualities associated with them was uncommon in painting (though perhaps more common than usually assumed), this was not at all the case with the idea of the modes in music. As we have already seen, it was at least as old as the Greeks, and it went on to play an important role in all musical theory and much musical practice (from Chant through Beethoven) ever since. But one of the problems in music was whether the modes were somehow equivalent to the keys and with the emotions that were often associated with specific keys. The evidence for what have appropriately been called key characteristics is abundant, much more so than has generally been acknowledged.

Properties of the Modes

C-Major Gay and warlike

C-Minor Obscure and sad

D-Minor Grave and pious

D-Major Joyous and very warlike

E-Minor Effeminate, amorous and plaintive

E-Major Quarrelsome and peevish

Eb-Major Cruel and severe

F-Major Furious and quick-tempered

F-Minor Obscure and plaintive

G-Major Quietly joyful

G-Minor Serious and magnificent

A-Minor Tender and plaintive

A-Major Joyous and pastoral

Bb-Major Magnificent and joyous

Bb-Minor Obscure and terrifying

B-Minor Lonely and melancholy

B-Major Severe and plaintive

Much plaintiveness, as if to cover the possibility of some more precise emotion.

It was all in the air, this association of particular emotions with particular aspects of musical composition, this need to introduce rules into the correlation between the composition of a work and the emotions it aroused. Our list comes from Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Rules of Composition* written around 1692 for the young Philippe d'Orleans; it was by no means the only one in the seventeenth century, but perhaps the most detailed. About thirty years later, Jean-Philippe Rameau's chart entitled *De la propriété des Modes & des Tons* from his *Traité de l'harmonie* would make a similar set of connections. (To read Rameau's text in PDF, click [HYPERLINK "http://gallica.bnf.fr/scripts/ConsultationTout.exe?E=0&O=N008619"](http://gallica.bnf.fr/scripts/ConsultationTout.exe?E=0&O=N008619) \n _blank [here](#)). But by then such ideas, however much they may have been theoretically renewed, adapted, and refined, were stale. In all of them, as Rameau's heading makes clear, and as Poussin insists in *his* letter on the modes, the classical idea of decorum remains in the foreground. The emotions a piece of music expressed, or aroused, had to be fitting to its subject, just as with painting. Let us turn the clock back to times when these ideas were more urgent, less overtly mechanistic; and then remind ourselves of the central period - Poussin's - when they were articulated in such a way that they might still be of relevance to the neurophilosophical problems we are pursuing.

Charpentier's list is headed "properties of the modes", but it seems to provide nothing more than a list of keys with their emotional correlates. This was the commonest way in which the modes were understood in the seventeenth century and after. For the ancient Greeks too, the modes - the Greeks only had eight - corresponded, very roughly, with the notion of key characteristics. And they too thought of the modes both as representing particular emotions and as capable of provoking them with similar particularity. But can it only be a matter of key, however so understood? Of course not. There is much more to music besides key that can affect its hearers: modulation from one key to another, rhythm, harmony, and melody, for example. Not surprisingly, the modes were often taken to be something else besides, or a composite of various aspects of a musical composition. Then there was the perpetual issue of the relationship between music and its texts. In fact, this remained the central issue, if not always explicitly so, in every discussion of the relationship between the modes and the emotions from the earliest times on. At least until the eighteenth century. And so it is not at all surprising that in his letter to Chantelou about the modes, Poussin should have begun by insisting that Chantelou attend more carefully to the determining role of the subjects of the pictures that had provoked their *contretemps* in the first place.

Charpentier offered two justifications for his list. First of all - and straightforwardly enough - there was the need to accommodate different vocal ranges. But secondly - and much more importantly - there was its potential utility as a guide to "the expression of the different passions, for which the different key properties (energies, significantly enough) are appropriate". Always the need for the appropriateness and propriety of properties, as if propriety were the chief constitutive element of property. But if it all were simply a matter of key, the task would be relatively simple, at least in principle. It would not be much different, say, from attempting to establish the moods of particular colours in pictures (in which case "mood" would not implausibly serve as a rough substitute for "mode", and key a rough equivalent for colour). But just as there is more to music than just key, so too there is more to painting than colour. Certainly to speak only of colour would not satisfy the full implications of Poussin's letter at all.

In 1640, in the wake of a cruel musical competition set up for him by Marin Mersenne, Johan Albert Ban, a slightly crazy and certainly obsessive priest and music theorist of Haarlem, wrote a letter to the famous Dutch bluestocking Anna Maria van Schuurman, in which he assigned emotional qualities to the consonances, thus:

minor third: soft, bland, and languid

major third: energetic

fourth: harsh, because it cannot be divided into two harmonic intervals

fifth: heroic and martial

minor sixth: more flattering and languishing than the minor third, because it is a wider interval

octave: merely pleasing, because it has no power of moving

Ban went on to observe that the dissonances could also affect the emotions in specific ways, but these he did not outline, as they had been in his now unfortunately lost Latin treatises on music. The issue of musical modulation intervenes here too; but all this raises another and conceivably more crucial possibility for the ways in which cognition and emotion may be seen to interact in works of music and the visual arts, namely the matter of intervals between notes, or what in painting could be called proportion. This is an issue that will be developed in the next historical instalment of this project.

Discussion

Modes, Innateness, and Arousal

Dominic Lopes

2 déc. 2002 22:30 UT

There is much in Freedberg's description of his work that I think is bang on. Maybe it's a bit of an exaggeration to say that "all this is likely to arouse deep scepticism." But there are a couple of points where I think Freedberg might proceed with caution.

He writes that "I think that anyone who reflects on these questions will realize instantly that a positive answer would entail a view of the relations between pictures and spectators that is not solely dependent on context, but is predicated instead on the possibility of being able to establish certain kinds of rules; and that certain kinds of responses are in fact innate." I don't think the entailment is so obvious, however. I do think it's obvious that pictures can directly arouse their viewers' emotions and that there are rules describing the relationship between how a picture looks and the emotions it arouses. But it does not follow as a matter of logic that the rules are either innate or universal (and universal does not entail innate). Freedberg's example of musical keys gives the mistake away. C-Major is not universally gay and warlike; that is a convention of European classical music and it must be learned. I think it is enough if the modes in the pictorial case, like musical keys, turn out to be systematic and rule-governed.

I also wonder whether it's safe to cast the question as one about emotional arousal, rather than expression, where expression does not require arousal but merely the recognition of something like an emotion-expressive look. It may well be that E-flat Major is perceived by many to be cruel and severe but never causes listeners to feel cruel and severe. Here it might be helpful to know more about the setup of Freedberg's experiments.

Response to Lopes

David Freedberg

3 déc. 2002 11:02 UT

I'm grateful to Lopes for his clear comment on my piece. It offers the opportunity for clarification of my proposal. I would have thought that my claim that "a positive answer [to the question of the possible correlations between the composition of pictures and the responses they evoke] would entail a view of the relations between pictures and spectators that is not solely dependent on context, but is predicated instead on the possibility of being able to establish certain kinds of rules; and that certain kinds of responses are in fact innate" was sufficiently hedged with subjunctives to make it clear that I was by no means excluding the possibility of the pressures of context on the correlations we are seeking to establish. When I wrote *The Power of Images*, reviewers were also swift to suggest that I was excluding context as a pressure on basic levels of response; I was not. To insist that rules may be found for the relations between pictures and the responses they arouse is not, self-evidently, to exclude the pressures of context and the role of convention.

While I'm grateful to Lopes for his stringent reminder that universal does not entail innate, it is indeed the case that in this project we are looking for correlations that may be described as innate.

I offered the examples from musical history as exactly that: interesting historical precedents for the search for 1) correlations between particular emotions and particular pictorial composition, and 2) similar attempted correlations between emotions and key characteristics in music. These examples were not -- even remotely -- intended as proof. On the contrary: both the musical and the pictorial examples offer clear instances, as Lopes rightly points out, of the role of convention in the arousal of emotions. They were simply intended to suggest that we take the project they entail more seriously than has generally been the case.

I would hope that our experiment goes beyond what Lopes calls expression, and does indeed reach to the level of feeling -- though the distinction, I suspect, may eventually turn out to be less great than he wants us to think. If the matter were just the recognition or registration of emotions expressed in a picture or piece of music, then the issue would be much simpler and indeed largely one of convention; which is not what we're after here.

innate and universal

Dan Sperber

3 déc. 2002 13:10 UT

Indeed, as Lopes observes, "universal does not entail innate." Conversely, innate does not entail universal: a specific response to some stimulus may be innate and yet found only when and where the stimulus occurs. The fact that music in C-Major is not universally available and has been theorized only in European classical music to elicit a characteristic response does not imply that this response must be learned and is not innate. Moreover "learned" and "innate" need not be mutually exclusive: the learning of a response may be more or less narrowly channelled (or "canalized" to use a technical term of biology) by innate dispositions. Think of imprinting (or of language acquisition for that matter) as an innately channelled form of learning. The resulting response (or competence) is partly innate and partly acquired.

To go back to the modes discussed by Freedberg, there is nothing contradictory in, on the one hand, recognizing that their theorizing and conventionalizing is local and historical, and, on the other hand, hypothesizing that they may evoke specific innate dispositions. This said, I would love to see some evidence.

Emotion, fiction and pretense

Gloria Origgi

3 déc. 2002 15:40 UT

In the last part of his comment, Lopes writes : "It may well be that E-flat Major is perceived by many to be cruel and severe but never causes listeners to feel cruel and severe".

This raises another important issue for Freedberg's Theory of Response, that is, how in most cases we manage to "inhibit" the response that is caused by a picture or a piece of music?

How is it that art makes us feel "as if" we were cruel or severe, as in a game of make-believe in which we pretend to be in a certain emotional state but we do not act in a consequent way?

This question opens the broader philosophical issue of our relation with fiction, but I think that it may be relevant in this context.

Innateness and Expression Recognition

Dominic Lopes

3 déc. 2002 17:36 UT

Just a remark on Freedberg's closing comment that "if the matter were just the recognition or registration of emotions expressed in a picture or piece of music, then the issue would be much simpler and indeed largely one of convention; which is not what we're after here."

I can see that expression recognition is simpler than arousal, since the latter entails the former but the former does not entail the latter (on some accounts of it). But why think that one is more likely to depend on convention than the other? Paul Ekman's studies showing that the recognition of facial expressions of the basic emotions is universal is good evidence that expression recognition is innate.

Emotion as cognition

Noga Arikha

3 déc. 2002 17:38 UT

Lopes, in pointing to a possible distinction between the expression of emotions and their arousal, is perhaps also asking whether emotions that are intrinsic to the viewer's experience of the painting arise out of a second-order recognition of what lies within the picture, or as a first-order reaction to it.

What might be interesting about the Modes, however, is what appears to be their reliance - for the analogy between musical keys and pictorial composition to work - on the notion that emotions are fundamentally cognitive. The trick, developed within the art of rhetoric, of arousing in the audience emotions that lead to a certain (moral) understanding of the world might be relevant here, although Poussin's aim was explicitly for painting to 'delectare' - truncating Horace's 'docere et delectare'. Beyond the distinction between arousal and expression, however, might the emotional experience summed up in 'delectatio' be cognitive at a first-order level? The Aristotelian notion that the sense-percepts which trigger emotions meet, so-to-speak, in the *sensus communis* (as Quiviger explains in his text) might be valid here. In this case the contemporary relevance of the idea of the Modes would be that of pointing to a possible cognitive equivalence between the senses, of the sort that may be demonstrated, for instance, by the phenomenon of synaesthesia.

How specified, then, would have to be current, developing theories of emotion as cognitive in order to tell us anything about the experience of works of art? Does the theory of Modes fit the bill in this sense?

A comment on the Modes

Avigdor Arikha

3 déc. 2002 19:39 UT

Poussin used an extract copied from Zarlino about the modes in his letter of November 24, 1667, to Paul Fréart de Chantelou, not only to justify himself for painting 'The finding of Moses' for Pointel. In spite of his rather confused way of presenting the theory of modes, Poussin actually seems to have implemented this theory from the end of the 1630s or early 40s. In a fragment of a letter to the painter Jacques Stella, quoted by Félibien, Poussin makes the distinction between "sujet mol" and "manière plus sévère" - soft or a severe manner, the visual equivalent of the minor and major keys. For example, Poussin's "Deluge" can be seen as painted in the "severe" manner, in a Doric mode. However the equivalent of modes in painting is actually expressed more by color than by composition, because sound and color do correspond, and such correspondences were established in a color scale by painters such as Arcimboldo and in a more general way by Paul Klee.

PS

Avigdor Arikha

4 déc. 2002 3:50 UT

Kandinsky elaborated in his 'Über das Geistige in der Kunst' (written in 1910), on musical sound that 'affects the soul directly' and the direct affect of form and color on "the soul". Quoting Delacroix, he writes : 'everybody knows, that yellow, orange and red produce the idea of joy'... However, the qualities of form in painting are divided between active and passive, light and heavy, etc. whereas color is not only divided in tones, but between cool and warm hues and values and their juxtaposition that constitutes the Simultaneous Color Contrast (as defined by Chevreul, 1839) and therefore, differ from sound.

Still on mode-mood-congruency in art and music

Carlo Alessandro Landini

5 déc. 2002 22:16 UT

David Freedberg's original approach to a possible congruency between visual (pictorial) and auditive (musical) stimuli is undoubtedly as meaningful as it is fascinating. Since it has been largely determined that there might be a "powerful" association between certain visual patterns and emotions (the mode-mood-congruency effect already stated by Poussin), and since the same findings have been determined for music (the "musical brain" which was prophetically outlined by Marc-Antoine Charpentier in his *Règles de Composition*, following in the footsteps of Plato and Aristotle) from the evidence of pleasurable responses to music correlated with brain regions implicated in reward and emotions, as some scientists of Montreal's McGill University have recently determined, one should be able to investigate on the same cognitive premises the wide array of human reactions triggered by visual stimuli (disregarding any established role of the visual cortex and evaluation scales based upon saccadic eye patterns, saliency etc.). Since there isn't a vast literature on this topic, Freedberg's contribution might encourage – on an interdisciplinary basis – the study of a possible relationship between attention arousal, emotions, and medical strategies of visual-related healing (this applicative aspect doesn't exist, to my knowledge, except in very abstract, condition-dependent forms) on the one hand, and of psychiatric semiotics and diagnostics (as in the Rorschach Test, in the Lüscher Test, etc.) on the other. Furthermore, provided that a connection between visual and acoustic stimuli can be found on a cognitive as well as on a neural basis, this could possibly represent another step toward the full understanding of synaesthesia as a mutual, synergic, high-level reinforcement between two apparently distant codes and "evolutionary contingencies" such as the visual and the acoustic one.

What could pictorial modes be like?

Roberto Casati

5 déc. 2002 22:37 UT

Freedberg's project aims at establishing a correlation between some (classes of) objective features of paintings and (classes of) subjective responses. His guiding analogy is provided by musical modes, which are said to be correlated with specific emotions.

Two questions on that, somewhat technical.

2. In the case of musical modes, one of the terms of the correlation is specifiable, indeed specified. Just to fix the elements of the discussion: Modes are patterns of tones (2s) and semitones (1s) within an octave. So the major mode is the pattern

2212221

and the minor mode is the pattern

2122122.

Dorian (2122212), Ionian (2212221), and other modes, have yet different, but relatively straightforward patterns. (For a brief tutorial on musical modes, by John Chambers, see: <http://trillian.mit.edu/~jc/doc/abc/Modes.html>. You get an intuitive way of how different modes feel by playing scales on the piano, on the white keys only. Each starting point determines a different mode - if you start with C, you have major; with A, minor, and so on.) Some rules are obeyed by actual modes – semitones are never paired, for reasons which would be worth investigating, but which may themselves depend on cognitive constraints.

I mention all this in order to suggest that modes are simple and strong structures, which are very easily describable, indeed easily and completely described. I do not know if they correlate with emotional responses, but assume they do for the sake of the argument. Is there anything remotely analogous in painting, so nicely structured? What are exactly emotions expected to be correlated to, in the case of paintings? What could a visual mode be like, that it could have such a simple and strong structure as a musical mode?

2. Some of the lists of emotional responses are puzzling, at least in the context of Freedberg's argument:

D-Major Joyous and very warlike

E-Major Quarrelsome and peevish

As it happens, D-major and E-Major are the same mode: Major. They both obey the same 2212221 pattern. So the correlation cannot be with the mode?

Modalities and the 'Aha' hypothesis

Noga Arikha

12 déc. 2002 20:07 UT

Roberto asks "What could a visual mode be like, that it could have such a simple and strong structure as a musical mode?"

One might begin to answer this by reframing the question and by disregarding the notion of Mode for a moment: is there, in the first instance, a modality specific to musical perception? In other words, is there a specific way of perceiving a - temporally linear - musical piece such that our response to a range of notes is intrinsically incomparable to our perception of visual form? More specifically: do we perceive consecutive notes (or chords and harmonies) much as we do (micro)phonemes, in such a way that we expect one phoneme, or one sound-bit, to *entail* (formally) only a certain range of consecutive phonemes? If this is the case, would such a hypothetical relation of (formal) entailment (whatever that may be, and it does call for further definition) be applicable also to spatial form?

It is worth asking this last question in the context of Ramachandran's paper, and of the 'Aha hypothesis', as Pascal Mamassian calls it in his response: as I suggest there, the 'Aha' of the limbic system described by Ramachandran could perhaps be labelled as the 'satisfaction', following an 'aesthetic expectancy', brought on by a musical resolution or indeed by any formal solution, regardless of the modality. Might we get somewhere from here?

Re: Freedberg and Lopes

Amy Morris

5 déc. 2002 23:10 UT

Freedberg has stated that the larger endeavor of his project (with Perona) involves "defining correlations between particular kinds of compositions and particular emotional responses." This is a careful statement on his part that seems, perhaps, to have evaded attention. Defining correlations is not the same endeavor--as stipulated by those who specifically try for correlation--as analyzing predicates, inferring innate functions or structures, inferring or generating "rules" (formulated as hypotheses of causality or as regularities), or the general issue of who means what with the word "universal." (Stipulated as true? Found in every case, ergo inferred as necessary [and in some cases, also sufficient]? Difficult to argue without? Rhetorically pitched as intended to be supposed to be always true?) To begin with a careful act: a correlation is a correlation is a correlation. When Lopes says "I do think it's obvious that pictures can directly arouse their viewer's emotions and that there are rules describing the relationship between how a picture looks and the emotions it arouses," does his use of "rules" mean "logically necessary relationships"? Or statistical correlations? Or inferences based on perception of correlation? Or generalization into the universal of personal experience? Lopes continues: "...it does not follow as a matter of logic that the rules are either innate or universal (and universal does not entail innate.)" Is this an assertion that the rules are social? Or behavioral? But are the "rules" inferred as causal, or inferred as correlations?

Freedberg's project does clearly state a goal of moving from correlations to complex states of inference about "case-study" in Poussin as a prologomena to (or of) "a further syntactical level: between the look of a picture and the emotions it arouses. And the rules for that syntax, I believe, are universal, innate, and specifiable." My main question for him, at this point in time, prior to other extant questions, is curiosity: what do you mean by "syntax" in this statement?

(Do you intend, in your next installment, to discuss potential correlations between "syntax" and saccadic eye movements? If so, how will you and Pietro set this up?)

Les limites

Clotilde Lampignano

6 déc. 2002 9:45 UT

A' partir de Poussin , commence la recherche des relations entre la composition visuelle et l'émotion. Il me semble que cet essai soit joué sur les contrastes, la théorie contre la pratique, l'appétit contre la raison (ce que nous voudrions et la raison), à propos de ce que théorise Poussin quand il veut susciter émotions à partir de l'observation d'un tableau. Cela était du aux protestations d'un de ses marchands d'art. Dans l'histoire de l'art le succès du mode était du à la théorisation de Poussin à partir de l'an 1647, bien qu'il ait suivi l'exemple des Istituzioni armoniche. Dans la théorie de Poussin le mode est vu comme mesure ou raison, et forme , c'est-à-dire quelque chose de bas qui limite l'idée et la contraint. En outre le sujet (le mode) induit à l'émotion; la pratique (l'histoire) le limite. La forme (l'histoire) sont les pieds dans la poésie de Virgilio.

Filtering out emotions

Anne Hamker

6 déc. 2002 20:36 UT

Conducting experiments on art and emotions myself, Freedberg's brief overview raises a bunch of questions. Although I generally like the idea of searching for relations between pictorial composition and emotional response, I am not sure how to discuss this intriguing

topic seriously without knowing details about the actual experiment.

I have to admit, the search for a syntax for the relations between how pictures look and how we recognize them still gives me a hard time. One problem I see with Freedberg's approach is (in a way similar to the one of Wolfgang Kemp) that he assumes pictorial compositions trigger emotions. In other words, emotional reactions are based on bottom-up processes. However, we all know that emotions are complex phenomena and at the same time a result of top-down processes. Therefore, I was wondering how Freedberg would filter out those emotions that are only caused by the pictorial composition. (Here, I do not agree completely with Lopes that pictures can directly arouse the viewers' emotions. This might be the case with some artworks but certainly not with all of them. It also depends on how we define "direct". A "direct" reaction is described as a stimulus-response mechanism, not as an emotion.)

Furthermore, I would be interested in the way Freedberg is going to measure emotions, as arousal is only one part of the story. Valence, for example, is another component of emotions.

Finally yet importantly, it is not clear to me what Freedberg wants to address, whether emotions or feelings. It would make a huge difference if he considers emotions equal to feelings. Following Damasio and colleagues, feelings comprise a conscious aspect whereas emotions do not.

What the art of Aleksandr N. Skrjabin teaches us

Carlo Alessandro Landini
8 déc. 2002 22:56 UT

I think David Freedberg does not only assume, as Anne Hamker claims, that pictorial compositions might trigger emotions. He also and before anything else draws our attention upon the fact that there might be a secret correspondence between the matrix of stimuli provided by visual arts and that of music. We should never forget, I guess, the lesson of the Russian composer Aleksandr N. Skrjabin. Is the tonality C red or white ? Is F sharp blue or green ? In the neverending history of music, these and similar questions did not seem to be as meaningless as we could think today. Between the 19th and the 20th century, in Russia, the most different answers came from famous artists and freethinkers: Skrjabin and Rimskij-Korsakov among the musicians, Kandinskij among the painters, Florenskij among the philosophers. The climax of a series of experiments on the old sound-colour congruency problem was seemingly incorporated by Skrjabin in the visionary score of his *Poème de l'extase*, which involved the use of the so-called clavecin à lumière, an instrument realized appositely to produce colours corresponding to the twelve keys of the chromatic scale. Strangely enough, if Kandinskij used to play the piano and the cello, Skrjabin's habit was to illustrate his compositions with help of diagrams and graphs. All of their writings shows that they had developed a very similar conception of art. Should this convergence be nothing but casual?

Link between art and emotion?

Jose Luis Guijarro
7 déc. 2002 10:41 UT

¡Hola!

The idea that art is somehow linked with emotions seems to be so deeply entrenched in our culture that nobody with some sense would dream to challenge it. However, I have always had problems with that notion, although they are hard to express clearly, I'm afraid. Let me try:

When I represent rice pudding in my mind, I immediately have a feeling of disgust. But when I represent cheese-cake, I get a strong and pleasurable emotion. Does that mean that. I imagine that this is somehow a similar process than that which, according to Freedberg, should happen to me when I hear a C-major or a C-minor? It seems that in one case I have a gay and warlike emotion, in the other an obscure and sad one. Fair enough. But I don't happen to see why this process is linked with the art experience.

Let me turn to images now. Suppose I have just had a bad divorce, where I think my ex- has done all the best to harm me. Imagine further that I have fallen in love with what, for me, is a fantastic person who is helping me out of my family mess. Now, suppose I see a picture of the just-divorced person and another of my present "eternal" love. I will react differently to both of the pictures, won't I? Does this emotional difference have anything to do with art?

So what is the (I suppose) "specific" relationship between art and emotion that makes it so crucial according to our common mythology (which Freedberg seems to favour)? That it be unconscious, subliminal, or whatever? It can't be that! I have difficulties in imagining what the specificity of that relationship might be. Any hints?

If it is true that art happens only after displaying a given information so that it may be valued (or talked about) in a specific way, the valuing attitude may naturally get emotionally involved, for whatever reasons the individual might have. The fact that some of these reasons are universal or innate (or both or neither) does not seem to be relevant for art -at least as far as I am able to understand it.

¡Adiós!

DNA, Endorphins, Receptors

Richard Minsky

9 déc. 2002 19:22 UT

In the mid-1970's I taught a studio course at The School of Visual Arts in New York City that included techniques the artist can use to create emotional responses. Part of *The Theory of Museum Finish* included a section on Color Theory. The classics of Itten, Albers, Goethe, etc. were left to other faculty, and readings were assigned that included books on color healing, color meditations on the chakras, the effects of color stimulation on the endocrine system, etc. For example, one social study they read involved placing disruptive children in pink rooms to calm them down (pink stimulating the production of endorphins). As an experiment, the class took famous works of art and changed the colors in them.

To what extent is DNA patterning relevant? Universality may be constrained by genetic paradigms. Mitochondrial DNA reveals seven female ancestors for all Europeans [HYPERLINK "http://abcnews.go.com/sections/science/DailyNews/daughters000420.html"](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/science/DailyNews/daughters000420.html) \n newWindow [\[Daughters of Eve\]](#). If the emotional effect of visual art is DNA based, the protocols of an experiment might include sampling endocrine responses to visual stimuli from members of various DNA populations.

Also, not all color receptors are in the eyes, and different people seem to have different ones. There are examples of people sensing color with the skin on their backs.

One TV show that excited me this year was on the Discovery channel. It showed a small desert mammal that had very strong male-female bonding. They isolated the chemical responsible for the bonding, and found it occurred in human women during childbirth. Then they flashed images in front of people and took specimens, determining that the chemical was created under stimulation by images of baby animals. If anyone in this discussion knows of a citation on this research I would love to know!

Art and emotion ??

Pascale Cartwright

10 déc. 2002 10:57 UT

The effect of colour or music on the mood or on emotions is now a well known fact. Some people, especially in far eastern countries, before decorating their house, will make sure they choose the right colour for the right room. The business man will do the same in his offices for his employees to work more efficiently. In the same way, soft music calms people in the subway, and helps children to relax in the classroom. Rhythmic music lifts the mood up. Scientists must be able to tell us which part of the brain is being stimulated. In slightly different fields (holistic therapies), as R. Minsky says, there is a theory of colour healing, but also of music healing which considers that each mode corresponds to harmonisation of each charka (energetic centre).

Some type of emotional response to colour or music could well be innate, I do not think that it is what Art is all about.

If a cognitive or even emotional response to colour or music is innate, the type of emotional reaction it triggers is certainly not innate or universal. The occidental person, being deaf to Arabic dodecaphonic music, can fully appreciate this same music after being a few years in contact with it. This is cultural. The young and the old will not have the same emotional response to Bach. Because young and old have a different culture. The same mode will not stimulate the same emotion in two different people. There is no syntax here.

When it comes to art, we must be careful using the words "emotions" or even "feelings" (A. Hamker) Rimbaud's vowels are reminding him of colours, not of emotions, although it gives us indications on how he perceives these sounds. The correspondence sound-colour is not involving emotions. In Art, the cognitive response might trigger emotions but might not, emotional reaction does not make art. I believe the cognitive reaction is of another type and that the neuroscience should look that way.

The neurological basis of artistic universals

V.S. S. Ramachandran (University of California, San Diego)

(Date of publication : 9 December 2002)

Abstract: We propose ten universal laws of art that cut across cultural boundaries and consider the manner in which hypernormal stimuli are used by artists to activate neurons more optimally than natural stimuli. In constructing this theory we bring together strands from ethology, neurophysiology and experimental psychology.

Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth

Pablo Picasso

There are hundreds of types of art; Classical Greek art, Tibetan art, Khmer art, Chola bronzes, Renaissance art, impressionism,

expressionism, cubism, fauvism, abstract art; the list is endless. But despite this staggering diversity of styles, are there some general principles or "artistic universals" that cut across cultural boundaries? Can we come up with a "science of Art"? Science and art seem like such fundamentally antithetical pursuits; one is a quest for general principles whereas the other is a celebration of human individuality — so that the very notion of a "science of art" seems like an oxymoron. Yet that's what I will suggest in this chapter — that our knowledge of human vision and of the brain is now sophisticated enough that we can speculate intelligently on the neural basis of art and maybe begin to construct a scientific theory of artistic experience. Saying this, as we shall see, does not in any way detract from the originality of the individual artist, for the manner in which she deploys these universal principles is entirely up to her. (After all, knowing the rules of grammar does not diminish our appreciation of Shakespeare's genius!)

There are other problems too. What, if any, is the key difference between "kitsch" art and the real thing? Some would argue that what's kitsch for one person might be high art for another — that the judgment is entirely subjective. *objectively* distinguish the kitsch from the real, how complete is that theory and in what sense can we claim to have really understood the meaning of art? One reason for thinking that there's a genuine difference is that one can "mature" into liking real art after having once enjoyed kitsch, but it's virtually impossible to slide back into kitsch from having once known the delights of high art. Yet the difference between the two remains tantalizingly elusive. I speculate here on the possibility that real art involves the "proper" and effective deployment of certain artistic universals, whereas kitsch merely goes through the motions — as if to make a mockery of the principles without a genuine gut-level understanding of them.

I am reminded of patients with right hemisphere stroke who, when asked to draw an object (say, a horse) will create a reasonable likeness, often containing all the required details. But what's missing is the *essence* of the horse; the drawing seems almost too detailed but lifeless. This suggests that what we call "the artistic sense" is normally in the right hemisphere — which is damaged in these patients — and the left hemisphere doesn't quite "get it" even when it tries hard. It leads me to wonder whether "kitsch" is really a feeble, ineffective attempt by the left hemisphere to usurp the intuitive artistic sense of the right. In trying to paint or sculpt, perhaps the left hemisphere tries to "translate" the visual code of the right hemisphere into its own language of logical propositions or explicit rules and, of course, fails to do so — resulting in what we call kitsch. This explanation has a pop-psychology "ring" to it but it may not be too wide off the mark!

Chennai (Madras), the city in Southern India where I was born, dates back to the first millennium B.C. I often return to it as a visiting professor at the Institute of Neurology to work on patients with stroke, with phantom limbs following amputation, or a sensory loss caused by leprosy. During one three-month visit, we were going through a dry spell; there weren't many patients to see. This gave me time for leisurely walks through the Shiva temple in my neighbourhood in Mylapore to escape the hustle and bustle of the city and to relive childhood memories. I have fond memories of my mother taking me there every Friday to pray while she explained the symbolism of the different Gods and Goddesses and a thousand myths and legends they evoked. This particular temple has an inscription near the entrance saying that the foundations were laid during the 2nd or 3rd century B.C. (The word Mylapore is mentioned by Ptolemy, the Greek, in his writings.) Inside the temple, near one of the inner shrines, a Brahmin priest was chanting the *Vedas* in Sanskrit to a group of young disciples — even as his ancestors might have done four thousand years ago. This is one of the most striking things about India; there is a genuine sense of timelessness. It has been said that it is the oldest *living* culture in the world. Shiva, who has been found depicted on five thousand year-old steatite seals in northern India, is still worshipped today and celebrated in myth, legend, and art (Greece too, has a rich mythology but no one there worships Zeus anymore).

A strange thought occurred to me as I looked at the stone and bronze sculptures (or "idols", as the English used to call them) in the temple. In the West these are now found mostly in museums and galleries and referred to as "Indian art". Yet I grew up praying to these as a child and I never thought of them as art. They are so well integrated into the daily worship, the music, dance and into the very fabric of life in India, that it's hard to know where art ends and where life begins; they are not separate strands of existence, the way they are here in the West.

Thanks to my Western education, until that particular visit to Chennai, I had a rather "colonial" view of Indian sculptures. I thought of them largely as religious iconography or mythology, rather than fine art. Yet on this particular visit, these images had a profound impact on me and started haunting me even in my dreams. One day, when I woke up, I had an epiphany of sorts and I began to see the sculptures as indescribably beautiful works of art, not as religion. Thus began a love affair with art that has continued unabated for the last five years.

As a scientist I wanted to know why? Why were these images, and other great works of art, so beautiful? How does the brain respond to beauty? What did Keats mean when he said "Beauty is truth and truth is beauty"? I started reading voraciously about the history of ideas on art in general and Indian art in particular.

When the English arrived in India during Victorian times, they regarded the study of Indian art mainly as "ethnography" and "anthropology". (This would be equivalent to putting Picasso in the anthropology section of the national museum in Delhi.) They were appalled by the nudity they encountered and often referred to the sculptures as "primitive" or "not realistic". For example the bronze sculpture of Parvati

, which dates back to the zenith of South Indian art, during the Chola period (12th century A.D.), is regarded in India as the very epitome of feminine sensuality, grace, poise, dignity and charm. Indeed of all that is feminine. Yet when the Englishmen looked at this and other similar sculptures,

they complained that it wasn't art because it wasn't realistic - the sculptures didn't resemble any real woman. The breasts and hips were too big and the waist too narrow. Similarly, they pointed out that the "miniature" paintings of the Mogul or Rajastani School often lacked perspective — they were primitive because they were not realistic enough.

The metaphorical nuances of Indian art were also completely lost on Western art historians. One eminent bard, Lord Birdwood, considered Indian art to be mere "crafts" and was repulsed by the fact that many of the gods had multiple arms (often allegorically signifying their many divine attributes). He referred to Indian art's greatest icon, the dancing Shiva or Nataraja, as a "multiarmed monstrosity". Oddly enough he didn't have the same opinion of angels depicted in Renaissance art — human children with wings sprouting on their scapulae, which were probably just as monstrous to the Indian eye.

It should be clear from these examples that art is not about realism; on the contrary, it's about deliberate exaggeration and distortion of reality. Yet obviously you can't just randomly distort an image and call it art. The question, therefore, is what *types* of distortion are effective? Are there any "rules" that the artist deploys, either consciously or unconsciously, to change the image in a systematic way? And if so how universal are these rules? Most of the examples I will use to illustrate these rules are from Indian art, because that's what I am most familiar with. But I strongly believe that the same principles apply to any artistic style, be it impressionism, Henry Moore, Chinese art or cubism.

While I was struggling with this question and poring over ancient Indian manuals on art and aesthetics, I often noticed the word *rasa*. This Sanskrit word is difficult to translate but it roughly means "Capturing the very essence, the very spirit of something, in order to evoke a specific mood or emotion in the viewer's brain". That entire phrase is encapsulated in the word *rasa*.

Traditionally there are supposed to be nine *rasas* (such as Shringara, or amorous love;

Hasya, or comical; Raudra, or valour; Adbhuta, or astonishment; etc.). But the term is sometimes used loosely to denote any mood, emotion or sentiment that is conveyed successfully by the artist - and that is the sense in which I will use it here, as a launching-off point for speculating about the neurology of art.

So *rasa* holds the key. I realized that if you want to understand art you have to understand what *rasa* is and how it is extracted by the neural circuitry in the brain. One afternoon, in a whimsical mood, I sat at the entrance of the temple and jotted down what I thought might be the "eight universal laws of Art", analogous to the Buddha's eightfold path to wisdom and enlightenment. (I later came up with two additional laws; the exact number is somewhat arbitrary.) These are rules of thumb that the artist deploys to create visually pleasing images that more optimally titillate the visual areas in the brain (no pun intended!) than he could using "realistic" images or real objects.

To assert that there might be universals in art does not in any way diminish the important role of *culture* in the creation and appreciation of art. Indeed if this weren't true there wouldn't be different styles of art - Renaissance, impressionism, cubism, Indian art, etc. As a scientist, though, my interest is not in the differences between different artistic styles but in principles that cut across cultural barriers.

Here is a tentative list of my ten laws of art:

- 1) Peak shift
- 2) Grouping
- 3) Contrast
- 4) Isolation
- 5) Perceptual problem solving
- 6) Symmetry
- 7) Abhorrence of coincidences/generic viewpoint
- 8) Repetition, rhythm and orderliness
- 9) Balance
- 10) Metaphor

But it isn't enough to just list these laws or describe them in detail; we need a coherent biological perspective for thinking about them. In particular, when exploring any universal human trait such as humor, music, art, language we need to keep in mind three basic questions — roughly speaking *what*, *why* and *how*. First, *what* is the internal logical structure of the particular trait you are looking at (corresponding roughly to what I call laws)? Second, *why* does the particular trait have the logical structure it does? What is the biological function it evolved for? Third, *how* is the trait or law mediated by the neural machinery in the brain?

Let me illustrate with a concrete example — the law of "grouping" discovered by the Gestalt psychologists around the turn of the century. Figure 4

shows a striking example of this. All you see at first is a set of random splotches, but after several seconds you start grouping some of the splotches together and start seeing a Dalmatian dog sniffing the ground. The brain "glues" the dog-splotches together to form a single object and you get an internal "Aha!" sensation as if you have just solved a problem. In short, the grouping *feels* good.

Grouping is a well-known law frequently used by both artists and fashion designers. If you look at the classical Renaissance painting in figure 5,

you will notice how the same azure blue color repeats all over the canvas — the sky, the robes, and the water. And the same tint of brown is used for clothes, skin, soil, etc. The artist uses a *limited* set of colors rather than an enormous range of colors. Again the brain enjoys grouping similar-colored splotches; it "feels good", just as it felt good to group the dog splotches, and the artist exploits this. It is unlikely that the artist repeated the same blue for different parts of the picture simply because he was being stingy or had only one blue on his palette.

The same holds for fashion. When you go to Nordstrom's to buy a red skirt the salesgirl will advise you to buy a red scarf and a red belt to go with it. Or if you are a guy buying a blue suit, she may recommend a tie with some identical blue flecks to go with the suit. But what's all this really about? Is there a logical reason for doing this? Is it just marketing and hype, or is it telling you something fundamental about the brain? This is the *why* question.

The surprising answer is that vision evolved mainly to defeat camouflage and to detect objects in cluttered scenes. This seems counterintuitive, because when you look around you objects are clearly visible — certainly not "camouflaged". In a modern urban environment, objects are so commonplace that we don't realize that vision is mainly about detecting objects so that you can avoid them, dodge them, chase them, eat them, or mate with them. We take the familiar for granted; but just think of one of your arboreal ancestors trying to spot a lion hidden behind a screen of green splotches (a tree branch in front of it). What's visible is only several yellow splotches — lion fragments. But the brain "says" (in effect): "What's the likelihood that all these fragments are exactly the same color by coincidence? Zero. So they probably belong to one object. So let me glue them together to see what it is. Oops! It's a lion — let me run!" This seemingly esoteric ability to group splotches may have made all the difference between life and death.

Little does the salesgirl at Nordstrom realize that when she picks the "matching" red scarf for your red skirt, she is tapping into a deep principle underlying brain organization, and that she's taking advantage of the fact that your brain evolved to detect lions seen behind foliage — so grouping "feels good". Of course the red scarf and red skirt are *not* one object, so logically they shouldn't be grouped, but that doesn't stop her from exploiting the "grouping law" anyway, to create an attractive combination. The same holds for paintings and mattes, or even blobs of similar color on different objects within a painting. The point is the rule was *statistically* valid in the treetops in which our brains evolved. It was valid often enough that incorporating it into the visual brain centers as a law helped your ancestors leave more babies behind and that's all that matters in evolution; the fact that an artist can misapply the rule in an individual painting, making you group splotches from different objects, is irrelevant, because the brain is "fooled" and it enjoys the grouping anyway.

And now we need to answer the *how* question. When you look at a large lion seen through foliage, the different yellow lion fragments occupy widely separated regions of the visual field — yet your brain glues them together. How? Each fragment excites a separate cell (or small cluster of cells) in widely separated portions of the visual cortex and of the color areas of the brain. Each cell signals the presence of the feature by means of a volley of nerve impulses — a train of what are called "spikes". The exact sequence is random; if you show the same feature to the same cell it will fire again just as vigorously but there's a new random sequence that isn't identical to the first. What seems to matter for recognition is not what the exact pattern of nerve impulses is, but *which* neurons fire and *how much* they fire; a principle known as "Muller's law".

That's the standard story, but an astonishing new discovery by Wolf Singer and Charles Gray adds a novel twist to it. They found that if a monkey looks at a big object (say a lion) of which only fragments are visible, then many cells fire in parallel — to signal the different fragments; and that's what you would expect. But surprisingly, as soon as the features were grouped into a whole object (in this case, a lion) all the spike trains became perfectly synchronized. We don't yet know how this occurs, but Singer and Gray suggest that it is this *synchrony* that tells whatever is "reading" these signals higher up in the brain that the fragments belong to a single object. I would take this argument a step further and suggest that this synchrony allows the spike trains to be encoded in such a way that a coherent output emerges which is relayed to the emotional ("limbic") core of the brain, creating an "Aha! Look here — it's an *object*!" jolt in you. This jolt "arouses" you and makes you swivel your eyeballs and head towards the object. So you can pay attention to it, identify it, and take action. It's this *aha* signal that the artist exploits when he uses grouping in his paintings.

Can we attempt a similar analysis for our other laws?

For a detailed analysis, I refer you to my forthcoming book *The Artful Brain*. This text is an edited extract of Chapter 4.

(A previous essay about the Eight Laws was published in *The Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6, 1999: *Art and the Brain*, ed. J. Goguen.)

Discussion

A few questions

Amy Morris
8 déc. 2002 23:40 UT

Is there data on the measurements of time between perception of the visual stimuli and the moment of "gestalt," either in the monkey or in the human? Any patterns therein?

Does the same grouping (or evidence of grouping) show up in perception of sound patterns? Or in identification of or response to complex olfactory stimuli, or taste stimuli?

Is stimulus of syntactic memory of an object involved? (Or, in the hippocampus, possibly episodic memory?)

Grouping in Music

Bill Benzon
16 déc. 2002 18:57 UT

On grouping and sound, yes, grouping is important in the perception of sound patterns and has been investigated a great deal. Here's a relatively brief passage from my book, *Beethoven's Anvil: Music in Mind and Culture* (Basic Books, 2001, pp. 148-150):

Auditory streaming is a grouping process by which the nervous system segregates sounds into different auditory streams, each regarded as coming from a different source. This process has come to be known as auditory scene analysis and, according to Albert Bregman [in *Auditory Scene Analysis*, MIT Press, 1990], is a preconceptual process. That is to say, it is a "low level" process, not accessible to conscious intervention or learning.

Let us start with a simple example. Imagine three tones separated by moderate intervals, for example the NBC three-note chime. When those tones are played at the original speed you hear the familiar melody. If that three-tone sequence is repeated time after time, you hear the familiar melody repeated. You hear these sounds as part of a single sound stream, indicating that the auditory system as "decided" that these sounds come from a single source.

Now suppose you increase the tempo. For awhile the melody will just get faster and faster, but at some point it will disappear. You will no longer be able to detect the order of the tones, and the single sound stream will disintegrate into three streams, each consisting of repetitions of one of the tones. The tones and their relative order are the same at the high speed as they were at the low speed. But the way we hear them changes: the auditory system has now assigned them to three different sources.

....

Baroque composers exploited this particular effect, the segregation of a single sequence of tones into two streams, to create the impression of multiple instrumental lines when only one instrument was playing. Bach did this, for example, in some of his music for unaccompanied violin.

Auditory streaming

Amy Morris
16 déc. 2002 23:09 UT

Thank you, Mr. Benzon! May I ask, were the investigations on this done both on animals and humans, or just humans? If animals, how is the "recognition" of the melody indicated? (I vaguely recall reading about some extensive research on complex birdcalls, but perhaps that's not relevant here.)

Is there any indication that the number of notes in a "melody" affects the interval factor? (I'm thinking of short-term memory tests for serial number and letter and image repetition and recognition.)

How long can a melody be and still be "remembered" as a melody ?

Does the transmutation of melody into three streams happen at a precise speed? Is it consistent across tested subjects? (Are musicians and non-musicians consistent?)

streaming and phrasing

Bill Benzon
19 déc. 2002 20:45 UT

The research I'm aware of has been done on humans. Doing it on animals would be tricky as you can't ask them to indicate just

when a single stream breaks apart into two or more streams.

Streaming is known to be affected by interval size, tempo, and timbre. Other things being equal, notes that are far apart are more likely to break apart than notes that are close together. Given a melody having an interval of, say, a fourth in the middle, the phrases on either side of that interval are more likely to be perceived as part of the same stream if the tempo is relatively slow. Finally, if the notes in a musical line are sounded by two or three distinct timbres (say, a violin, flute, and oboe), the line is likely to break into separate streams for each timbre.

I'm not aware of any differences between musicians and non-musicians with respect to streaming.

As for the number of notes in a melody, streaming isn't the only musical grouping phenomenon. Melodies consist of phrases, big phrases consist of small phrases, small phrases may consist of still smaller phrases, etc. There has been some research that shows phrases to be psychologically real; we tend to hear phrase boundaries as being more distinct than anything that shows up on sonograms (this parallels similar studies of linguistic phrases). Other research indicates that the "psychological present" is about 3 to 4 seconds long. I don't know whether melody has been examined with that interval in mind, but I do know of at least one study that argues lines of poetry are no longer than that ("The Neural Lyre: Poetic Meter, the Brain, and Time," by Mark Turner and Ernst Poppel – you might find this piece on the web by googling it). As melodies, however, are often longer than that, it presents an interesting question: just how do we perceive those melodies as complete objects?

The same pebble again

Jose Luis Guijarro
9 déc. 2002 10:17 UT

A couple of years ago, I wrote a commentary on Ramachandran & Hirstein (1999), *The Science of Art*, which may be found in Spanish and in English at:

<http://www.infonegocio.com/joseluisguijarro/Arte.htm>

I started my commentary saying that

"In my cultural environment we say that the human being is the only animal that stumbles twice on the same pebble. It certainly looks amazing that, after more than fifty years of cognitive studies, when at last some scientists try to bridge the gap between art and science they repeat old misconceptions. These misconceptions are, to my knowledge, almost eradicated in cognitive linguistic studies on figures of speech, such as metaphor, metonymy, etc. (i.e., Lakoff (1993), Gibbs (1994), Sperber & Wilson (1986/95), etc. etc. and etc.). Nobody pretends in these fields that they are the "laws of Literature". On the contrary, they have been proved ordinary ways of human communication that some writers use, of course, in communicating their artistic messages. And yet, when we come to the visual arts, there seems to be a new pebble in which people keep stumbling once and again. What really astonishes me is that these scientists are either neurobiologists or cognitivists, people who study the human brain or the human mind with strong causal constraints in their methodology. An yet, many (if not all) miss the first requirement that Noam Chomsky proposed more than forty years ago for a research to be considered scientific: the level of OBSERVATIONAL adequacy.

To what object/event are the authors referring to when they speak about "art"? Are they talking about the (mental and/or social) behaviour of the artists when they engage in creation (?), or about the reactions of the beholders when they watch the results of that behaviour, or is it the quality of these results themselves that are at stake?"

I have exactly the same problems with the present paper. Schematically: (1) What turns a set of dots that is eventually perceived as a Dalmatian dog into art? (2) What is the crucial component of the alledged emotions we get from a red scarf and belt that may convert them into art? (3) Do these "laws" work also in music, cinema ... culinary art? How?

kitsch and beauty

Avigdor Arikha
9 déc. 2002 15:35 UT

To the basic question raised by Vilyanur S. Ramachandran, I would like to add that the distinction in art between "kitsch" and the "real thing", is that kitsch soon becomes unbearable, like bad food, whereas the "real thing" is unquenchable. However this sensorial distinction finally depends on the viewer, on the sharpness of the senses, the complexity of the visual receptors, and ultimately, on visual discernment, which is rooted in visual experience - not in reading "about" art, but in intensive looking at art. This brings on a heightened activity of both hemispheres.

Kitsch vs high art - an agreement on terminology

Roberto Casati
12 déc. 2002 23:43 UT

In reading Ramachandran and Arhika I hear bad overtones associated with kitsch. I myself have no particular normative stance about kitsch, but I am not very happy about a neat contraposition between kitsch and high art. Kitsch is also an art form, whose distinctive features is the use of quotations from other art forms. (A Leonardo Madonna incrustated in a Op-Art Styrofoam frame, etc.). I mention it because kitsch is oftentimes the very rich substrate of new artistic developments – start by quoting someone else (which is quite rational if you want to do something that is recognized as artistic) then develop a style of your own.

The general point is that in a debate like ours we probably need some agreement on concepts, all the more when interdisciplinarity is the key.

Aha!

Dominic Lopes
9 déc. 2002 23:13 UT

What is the test that tells us that a given response to a work of visual art is an aesthetic response and not merely a visual response? Each of the items listed in Ramachandran's Ten Laws is processed by vision. It follows that each is involved in merely seeing a visual artwork.

Is the idea that you're looking at art when all of the Ten are evoked to an unusually high degree? Surely not all artworks do that! So is the idea that you're looking at art when some of the Ten are evoked to an unusually high degree? But that condition is met by many, many non-art scenes.

Isn't any answer going to be arbitrary unless there is some measurable neural event that occurs in correlation both with the sight of genuine art and subsets of the Ten? What is that "Aha!"?

Aha! and the Abused Dalmatian Dog

Roberto Casati
11 déc. 2002 17:01 UT

Commentators (Lopes, Quiviger) complain that nothing in Ramachandran's account explains what is artistic in perceiving artworks. For instance, grouping occurs all the time in vision, but art seems to be relatively rare. Being rather skeptical about all characterizations of art which are less than cultural, hence heavily normative, and in particular about the pretty undefined projects of neuro-aesthetics, I can only hypothesize that the required explanation is not forthcoming.

A technical question on grouping. Figure 3, the Unfamous Dalmatian Dog, is supposed to illustrate gestalt grouping. Actually, gestalt grouping is usually taken to be a bottom-up process, in which macro-units are built out of patches, lines, dots, etc., regardless of their meaningfulness in a configuration. So close dots or similar dots or aligned dots get grouped – no matter if they constitute, or do not, the image of a limb. Gestalt grouping, operated on the Dalmatian Dog Display, would produce macro-units quite different from the Dalmatian itself. The Dalmatian Dog is an example of top-down, or conceptual grouping. I tell you that there is a Dalmatian around, point out to potentially meaningful parts of it in the display – here's the tail, here's a paw, and you Aha! the configuration, after a while.

Besides the technical point, it would be interesting to see whether these top-down, concept- and attention-driven processes, which are usually taken to be representative of artistic contemplation, have a place in Ramachandran's project.

P.S. Tired of the Unfamous Dalmatian Dog? I would like to introduce you to a creation of mine, the Dalmatian Cat. You can meet her at <http://roberto.casati.free.fr/objects/0205dalmatianCAT.jpg>. (Is it art? Or "just" Kitsch?)

Here is a conceptual art performance: disseminate the Cat, if you feel that the Dog has come of time.

Which parts of the brain do images stimulate?

francois quiviger
10 déc. 2002 4:48 UT

The main problem with Vilayanur S. Ramachandran's essay is that it is based on the assumption that art only addresses the eye, while in fact what we see, in reality or in representation, is the receptacle of considerable sensory anticipation.

Or to put it bluntly it would be in my view far more useful, instead of opposing high art and kitsch (a very Western polarity to say the least) to oppose sacred erotic sculpture - group sex, for instance, as they are currently found on many temples of India and Nepal - with pornography. Which part of the brain are stimulated? surely not only the one dealing with visual perception...

Which parts would you like?

Amy Morris
16 déc. 2002 23:56 UT

Ramachandran's essay presents a handful of references to the effects of art on his own responses and on his own philosophical considerations. This paper isn't an assertion that "art only addresses the eye." If it were, we'd be looking at a lot more graphs and charts of optical physics. What we have, in fact, is a narrative of his own interest in a few kinds of art for x and y reasons which resulted in the q and p questions and (partially outlined here without the math) answers. In fact, he's not talking much about "the eye" at all--he's talking about neural firing. And he's not making statements that that putative singular moment --the Aha!--is the sole content of the meaning of art, much less the sole component of educated indwelling consideration thereof. He's looking for neurological universals in a certain epistemological strategy. Are you insisting that there are none? Or are you simply not interested in whether there are any? Or are these somehow the wrong ones? In a certain sense, you are telling him that his social/individual/personal/cultural historical interpretation of art (in the genre of "science" rather than the genre of "history") is wrong. That seems to imply that you think there is a correct interpretation or that there is a correct method, or that you can't define what ought to be done, but you know it when you see it. Is that your argument?

Perhaps some that neurology cannot reach?

francois quiviger
2 janv. 2003 23:24 UT

So many questions. The bulk of my remarks derives from the fact that when I read Ramachandran's 10 principles, or read in detail his remarks about grouping and neural firing, I find useful laws of perception and recognition, initially based on visual data, but no specific attribute distinguishing a so-called work of art from advertisement or pornographic imagery - all artificial genres characterised by a highly premeditated use of visual data. Thus these neurological universals seem to map only the very early beginnings of the journey of 'any' image to the mind of its viewer.

Abstraction

Clotilde Lampignano
12 déc. 2002 11:15 UT

La science de l'art est connotée par des principes généraux = universaux artistiques (au delà des différents styles). Science=recherche de principes généraux. Art= célébration de l'individualité humaine. Donc sur les principes de la science on peut spéculer sur la base neurologique de l'art et construire une théorie scientifique de l'art, de l'expérience artistique. Les objets qui constituent les idoles et qui sont mis en dehors de leur milieu de culte deviennent œuvres d'art (objets pour ainsi dire non plus de culte religieux, mais de culte esthétique). Voir le cas des statues dans le dôme de Milan, ou simplement celles du Vatican, mais on pourrait aussi dire que les œuvres d'art ont été assignées aux artistes les plus éminents pour être contruites, afin que le génie artistique s'incarne dans la construction de quelque chose de réel, mais qui aurait pu résulter dans l'interprétation du sacré. Dans le cas où l'œuvre d'art est extrapolée de son propre milieu, elle conserve la relique de son propre sens, parce qu'elle est mise dans les musées, et elle est conservée comme témoignage de sa propre représentation surtout religieuse, même si elle n'est pas idolâtrée car en dehors de son contexte, dans lequel elle sert de support de la prière. On peut observer que la plupart des œuvres d'art ont eu dans l'histoire des jugements de contestation, de critique négative. Pour ce qui est d'une science de l'art, on parle des règles, qui doivent être appliquées par l'observateur pour les distinguer, mais quelle règle a appliqué l'auteur de l'œuvre d'art? Science de l'art comme science de la langue, quelles sont les règles sous une langue? Mais la science de l'art reste abstraite pour l'auteur comme pour l'observateur.

The Modified Molyneux Problem

Pascal Mamassian
12 déc. 2002 18:09 UT

What is the ultimate goal in bridging the gap between art and cognition? If the goal is to determine the neural structures involved in art appreciation, then Ramachandran and Zeki and Livingstone are probably justified in starting with what we know about the visual system from visual neuroscience studies. But surely this cannot be the whole story as Lopes, Quiviger and Casati justly point out. What is the difference between perception and artistic experiences? Is art just a glorified perception?

I find it constructive that Ramachandran commits himself to the "Aha hypothesis", namely that art arises from a signal in the limbic system received from the neural synchrony of cortical activity. Presumably, this is a testable hypothesis. One could look at the physiology and anatomy of the connections between visual cortical areas and the limbic system, study the neurotransmitters involved, and look for clinical cases that have this link broken. Supposedly, such patients would not be impaired in recognizing or acting on objects, but would be oblivious to the artistic quality of the objects. Maybe this discussion boils down to address the following modified Molyneux problem: "Suppose that a congenitally blind person enjoys artistic experiences from her other senses (from music, French food,...). Imagine then that this person suddenly recovers the faculty of sight. Will she now be able to experience visual arts?"

Satisfaction

Noga Arikha
12 déc. 2002 19:34 UT

This revised Molyneux question seems to me an excellent point of departure: if the answer were positive, it could underscore the potential role of the 'Aha hypothesis' as the minimal defining criterion for a range of responses that are *specific* to a work of art. One may take it one step further and, thinking along the lines of Freedberg's text on the Modes, wonder whether there is a similar activity of the limbic system in *corresponding* 'Aha' experiences, for example musical ones: the expectation of a resolution at the end of a development in a sonata, for instance, will build up to an 'Aha' of recognition once that resolution occurs, and will result in a degree of frustration, or at least of increased expectation, if it doesn't. Satisfaction - temporal or spatial - as a central experience of a work of art: this could be posited as the 'specific-to-art' index that we are looking for, and that many of the respondents here seem to believe is absent from Ramachandran's hypothesis. Any thoughts on this from anyone?

Molyneux and the arts

Roberto Casati
12 déc. 2002 23:34 UT

I welcome Mamassian's proposal of framing some questions about artistic experience in terms of an extended Molyneux question. After all, the appeal of the Molyneux question has been identified in its requiring a simple yes/no empirical answer to a problem that is hugely philosophical, the identity of visual and tactile shapes. And in particular, Mamassian correctly points out that we will not be content with an account of art which does not cut across sensory modalities.

However, I have some perplexities about the centrality of recognition or of successful grouping for artistic or aesthetic "experience" (let alone that I am not completely sure about the existence of such an experience), as per one of Ramachandran's principles. Don't we have in our perceptual life a lot of recognition and grouping going around which simply does not constitute an aesthetic experience? So what is the qualifying point, what makes a certain grouping and a certain Aha! an indication that the seen thing is artistic or can be considered as artistic?

The project: grounding art theory with situated knowledge from neuroscience

Maria Rossi
13 déc. 2002 19:42 UT

We have to discover the basic methodological principles for a theory of art based on neuroscience. Most recent attempts to develop a 'neuro-aesthetics' (misleading expression) are unconvincing regarding many concerns (e.g., artwork specificity, cultural factors). Here, commentators (Casati, Guijarro, Lopes, Quiviger) complain that the laws put forward by Ramachandran cannot account for the specificity of artwork. These objections are based on relevant concerns, but they may hide the interest of studying neuroscience for understanding art (Mamassian). Thus, I want to suggest a general strategy for giving an appealing role to neuroscience in the understanding of artistic behavior.

Neuroscientists are right on a particular point: aesthetic experience depends asymmetrically on sensory-motor systems and brain processing. You cannot have an aesthetic experience without having a set of functional sensory-motor systems for gathering information on artwork. Therefore, the knowledge acquired on sensory-motor processing is knowledge of a necessary, but NOT sufficient, condition of artistic behavior and experience. It means: sensory-motor processing does not exhaust the realm of aesthetical identification, reasoning and acting.

Thus, we could develop a different theoretical strategy than that which seems to be favored by Ramachandran. Instead of trying to formulate general laws, we could conceive of works of art as specific devices or setup that deserve a situated analysis - based on the hypothesis that works of art are difficult to understand outside of their spatio-temporal or immediate historical context. Here is the constraint: A situated analysis of artistic device AD may incorporate knowledge on neural processing P if and only if the mention of P is relevant for explaining any event E that occurs in immediate (causal) relation to A (A includes all artistic behaviors). A situated analysis, I claim, is the strategy that has the most chance to show the differences between ordinary object perception and artwork perception.

Observational adequacy, situated analysis and the missing explanandum

Roberto Casati

14 déc. 2002 16:42 UT

As in many other cases in the social sciences, scholars of art are often faced with the problem of the missing explanandum. We have sophisticated models (recursive computations, neural networks), we have powerful scientific tools (PET scanners), we understand about statistics and know how to operationalize our variables, so why do not we apply the whole machinery to some of the most striking phenomena of mental life? Some results will surely follow. Hopefully we shall discover what is art by finding out some specific artistic patterns of responses of dedicated areas of the brain.

The problem with this strategy when it comes to arts (and to many subjects in psychology) is that it is not clear what we are out to explain. Production, reaction? The impact of artistic objects? Which objects are artistic then? Too many philosophical problems start to clog the scene. Very quickly the discussion moves to variables that appear to be handier, easily operationalizable. "Aesthetic pleasure" looks promising. Isn't this just a case of pleasure, one of the basic emotions? Easy to define. Easy to scan. Easy to model. And the "artistic" side of the story just comes from the fact that we scan a subject when she is faced with an artistic something, that is, something that has been produced by an artist, or whose picture is taken from an art history book.

So, there will be results, but what do those results exactly explain? My fear is that quite a lot of preliminary conceptual work is needed here. (Remember what happened to the optimistic prospects of Artificial Intelligence as an explanatory tool for psychology.)

This skeptical point goes a little beyond the observational adequacy requirement stated by Guijarro and the situated analysis requirement stated by Bullot. It is not, though, skepticism across the board as to the cooperation of scholars of arts and cognitive scientists. I just think that we are in a very preliminary phase, one in which scholars of arts can help the cognitive scientist by providing interesting cognitive artifacts, which obey strange cognitive patterns. The study of these patterns (as is the study of religion as a cognitive phenomenon) could open quite interesting avenues. The debt will be paid out only much later, and the efforts by cognitive scientists to find shortcuts may risk incurring in the problem of the missing explanandum.

About the problem of the 'missing explanandum'

Maria Rossi

17 déc. 2002 1:01 UT

A first and short reply. I agree with the three general conclusions stated by Casati – these points appear to be constitutive of a moderate and not-so-skeptical view: (i) We are in a very preliminary phase, one in which scholars of arts can help the cognitive scientist by providing interesting cognitive artifacts, which obey strange cognitive patterns. (ii) The study of these patterns could open quite interesting avenues. (iii) The efforts made by cognitive scientists to find shortcuts may risk incurring in the 'problem of the missing explanandum.'

About (i): These patterns may be viewed as 'strange' because they 'infringe' or 'trespass' some of the rules of ordinary cognition or perception. One interesting avenue is therefore to compare ordinary (or routine-based) cognition and artwork perception/cognition. This can be done on very specified cases (I will discuss them later).

About (iii): The cognitive theoretician has thus to solve the problem of the missing explanandum. This imply merely that he has to specify the phenomenon that he tries to explain. The specification process would probably goes with restricting the scope of the analysis (the reason why we may be willing to be skeptical about a proper treatment of the unity of artwork kind). This is precisely this specification process that I call a situated analysis (I will give more concrete examples).

Aural Grouping?

Barbara Montero
17 déc. 2002 1:46 UT

The category of works of art is so large and diverse that I wonder if it would be better to start with specific kinds of art, such as visual art, which seems to be the focus of Ramachandran's paper. Alternatively, it might be better to skip the question of what counts as a work of art and focus on what occurs when we experience beauty for not all art is beautiful and not all beautiful things are works of art. That said, it seems that the notion of grouping might have an aural application, in recognizing recurrent themes in music. I wonder what the "why?" and "how?" are here.

Comments on Barbara Montero's

Jose Luis Guizarro
17 déc. 2002 16:03 UT

¡Hola, Barbara!

The idea that art lies in the objects produced as "artistic" in a given culture (be it painting, music, literature, dancing, cinema, culinary art, whatever) seems to be wrong from the beginning. This is the main reason, I think, why there is no universal description of what art might well be.

Now, Roberto's idea tries to get away from that "huis-clos" in a behavioural frame, while I have done the same, but speculating about our information-processing abilities as human beings in a cognitive fashion. You see, there MUST be some special way of processing information that we have as humans which lies at the base of that experience.

I think it is our ability to display information which is at the bottom of our artistic experience. And, if according to Marie Louise Pratt, one displays information in order to value and therefore share it, the problem is not on any object or artistic "activity", but on the VALUE which makes art different from discovering a mathematical rule or from solving a crossword puzzle.

I don't know whether there be "general" values (I tend to think, there are not very many: all seem to be individualistic), except one: living beings have one general value: to preserve their life and that of their heirs. My quest is to look for another general value that humans all share. And it seems to me that the "creation" of our subjectivity from the time we are born onwards looks as a very likely possibility.

Therefore, when we perceive creativeness in something, what I think happens is that, in some as yet unexplained way, we manage to re-enact that process, either by erasing as much context as we normally need to process relevant information, or either, by "opening" it in ways that have a similar effect.

It is an idea that few people here have chosen to discuss. I don't know whether it is because it seems utterly stupid, or because it is ... creative!

(Incidentally, it seems strange that the author of the paper has not deemed it interesting to enter into the debate. I would have liked to read his reactions)

¡Hasta otra!

Art and everything else

Nirmalangshu Mukherji
17 déc. 2002 5:01 UT

The distinction between kitsch and 'real' art enables Ramachandran not to lose sight of the proper object of inquiry while explaining kitsch as an underdeveloped form of this object. Will the study of real art, neurological or otherwise, allow the extraction of a set of rules which are at once universal and whose instances pick out just the proper object?

Insofar the domain of language is concerned, it is clear by now that the universal won't yield the specific we want: 'knowing the rules of grammar' does not explain mind-external aspects of language-use, not to speak of explaining our 'appreciation of Shakespeare's genius.' Furthermore, the generative study of real music (Western tonal) just doesn't seem to generalize to other forms of music (1). None of this is surprising given the history of science, but cognitive neuroscience could be a new game altogether.

Consider, the 10 rules listed by Ramachandran. I will assume that they all apply. But they apply to pick out what? Ramachandran discusses just the rule of grouping. I will assume others have a similar flavor. The first nine apply not only to music (which Ramachandran distinguishes from art), but also to christmas cakes, games of tennis, gymnastics, wines, perfumes. This leaves rule 10: metaphor. If metaphor includes something like 'artistic sense', we are begging the question. If not, then why shouldn't it apply to christmas cakes?

Maybe these are all works of art, and they fall in the same class as Picasso's Guernica. But they also apply to other: cloud formations, insect tracts, arrangement of pebbles, patterns on pythons etc. That is, when we look at these things, we are prone to express Keats'

dictum. But these are not works of art simply because there's no artist; hence, these are not artefacts.

Even for the mind-internal systems, language consists of widely disparate elements, most of which are found in non-linguistic systems (2) extending in some cases to non-human organisms (3). The picture is enormously more complicated when we include mind-external aspects such as reference, beliefs, intentions of others, etc.

Cognition of real art, as envisaged, is likely to be even more complicated, for it ineliminably involves, as we saw, some notion of authorship and the cultural beliefs associated with it (4).

1. Mukherji, N. (2000). The Cartesian Mind: Reflections on Language and Music. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study. 2. Mukherji, N. (In Press). Is CHL linguistically specific?. 3. Hauser, M., N. Chomsky, W. Fitch (2002). The faculty of language. Science, November 22. 4. Mukherji, N. (In Press). Varieties of interpretations. Interpretation and its Objects: Studies in the Philosophy of Michael Krausz, Ed. Andrea Deciu and G. L. Pandit. Rodopi Publishers, Amsterdam.

the neurological lightness

fabrice bothereau

17 déc. 2002 21:50 UT

Mixing familiar objects with art pieces doesn't seem the best way to clarify the question. If not, we must ask whether a chair is more universal than a painting of Matisse. A chair is an object, a painting is not. If a painting, and anykind of art, is nothing more than an object, say, universal, then it's no longer worthwhile to use the word "art".

If not most people are ready to accept Malevitch in the range of painters, its because 1) they refuse, 2) they aren't trained, 3) they don't care, 4) they like Kandinsky, 5) they don't like paintings, and so on. How come should still remain somewhere in the brain an available cell that, connected, would immediately transform disagreement in agreement ? You'll find more people accepting to say "yes, this is a chair", than accepting to say "yes, this is painting". And why that? Because there's no rule. Kant said it. It's a question of taste. It's also, that he did not mention, a question of education, of chance, of infancy. To think of the chair again, there are no indefinite rules to follow for the making of a chair. But how many rules are they for the making or art? Some people just don't want to hear about contemporary art. Because it's not art for them. When Courbet had first exhibit his paintings, many people were revolted. This was not art. So, someone could ask, where was their missing cell? Do the people, a bit more than a hundred years after, queueing for Matisse and Picasso, have got that available cell?

Second. We've got not much left, so we would just say that in philosophy, we are used to be very cautious with what seems evident. So we'd like to suggest one name : Whitehead. Reading him, leads us to reconsider the modes of apprehending the external world. And this is starting with the object, time and space, and the event that resulted from the conjunction of the three. If you add to this a human being, with experience, consciousness, knowledge, and feelings, it's get very complicated. So you can not say that we "take the familiar for granted"...

Beauty and the mind: lessons from Kant

John Armstrong (University of Melbourne)

(Date of publication : 16 December 2002)

Abstract: The study of art and cognition has historical roots in the work of Kant. He was the first philosopher to focus on the question: what exactly are the mental processes which occur when we find something beautiful - or impressive - as a work of art? My paper will explore some of the ways in which we can continue to learn from Kant's attempts to answer these questions

The attempt to explain in detail what the mind is doing when we experience a work of art as beautiful or profound goes back to Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, or *Critique of Judgement* (1790). Kant's suggestions seem to me to be highly insightful and of continuing relevance

but they are expressed in rather obscure technical language. I want to sketch some of the key points with reference to a specific example: Corot's [HYPERLINK "http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/cgi-bin/WebObjects.dll/CollectionPublisher.woa/wa/largeImage?collectionSection=work&workNumber=NG3237"](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/cgi-bin/WebObjects.dll/CollectionPublisher.woa/wa/largeImage?collectionSection=work&workNumber=NG3237) [Avignon from the West](#) (at the National Gallery, London).

Kant's thesis can be summed up in a fairly brief sentence: the experience of beauty is constituted by the "free harmonious play of imagination and understanding"; the experience of art is similarly constituted, although with certain added refinements. But what this grand sounding phrase actually means is far from obvious.

The free play of imagination

Kant uses the notion of imagination in a technical sense. In ordinary perception the role of imagination is to draw together or differentiate elements of the visual field according to a pre-conceptual order - that is independently of our grasp of the species of things which we are looking at. In Corot's picture we could see that the visual texture of the papal palace is unlike that of the foreground - without classifying these as a building or as heath land. Kant thinks of the "synthesis of imagination" as an ordering process which picks up on visual patterns; in a modular conception of the activity of the mind, this process would precede and facilitate the conceptual classification of what we see. The line which marks the second ridge of hills (beyond which we see the dark trees of the river valley) is visually distinctive quite apart from our grasp of it as a ridge.

In art (as in this picture) this kind of sensitivity - to similarities and differences of visual texture - plays a very important role. In the more practical moments of life we work with (but don't consciously attend to) such operations of the imagination. Consider the gable-end of the rustic building at the lower left of the picture: it has a distinctive apex; in the "synthesis of imagination" this is seen as similar to the (reversed) apex made by the river on the extreme left and a second (reversed) apex to the right of the lone tree - which (in fact) marks the occlusion of some woodland by two hills. The pictorial structure does not, then, depend upon our seeing things together according to conceptual classification. It is a pre-conceptual sense of similarity which holds together these motifs. Artistic composition is necessarily pre-conceptual in that it does not rely on seeing as similar things which belong to the same conceptual class - but, precisely, requires that we see cohesion and kinship across class boundaries. It also requires differentiation (and differentiation, of course, relates the things held apart - since we see them as mutually constituting a difference). Thus the oppositions of visual texture amongst the palace, the foreground and the sky pick out zones of the image which we see in contrast one to the other. And this sense of contrast doesn't require - it precedes - our grasp of these zones as depicting things: rough ground, a palace, the sky.

The free play of the understanding

Understanding is, in Kant's language, the process in which we see a particular object as belonging to a general class. When I see the object before me as a tree, I am deploying a general concept "tree". And this concept is such that it can apply equally well to other individual objects. Although we do not do this self-consciously, our minds are deploying a general rule here - and the general rule would be framed approximately like a definition of "tree".

Kant's suggestion is that in aesthetic experience the understanding is "at play" - and is not quite performing its usual function. What might this "play" of the understanding be? Abstractly, it could be described as the pursuit of generalisation, without its achievement.

Suppose one feels that there is some visual relationship between, say the single tree on the right and the sky. The juxtaposition of this element and aspect of the picture does not strike us as arbitrary. And yet if we try to specify what exactly the relationship is we find we cannot. We cannot, that is, reduce it to a general formulation. And, therefore, we cannot see other instances as repeating quite the same relationship.

In other words we grasp the relationship between the tree and the sky as a relationship - but its "ineffability" remains intact - we can't sum it up. And, further, we don't see this relationship as repeatable: it is unique. It is crucial to recall, at this stage, that Kant is not doing phenomenology - he is not trying to tell us about conscious processes. Rather he is attempting to describe sub-personal processes. These underwrite our conscious experience; but it is not an objection to Kant to turn round and say - that doesn't happen to me when I look at a picture. He is trying to explain how an ordinary capacity of perception - the ability to see an individual as a member of a species - works in a special way when we find something beautiful.

A relationship is, a priori, abstract and can necessarily be instantiated apart from the particular elements it relates. The relation of "to the left of", for example, can obviously be sustained by millions of distinct pairs of objects. What is so beguiling about the relationship between a tree and the sky is, while it is indeed a relationship, the specific character of the relationship cannot be detached from the things related.

Kant's view was that, in these cases, the mind seeks a more and more specific grasp of the relationship but never arrives at this; we keep on sensing that there is something to be understood - but quite what it is eludes us. And yet we are not frustrated; we experience it - as he puts it - as play.

The harmony of the faculties

The beautiful object, then, strikes us as highly meaningful, as ordered in a rational way - and yet when we try to say precisely what the meaning or order is we find that we cannot. What impressed Kant here was the benign relationship between the object and the mind. The beautiful object presents us, as it were, with an image of a perfectly comprehensible world, one adapted perfectly to our minds; and

yet - for this to occur - the meaning cannot be specified, the order cannot be fully codified. If it were the sense of plenitude, the completeness of the object would be compromised. Instead of presenting us with an impression of 'meaningful order as such' the object would merely convey one more specific and limited message, would be reduced to a particular and finite order.

In other words, the value and significance of the work depends upon something elusive: a sense of order without any precise codification. Kant thought that this had a theological import. The encounter with the work of art is similar to that of Adam before the Fall. A world created by a loving God lies before us - as yet we have not understood it, we have not conceptualised it, and yet we grasp that it will be comprehensible.

Aesthetic ideas

Kant does not have much to say about the role of content in art - but what he does say is, I think, very helpful. One problem with content is that it allows for multiple instantiation. "Content" is what could be presented in another form. It therefore sits awkwardly with the specific and particular value of works of art. Kant attempted to get round this in an ingenious way.

He places a great deal of emphasis upon the imprecision of genuinely artistic content - in which the work is suggestive, rather than explicit. The idea is fused with its aesthetic presentation. This is a natural extension for Kant: we grasp such content in a mental process closely related to the free harmonious play of imagination and understanding. We don't quite specify the content, but we keep on circling round it. We can't pin down what Corot is trying to tell us about the palace. And yet we may be filled with a sense of the past persisting into the present; or it may be that there is a moving contrast between the extraordinary innocence and freshness of the pictorial time and of the drama, distress and divisions to which the city was a witness. But, crucially, these are not presented as a thesis; they are areas or fields of reflection which fuse with the depicted scene.

The kind of mental processes which works of art require for their aesthetic appreciation can be understood as cognitive processes. But Kant is at pains to identify a set of cognitive processes which can do justice to the outstanding features of aesthetic experience: the specificity of the object, its internal cohesion, and the sense of depth of meaning (even though we cannot sum up that meaning).

Discussion

Immanuel Kant, but we can!

Jose Luis Guijarro

17 déc. 2002 19:24 UT

The summary of Kant's ideas presented by John Armstrong has made me think about a few things, maybe totally out of context:

1) Kant's ideas on Corot panting are indeed a result of his valuing it and wishing to share his interpretation. They therefore show how he thought this set of ideas was important as a prompting for an extended (intellectual) conversation.

2) "the value and significance of the work depends on something elusive: a sense of order without any precise codification". As I read this, I put it on my own speculative frame; let me try to put the result in so many words.

Our experience has shown us that, even if our mind was not totally codified when we were born, we achieved a natural "order" by becoming human "subjects". Thus, what I read Kant is saying avant la lettre is more or less what I thought I had found out myself. A rather frustrating feeling, I must say! So, he further thinks that "the encounter with the work of art is similar to that of Adam before the Fall. A world created by a loving God lies before us - as yet we have not understood it, we have not conceptualised it, and yet we grasp that it will be comprehensible". Isn't that a re-enactment of the subjectivizing experience, where the daily context has to be removed somehow?

What Kant couldn't do, of course, was to think in present-day cognitive terms; but, as J.A. seems to believe, his ideas may be very helpful in devising cognitive models.

relations répétées

Clotilde Lampignano

19 déc. 2002 14:56 UT

Expérience de la beauté = expérience de l'art. L'expérience de la beauté est selon Kant le jeu libre et harmonieux de l'imagination et de la compréhension. Selon Kant (dans la perception ordinaire) l'imagination ressemble ou différencie des éléments du champ visuel, selon un ordre préconceptuel, c'est à dire sans catégoriser les éléments, comme dans l'exemple, les arbres ou la bruyère. La composition artistique est pré-conceptuelle, car elle ne considère pas et ne perçoit pas comme semblables les choses qui appartiennent à la même catégorie conceptuelle, mais requiert cohésion et parenté au-delà des catégories. Elle recherche aussi la différenciation de choses qui restent séparées, mais que nous percevons comme différentes entre elles, par contraste. Selon Kant, la compréhension est le procédé par lequel je perçois l'objet dans sa catégorie générale. Je n'en ai pas conscience, mais je déploie un concept général d'arbre, quand je définis que celui-ci était l'"arbre". Dans l'expérience esthétique est en jeu la compréhension (la poursuite de la généralisation, sans l'atteindre). Il y a la relation visuelle entre l'arbre et le ciel, mais je ne puis pas formuler une règle

generale et donc je ne puis pas percevoir d'autres cas qui répètent la meme relation, relation indicible et unique (quelque chose en jeu dans la compréhension). A propos de la relation entre l'arbre et le ciel, dans le tableau de Corot, il y a quelque chose d'indicible et unique, mais dans un autre tableau, par exemple du meme Corot, dans le cas où le sujet représente un arbre et un ciel, ou dans les cas des autres artists qui par exemple peignent le ciel jaune et l'arbre rouge, comment peut cette relation répétée etre décrite?.

style and repetition

John Armstrong
20 déc. 2002 4:56 UT

The notion of 'style' seems to elude satisfactory definition. We often want to say that certain pictures are similar in style or that a building and a piece of music belong to the same style - and yet it has proved extremely hard to specify the kind of similarity which is at issue here.

One advantage of the Kantian view is that it gives grounds for seeing why it should be hard to formulate profound stylistic generalisations. If our sense of the beauty of an individual work is hard to pin down then it will be understandable that we have even greater difficulty in claiming that two instances of beauty are similar in important ways.

What depth of meaning?

Dan Sperber
23 déc. 2002 22:36 UT

John Armstrong talks of "the sense of depth of meaning (even though we cannot sum up that meaning)" as an "outstanding features of aesthetic experience." However the notion of a depth of meaning that we are unable to sum up, or for that matter to paraphrase in any way, should not be so easily accepted. Nor should we take for granted that "Corot is trying to tell us [something] about the palace" if "we can't pin it down." This uncritical posit of a "meaning" that the work of art is supposed to convey is, I would suggest, an old, deeply entrenched dogma about aesthetic experience rather than one of its authentic "outstanding features." (I argued this long ago in my Rethinking Symbolism, and Roberto Casati was making a similar point earlier on in this conference.) Couldn't we use Kant to help challenge this dogma, rather than to propose an hedged version of it?

Reply to Dan Sperber

John Armstrong
6 janv. 2003 9:01 UT

I certainly chose the wrong words: meaning which is deep but can't be paraphrased is an unhelpful notion.

Perhaps there are two issues at stake here. One is resonance, the other concerns the character of experience. Resonance is the effect of multiple significance: a single image, or element in an image, strikes as being connected to a range of (possibly divergent) thoughts. When we try to trace them explicitly one by one the overall character of the experience is lost.

Further, i

It is surely right that, phenomenological speaking, an experience can strike us as deep and significant even though we have difficulty articulating what its import actually is. Holding a new-born child in one's arms might be a deeply affecting experience but, obviously, it can be extremely hard to put into words the import of the moment. Statements such as 'I felt I was holding a new life in my hands' sound somewhat trite, but are not wholly irrelevant.

In the discussion of 'free play' and of 'aesthetic ideas' Kant seems to be offering a thesis about how experience can have content and yet be ill articulated by a direct statement of that content.

Questions only.

Pascale Cartwright
7 janv. 2003 12:08 UT

To D. Sperber : 1- Can you please briefly remind us what you argued in your "rethinking symbolism" about the old dogma. Why is it an old dogma? Why is it a dogma? Why entrenched? Why old? Kant certainly did not talk about "ready-mades" when he was talking about art. 2- Do you think that meaning can only be grasped through verbal (or scientific) language?

To J. Armstrong : 1- How does Kant describe exactly this "preceding" mental process which is involved in Art appreciation? 2- "Resonance is the effect of multiple significance: a single image, or element in an image, strikes as being connected to a range of (possibly divergent) thoughts. When we try to trace them explicitly one by one the overall character of the experience is lost." : Please explain more in detail.

Reply to Pascale Cartwright

John Armstrong
8 janv. 2003 9:38 UT

1. It seems to me that Kant's point is this: what Kant calls 'judgments' [that is, acts of cognition] typically involve assigning a particular item to a general term - 'I can see some clouds' to take a banal example. Such a judgment is the result of a mental process, of which we are (almost always) unaware. The particular has to be in some way grasped before it is assigned to a general term, and the general term has to be found. Kant thought of the mind as performing what he called a synthesis of imagination and also as searching for a concept. The synthesis of imagination is the process in which various elements of visual input are held together, prior to their being assigned to a concept. Kant was pursuing speculative cognitive science, but one can make sense of

what he is suggesting. The idea is that we can recognize that the cloud is visually distinct from the backdrop of the sky - because of variation in colour, tone and visual texture - even before we assign the concept 'cloud' to it. Of course we are not aware of doing this, but Kant speculates that such a process must occur. The next step in the argument is the claim that precisely this sort of mental process - the synthesis of imagination which precedes the application of a concept - is central to aesthetic experience. The most impressive examples of this occur when we are contemplating ensembles within a work of art (such as seeing a tree and cloud together). We do not have a general concept here and the synthesis of imagination which is usually tacit is, in this case, something of which we can be conscious.

Im afraid that this will seem only to be adding to the obscurity - but it seems fairly plausible to me.

2. I was trying, rather ineptly, to convey a problem of analysis. Suppose we experience something which has two elements, A and B, but in which the distinctive character of the experience is that we experience the two together: we experience A in conjunction with B. When we analyse the experience into its components we consider them distinctly - which of course helps to clarify the distinctive nature of each component. Nevertheless, something gets lost - namely what it is to experience the two in conjunction. Now if the process of understanding is essentially analytic, then there will be certain experiences which resist complete elucidation.

To take a crude analogy, suppose you note that a gin and tonic is made of gin, tonic, ice and lemon; you take a sip of gin, then a sip of tonic then lick an ice cube and a piece of lemon. Obviously the careful study of the elements by which the drink is constituted will not be an analysis of the experience of drinking a gin and tonic.

No doubt a lot more clarification is needed, but perhaps this is a start.

The laws of perception and the content of a work of art

Gloria Origg
23 déc. 2002 23:36 UT

John Armstrong concludes: "The kind of mental processes which works of art require for their aesthetic appreciation can be understood as cognitive processes."

In his work, V.S. Ramachandran tries to pin down some of the cognitive processes, that Kant is at pains to identify, in terms of a series of laws of artistic universals.

However if we look at these processes, we do not find trace of the "outstanding features" of the artistic experience. These laws are perceptual laws which are at play in our normal perceptual life.

If the "abnormal" character of the artistic experience has to do with the "ineffability" and "elusiveness" of its meaning, as Armstrong seems to accept, I don't think that a more detailed description of perceptual processes involved in the aesthetic experience may help us in any way.

Yet, I do not see why a theory of content of artworks should be so demanding upon the underlying perceptual processes that make it possible.

If we make a parallel literary theory, very few scholars are persuaded nowadays that the comprehension of the general laws of linguistic grammar will generate a complete understanding of the meaning of "War and Peace".

Ineffability and cognition

Noga Arikha
30 déc. 2002 13:17 UT

The notion of "ineffability" might describe in part the phenomenology of aesthetic experience. But it is true, as Gloria suggests here, that a research programme into art cognition must at once embrace and go beyond such a phenomenological account - although Alva Noe's paper gave us a more complex picture of what a phenomenology of artistic experience might look like.

However, one might also understand "ineffability" as an emotion, or, more likely, as a set of particular emotions which together constitute artistic experience: in this case it could be taken into account in an analysis of the emotional responses to art, perhaps along with the "Aha" hypothesis of Ramachandran. One may ask, again - the question has been returning throughout the conference - what the relation would be between pinning down this set of emotions and one's understanding of a work of art such as the Corot analysed here.

Objects and aesthetic attention

Nicolas Bullot (Post-doctorant, Institut Jean Nicod, University of British Columbia)
(Date of publication : 6 January 2003)

Abstract: This article puts forward an hypothesis on the aesthetic use of attention. Some artistic situations favour such a use of attention and may contribute to the conscious access to cognitive and emotional contents and effects, as well as to their discussion in the public

sphere.

(Translated from French by Marcel Lieberman)

A list of multimedia examples is available on the page [HYPERLINK "http://www.objectcognition.net/NJB/"](http://www.objectcognition.net/NJB/) [Collections \(AAOBR\)](#).

"I probably saw the motion of the wheel as an excellent antidote to the regular motion of the individual around the contemplated object." Marcel Duchamp, on the *Bicycle Wheel*.

"The ensemble becomes an esthetic provocation: beauty as a refusal of habit." Helmut Lachenmann, on *Pression*.

I shall present here an hypothesis concerning the nature of attention directed towards works of art, while considering the constraints that the latter exert on cognitive abilities. This hypothesis fits into recent work in aesthetic theory that seeks to take into account research on cognitive abilities. This work centers its analyses on aptitudes that are both (i) studied within the cognitive sciences and (ii) essentially involved in aesthetic behaviors. According to the hypothesis that I want to defend - call it **H**, the capacity of selective attention has this dual status. Before presenting the content of the hypothesis, I would like to clarify the meanings of the main concepts to be used.

The concept of selective attention refers to the abilities studied simultaneously by cognitive psychology, neuroscience and the philosophy of mind. This research seeks to understand how, among the totality of information that is accessible to the sensory systems, the selection and binding of information relevant to an agent's action and knowledge is carried out — especially in the case of [HYPERLINK "http://jaufre.bulot.free.fr/njbCOLL/AAOBR/BOX-Objects.html"](http://jaufre.bulot.free.fr/njbCOLL/AAOBR/BOX-Objects.html) \n _blank [spatio-temporal objects](#) (henceforth objectST) to which attention is directed.

In order to refer to the system formed by artistic artifacts and the agents who perceive them, the concept of *artistic device* will be used. To say that an artistic device is operating, it is necessary that there be an interaction between two types of conditions:

a sensory- and motor-anchoring situation that corresponds to a set of target elements (sculptures or paintings, acoustical or theatrical events), and

a set of agents who explore this situation and adopt aesthetic attitudes by interacting with the target elements.

The *anchoring situation* of an artistic device corresponds to the space-time region that is explored when an agent directs his attention to the artistic device.

Schematically, it concerns, for example, the content and boundaries of art galleries, museum rooms, concert halls, movie theaters, architectural spaces and structures, or also books and electronic publications that have artistic content. The notion of anchoring refers to a fundamental function of sensory and motor systems: to ensure the proper placement of the agent's body within the situation, in particular through bi-directional access to the elements present within the situation. In the case of artistic devices, anchoring situations are at least partially artificial, or artifactual, contexts that agents must perceive in order to obtain information about the artwork that they're exploring.

It is plausible that, within an artistic device, the interactions between agents and the elements included in the anchoring situation involve subjecting the agents' selective attention abilities to certain constraints or operations. This idea can be specified more clearly in the framework of the theory of objectST perception. I propose the following hypothesis:

H: Certain artistic devices are based on inhibition processes of subsets of routines that typically monitor objectST-based attention.

The most general argument in favor of this proposition proceeds by comparing ordinary perception with aesthetic perception. In fact, ordinary perception seems to be based on the application of routines that monitor, among other cognitive processes, objectST-based selective attention, whereas the interaction with certain artistic situations appears instead to result in inhibiting the execution of certain routines. In other words, hypothesis **H** assumes that the interaction with certain artistic anchoring situations involves interrupting the normal course of perceptual processes by preventing, or altering, the execution of certain routines.

Why need we accept that, in interactions with situations encountered in daily life, our attention is monitored by routines?

First, routines are developed through learning in the [HYPERLINK "http://jaufre.bulot.free.fr/njbCOLL/AAOBR/BOX-Rc-Routines.html"](http://jaufre.bulot.free.fr/njbCOLL/AAOBR/BOX-Rc-Routines.html) \n _blank [performance of recurrent acts](#). Insofar as ordinary activities include objectST-based recurrent acts, it is natural that every individual develops and actualizes routines — that is, operations that enable one to accomplish a set of habitual acts that are triggered by similar contexts. Moreover, the speed and reliability of our interactions with objectsST will largely depend upon the existence of such routines.

Second, the idea that the perception of objects is based on the application of routines that monitor selective attention seems to be relatively well-supported by experimental research on the role of attention and ocular fixation in motor-visual monitoring, required for the normal execution of daily activities. One can, for example, refer to the work of [HYPERLINK "http://jaufre.bulot.free.fr/njbCOLL/AAOBR/BOX-Landetal.html"](http://jaufre.bulot.free.fr/njbCOLL/AAOBR/BOX-Landetal.html) \n _blank [M. Land, N. Mennie and J. Rusted](#). Certain generalizations seem to be valid. In particular, the organization of action appears to be structured on the basis of objectST-based sensory-motor routines.

Third, one can make use of a sufficiently rich and developed concept of "routines" to account for the variety of daily acts that can be monitored by routines. For example, the following operations are examples of prototypical routines:

"determining if x is inside or outside of y"

"fixing with one's eyes objectST x, and then manipulating x"

“recognizing the prototypical movements of household objectsST”

“recognizing the sound x that triggers behavior y”

Three important observations are currently made in the literature. (i)The execution of a routine is generally linked to automatic procedures that seem to be carried out with neither the voluntary monitoring nor the awareness of the operation taking place (or at least without a direct awareness of the spatio-temporal details of the current operation). (ii)Routines do not only concern the movement of the muscles and body, but they are also at work during the monitoring of mental activities linked to the identification and recognition of objectsST. (iii)The execution of a routine can determine or control the choice of attentional selection targets; however, the relationship between routines and selective attention is complex (since it depends upon the precise conception one adopts regarding these two notions).

Ordinary perception is thus “routine” in a non-trivial sense. Yet, the acknowledgment of the role of routines in ordinary activities is not valid, *stricto-sensu*, for describing the specificity of the perception of artistic devices. In fact, many works of art rely on the construction of situations that interfere with the application of subsets of routines.

First, a general reason has to do with the display and presentation procedure used in artistic devices. Given any objectST (or the objectST's characteristic signal, such as its acoustical signature), the fact that it is displayed in the space-time of the anchoring situation of an artistic device generally amounts to removing it from the domain of use for ends other than its display in the situation. This often involves the inhibition of grasping gestures: in the majority of cases, handling the objectST is prevented or forbidden (via glass cases, stages, barriers for maintaining a required distance). In fact, its display in a device thus amounts to removing it from the routines and interactions to which objectsST with ordinary household or industrial use are subject.

Second, at least in the history of art, many works have been dedicated to the representation and questioning of the status of objectsST — and to the problems concerning the criteria of objecthood.

A number of artistic experiments have been carried out on the perception of objectST properties; many of them involve the construction of situations whose properties prevent the execution of subsets of routines. I shall present two types of examples.

A first set of examples is found in [HYPERLINK "http://jaufre.bulot.free.fr/njbCOLL/AAOBR/BOX-Readymades.html"](http://jaufre.bulot.free.fr/njbCOLL/AAOBR/BOX-Readymades.html) \n _blank[Marcel Duchamp's readymades](#) and in the installation works that include household artifacts, like those of Oldenburg or Lavier. A second set of important examples is found in the research on [HYPERLINK "http://jaufre.bulot.free.fr/njbCOLL/AAOBR/BOX-ElectAM.html"](http://jaufre.bulot.free.fr/njbCOLL/AAOBR/BOX-ElectAM.html) \n _blank[electro-acoustic music](#) that is developed on the basis recorded noises.

I would like to conclude by posing a question that to me seems to be important: what might be the function of a mechanism that inhibits certain subsets of routines? In following a line of thought that needs to be examined more carefully, one can imagine that adequate responses will have the following form.

A first type of response is as follows: it depends on the artistic devices in question, or the moment being considered in the development of an artistic device. An analysis of each particular case is thus called for, since each artistic device puts into play a particular inhibition strategy. Another type of response offers a general explanation: the alteration of a routine can contribute to one's becoming aware of a property of objectST x to which the routine is typically applied. As a result, one of the functions of these alterations could be to favor the awareness, or meta-representation, of a series of properties (precisely that series on which the routine gets blocked). This consequently makes possible the collective or public awareness of the series in question, in connection with the communicational and critical function of artwork, or its contribution to perceptual learning.

Discussion

Une vue partielle de l'ART

Jose Luis Gujarro
7 janv. 2003 11:33 UT

Une tendance générale des interventions dans ce colloque est la suivante : ou bien l'on pense que l'art est une question de perception d'un objet uniquement (Nicolas Bulot. semble partager cette théorie) ; ou bien on ne parle que de l'inspiration et de la créativité de l'artiste qui fait un objet

Pourtant, il me paraît important de chercher une caractérisation plus générale du phénomène artistique, comme j'ai insisté dans plusieurs interventions, et comme Roberto Casati propose dans son article : une (ou plusieurs) condition(s) nécessaire(s) et suffisante(s) qui offrent une explication plausible de TOUT ce qui devient "art", que ce soit par l'inspiration et l'activité des artistes ou par les qualités de l'objet perçues par les spectateurs.

Ce que je trouve intéressant du présent article c'est qu'il offre des possibles voies d'analyse a-posteriori du fonctionnement de l'attitude artistique chez les spectateurs et que, dans cette même ligne, on pourrait peut-être essayer de faire la même chose sur l'intention des artistes. Mais pour commencer, pour savoir de quel objet, fait, relation, concept, etc. on est en train de discuter, il faut premièrement se mettre d'accord sur ce que est la condition minimale nécessaire et suffisante pour qu'un objet soit considéré de l'ART.

Une analyse partielle de certaines conditions nécessaires aux pratiques artistiques

Maria Rossi

7 janv. 2003 18:20 UT

L'analyse est en effet partielle, au sens où elle ne prétend pas donner une solution simple au problème de l'unité du genre artistique, et encore moins de définition unique de ce qu'est une œuvre d'art. Je reste sceptique à l'égard de la découverte d'une condition suffisante au statut d'œuvre d'art, et pense que ce n'est pas la bonne voie pour articuler la compréhension scientifique de la cognition avec la compréhension (de l'intérêt) des pratiques artistiques. Je m'intéresse davantage aux conditions nécessaires qu'à une condition suffisante rêvée. L'analyse concerne donc plusieurs conditions nécessaires des pratiques artistiques, liées aux principes qui suivent. (1) Il est un fait social que nous vivons dans des communautés où nous reconnaissons à des choses très différentes le statut d'œuvres d'art, et que ce statut est souvent institutionnalisé. De ce point de vue, mon analyse tient pour acquis un savoir partagé : le savoir tacite et historique de l'extension (approximative) du concept d'art ou d'œuvre d'art (en fonction de critères externes ou superficiels comme le fait de se trouver dans un musée, je n'ai pas besoin de plus). (2) Dans tous les cas (= condition nécessaire), ces choses qu'on appelle les œuvres d'art (= les dispositifs artistiques) correspondent à des situations que l'artiste ou les spectateurs explorent en déployant leurs capacités d'attention sélective. La distinction entre artiste et spectateur est de ce point de vue secondaire : la remarque est valable aussi bien pour les artistes (avant, pendant, après la réalisation de l'œuvre) que pour les spectateurs (pensez à ce que fait un artiste dans un atelier, pensez à un metteur en scène qui va voir sa propre mise en scène etc.). (3) Admettant les points (1) et (2), je m'intéresse au détail des opérations mentales sous-jacentes aux pratiques artistiques, et cherche à comparer la perception ordinaire et la perception dans les dispositifs artistiques (d'où un intérêt pour l'organisation de détail de chaque dispositif particulier). Et c'est là que j'introduis H, laquelle s'applique à une famille d'œuvre d'art et probablement pas à la totalité des œuvres.

Absence de distinction pertinente entre l'artiste et le spectateur

Maria Rossi

7 janv. 2003 18:26 UT

Le paragraphe 3 de José Luis Guíjarro me donne une occasion de proposer un correctif, car il contient un erreur d'interprétation. Ceci est un point important : je ne m'occupe pas plus de la perception des spectateurs que de celle de l'artiste. L'artiste, tout comme le spectateur, doit percevoir (porter son attention sur) la situation d'ancrage qu'il va rendre publique. L'artiste doit être spectateur ou scrutateur de ce qu'il fabrique. Tout artiste qui réalise une œuvre (quelle que soit son genre), doit concevoir, construire, ou fabriquer une situation d'ancrage (= condition nécessaire, qui s'applique même au cas de l'art conceptuel). Il peut s'agir d'un texte qu'on va lire en tenant l'objet spatio-temporel livre et en l'explorant par une nombre impressionnant de saccades oculaires (contraintes par les propriétés physique de l'objet-livre x, et les propriétés du contenu sémantique des phrases imprimées sur la surface des pages du livre). Il peut s'agir de choses posées sur des cimaises, d'événements lumineux projetés sur des écrans ou d'événements acoustiques projetés dans des espaces acoustiques. Il peut s'agir de presque n'importe quel événement physique, pourvu que cet événement physique soit - sous certaines conditions favorables - perceptible, interprétable cognitivement et présenté dans un contexte où il sera liés à des intentions/comportements artistiques. Un point crucial, qui m'intéresse en tant que physicaliste, est que les propriétés physiques de la situation d'ancrage opèrent comme des contraintes sur les capacités exploratoires-perceptives des agents. Or, il semble raisonnable de penser que ces contraintes sont partiellement choisies par l'artiste pour obtenir des effets cognitifs particuliers (dépendant de l'unicité de la situation d'ancrage), et c'est ce point nodal qui m'intéresse.

Réponse à Nicolas Bullot

Jose Luis Guíjarro

7 janv. 2003 20:12 UT

Les réponses de N.B. sont très intéressantes mais, si j'ai bien compris, il ne considère pas important (ni productif) de spéculer sur la (ou les) condition(s) suffisante(s) de l'événement artistique.

Cependant, on pourrait se poser la question de l'art dans une perspective, disons, évolutionniste. Si je ne fais pas d'erreur, il paraît qu'aucun autre animal a des expériences d'art au même niveau que nous en avons. Ainsi, l'idée que certains oiseaux sont attirés par les chants de leurs voisins serait peut-être un antécédent lointain de notre valorisation artistique, mais rien ne ressemble à cette expérience humaine. Et pourquoi cela ?

Parce que, que je sache, l'être humain est le seul à avoir développé la propriété de traiter des informations de manière indirecte, d'utiliser amplement des métareprésentations pour nos interactions avec son entourage. Je crois qu'on peut spéculer que l'expérience artistique ne saurait « fonctionner » chez les humains s'ils ne possédaient pas cette manière indirecte de traiter l'information. Et décrire de quelle manière cette faculté rend possible l'expérience artistique nous permettrait de trouver une (ou des) condition(s) suffisantes minimales pour que les conditions nécessaires de N.B. se mettent en marche.

Il y aurait donc, un processus précognitif à décrire (i.e., la condition suffisante primaire) suivi de plusieurs processus cognitifs déclenchés par les représentations socialement partagées qui donnent lieu à la situation d'ancrage et permettent d'évaluer artistiquement les objets.

Conditions nécessaires et conditions suffisantes

Maria Rossi

7 janv. 2003 22:49 UT

Sur le premier point. « il ne considère pas important (ni productif) de spéculer sur la (ou les) condition(s) suffisante(s) de l'événement artistique. » Pas exactement, cette formulation est plus forte que celle que j'adopte en réalité. Le repérage des conditions nécessaires que j'ai citées me semble aider à la compréhension et à la généralisation, en proposant des fondements fiables pour l'analyse. Evidemment, ce n'est pas une manière de proscrire la recherche de conditions suffisantes. Au contraire, c'est une stratégie d'analyse qui vise à disposer de généralisations (les plus suffisantes possibles) tout en préservant la possibilité de l'analyse des cas particuliers (ici, chacun des dispositifs artistiques).

Métareprésentations, Modification de la portée de l'attention par les situations

Maria Rossi

7 janv. 2003 23:01 UT

Sur le deuxième point. Je ne suis pas assuré de comprendre le détail de la spéculation. Cependant, je suis d'accord au sujet de

l'importance des métareprésentations dans la mise en place des dispositifs artistiques. C'est un aspect qui demeure dans l'arrière-plan de l'analyse que j'ai proposée, et qui est lié au questionnement sur les facteurs cognitifs qui contrôlent l'attention des agents dans chaque situation particulière. Le problème posé ici par la référence théorique aux métareprésentations est que les agents qui interagissent avec des dispositifs artistiques sont susceptibles d'avoir un nombre indéfiniment grand et varié de métareprésentations lors de ces interactions. Or, je ne sais pas, pour ma part, comment faire une théorie à partir de cette variété. Le cas me semble similaire au problème posé par les discussions mentionnées par Roberto Casati (cf. article du présent symposium) : les contraintes observables sont très faibles. Dans cet article, j'ai cherché à trouver un niveau d'analyse où il soit possible de décrire des phénomènes soumis à des contraintes qui puissent être décrites et expliquées avec un minimum de précision (en fonction d'un intérêt pour les activités mentales des agents). Ce niveau est celui que j'appelle (faute de mieux) celui de la relation entre la situation d'ancrage du dispositif et les effets cognitifs (plus ou moins prédictibles) de celle-ci. L'attention sélective est la capacité permettant d'articuler les informations provenant de la situation et les évaluations cognitives de ces informations. On découvre à ce niveau des contraintes objectives car chaque situation d'ancrage à une organisation qui oriente l'attention d'une manière ou d'une autre (spécifique de chaque dispositif). Il est utile de remarquer qu'il n'y a pas que les dispositifs artistiques qui opèrent en quelque sorte par « manipulation de l'attention ». Par exemple, les dispositifs de propagande sont aussi des dispositifs qui visent à manipuler les capacités d'attention en construisant des situations d'ancrage qui orientent l'esprit des agents vers certains types d'informations plutôt que d'autres (la différence est intéressante à étudier).

Art and Inhibition

Dominic Lopes
8 janv. 2003 0:21 UT

I would like to pick up on M Guijarro's comments on M Bullo's interesting hypothesis, since they seem to me to raise an important question about what we should be looking for in an explanation of art or aesthetic experience.

My worry is that there is not a single cognitive mechanism that fails to be engaged in our appreciation of some artwork. Thus proposals of the form "mechanism X is involved in appreciating some art works" are hardly likely to be illuminating.

Bullo seems to suggest that the inhibition of some "routines" is involved in all art-appreciation. But the example of readymades and electroacoustic music are not promising. Certainly, part of our appreciation of some art depends on its being presented in a physical setting in a way that inhibits certain behaviours and provokes others. But what about works of architecture or dance music?

Here's an idea: perhaps we should stop trying to give accounts of art and focus instead on art media or art genres?

A unique way of processing

Jose Luis Guijarro
8 janv. 2003 9:04 UT

Dominic Lopes says that there doesn't seem to be a single cognitive "mechanism" responsible for the art experience, and I certainly agree with him. What I think is distinctive is the KIND of functioning that takes place in that sort of event. For, although, as I said above, this functioning reminds me of a (light?) mystic experience, sometimes, it is certainly distinct from any other, the aesthetic experience included (if we understand it as the experience of beauty in, say, a face, a sunset or whatever non "artistic" situation).

My contention is that ANYTHING (a meal, dance music, a scientific theory, etc.) may be processed as an art event if the primary condition prevails. N.B.'s ideas seem to be interesting triggers of this human attitude, but I don't seem to understand in what way they may explain the origin of the art event itself.

Attention esthétique

Pascale Cartwright
8 janv. 2003 11:28 UT

Je suis d'accord avec N.Bullo pour dire que la distinction entre l'artiste et le spectateur n'est pas pertinente – que l'on aborde l'arbre par son feuillage ou par ses racines, on parle toujours du même arbre. Et je crois que tout le monde ici depuis le début parle bien de la même chose. Les différences d'appréciation sont d'un autre ordre.

N.Bullo par contre ne semble pas faire de distinction entre l'attention esthétique en général et l'attention que l'on porte aux œuvres d'art. C'est en ce sens qu'on pourrait penser qu'il oublie l'acte créatif et l'intention de l'artiste. En effet le processus d'inhibition des routines est le même lorsque l'on s'émerveille de la beauté d'un lever de soleil sur la forêt endormie : on ne voit pas alors une simple forêt comme information utile mais un spectacle à dimension esthétique. C'est la même chose pour le tableau. Non ? En ce sens Guijarro a raison. L'appréhension de l'art par inhibition de la vision de l'aspect disons « utile » « fonctionnel » de l'objet pour montrer « autre chose » de cet objet ne nous éclaire que très partiellement sur les processus cognitifs liés à l'art.

La différence serait-elle alors la situation d'ancrage ? Apprécie-t-on un tableau différemment uniquement parce qu'il est mis dans une situation d'ancrage privilégiée ? Et ne l'apprécierait-on pas si on le trouvait abandonné ailleurs ? Mais ne pourrait-on pas dire alors que pour la forêt la situation d'ancrage existe également et serait "l'état d'esprit" dans lequel se met l'observateur ?

Il est vrai que tout ce que dit Nicolas Bullo s'applique bien aux readymades et à certaines musiques électroacoustiques. Mais peut-on décrire les processus cognitifs liés à l'art en ne parlant que des œuvres qui ne sont pas considérées par tous comme des œuvres d'art ?

Réponses à Pascale Cartwright 1 : Attention esthétique et attention portée sur un dispositif artistique

Maria Rossi
9 janv. 2003 0:53 UT

P. Cartwright a écrit : « N.Bulot par contre ne semble pas faire de distinction entre l'attention esthétique en général et l'attention que l'on porte aux œuvres d'art. » L'hypothèse que je propose fait partie d'un travail préparatoire à des recherches sur l'attention esthétique. Cette recherche repose sur la distinction entre l'attention esthétique « libre » (terminologie temporaire sans portée explicative) et l'attention portée aux œuvres d'art (= ici, les situations artistiques, d'après le critère social et externe que j'ai proposé pour aider à la spécification de l'explanandum). Je fais donc la distinction ailleurs.

Le choix de restreindre la présente analyse au cas de l'attention portée sur les dispositifs artistiques (reconnus socialement comme tels) a été fait pour une raison méthodologique. Il me semble probable que la clarté explicative vient et viendra en premier lieu d'analyses portant sur l'attention esthétique « contrainte » (plus que d'une description phénoménologique de l'expérience de l'attention esthétique « libre »). Il est en effet possible, dans le cas de l'attention « contrainte » par un dispositif, d'étudier l'organisation des situations d'ancrage. En outre, ces situations véhiculent des informations sur les intentions et les processus causaux qui les ont générés. Enfin, on peut définir dans le cas de l'attention esthétique « contrainte » un critère minimal d'occurrence de la perception « esthétique ». L'attention esthétique (au sens minimal) est occurrente si les capacités attentionnelles d'un agent ont pour cible une œuvre d'art, au sens institutionnel et non-normatif. En revanche, dans le cas de l'attention esthétique « libre », l'ontologie des cibles de la sélection attentionnelle n'est plus du tout limitée. Tout ce qui est perceptible et concevable pourrait être pris pour cible par l'attention esthétique. Quels sont, dans ces conditions, les critères de l'occurrence de l'attention esthétique « libre » ? Quelles sont les raisons ou les causes d'une évaluation esthétique ? Savons-nous de quoi nous parlons lorsque nous en parlons ? En dépit de ces difficultés, l'attention esthétique « libre » ou « générale » est le phénomène qui m'intéresse le plus d'un point de vue philosophique et critique. La stratégie théorique que je suis consiste à partir d'une relation de dépendance qui semble fiable. La suivante : l'attention esthétique (« libre » ou « contrainte ») est dans une relation de dépendance asymétrique à l'égard de l'attention sélective ordinaire.

Réponses à Pascale Cartwright 2 : Les œuvres qui ne sont « pas considérées par tous » comme étant des œuvres d'art

Maria Rossi
9 janv. 2003 0:58 UT

P. Cartwright a écrit, en outre : « Il est vrai que tout ce que dit Nicolas Bulot s'applique bien aux readymades et à certaines musiques électroacoustiques. Mais peut-on décrire les processus cognitifs liés à l'art en ne parlant que des œuvres qui ne sont pas considérées par tous comme des œuvres d'art? » Réponse : « considérées », en quel sens ? Deux critères d'œuvre d'art sont ici confondus. (i) Un critère social est que l'œuvre d'art est ce qui est reconnu institutionnellement ou socialement comme étant de l'art. (ii) Un critère normatif est que l'œuvre d'art est ce qui a une valeur esthétique ou artistique. Les personnes qui ne considèrent pas les œuvres de Duchamp ou la musique électroacoustique comme étant « de l'art » admettent en fait implicitement (i) au nom d'une évaluation négative au niveau de (ii). Cet admission tacite est suffisante pour mon analyse : les pièces de Duchamp sont dans des musées et sont célèbres. Mon analyse part du niveau (i), et en ce sens, les pièces de Duchamp et de ses successeurs sont de l'art. Si H s'applique bien aux exemples donnés, alors H n'est pas réfutée. H n'est pas une théorie de la totalité des comportements et attitudes artistiques. Quant aux débats liés à (ii), ils concernent un point de vue normatif qui n'est probablement pas ici notre principal objectif.

On objectera cependant que H est une hypothèse vérifiée mais trop partielle (cela semble être le sens de la remarque). Notons qu'il est déjà intéressant de s'accorder sur le fait qu'elle est vérifiée dans certains cas. Maintenant, il est possible de réfléchir à l'extension des principes de l'analyse. Je suis enclin à penser que ces principes ont une portée qui n'est pas restreinte aux exemples cités. Cependant, il se pourrait que H s'applique mieux à l'art moderne (fin du XIXe à nos jours), dans la mesure où l'hypothèse H s'accouple harmonieusement avec une conception expérimentale de la fonction du dispositif artistique (influençant au cours de cette période historique, cf. par exemple Cray (2000)), mais cela reste à établir à partir d'analyses complémentaires.

Oui et non

Pascale Cartwright
11 janv. 2003 8:08 UT

Nicolas Bulot : « Enfin, on peut définir dans le cas de l'attention esthétique « contrainte » un critère minimal d'occurrence de la perception « esthétique ». L'attention esthétique (au sens minimal) est occurrente si les capacités attentionnelles d'un agent ont pour cible une œuvre d'art, au sens institutionnel et non-normatif. »

Oui et non.

Oui. Il y a effectivement inhibition d'un mode « routinier » de la perception lorsque l'on passe la porte du musée, salle de concert etc...(situation d'ancrage) et que l'on porte son attention sur les artefacts artistiques en question.

Oui, il y a la même « inhibition des routines » lors de l'attention esthétique « libre ». (Apparemment pas de situation d'ancrage) .

Mais non. Ne peut-on pas argumenter que l'inhibition des routines « sur commande » institutionnelle dans le cas des artefacts artistiques regroupés dans un musée, est en fait la mise en place d'une nouvelle routine, d'un nouveau mode de perception culturel tout à fait routinier qui se met en place dès que la situation d'ancrage nous le « commande ». Ce mode de perception nous est suggéré par la situation (d'ancrage) et ne nous oblige d'ailleurs pas à percevoir le caractère « artistique » des artefacts en question.

Ce mode de perception alors n'est pas le même que celui mis en place lors de l'attention esthétique libre où la rupture des routines est spontanée, et même peut-être le point de départ de ce qui motivera l'artiste à créer cette œuvre d'art.

L'attention esthétique « libre » avec inhibition de l'attention routinière serait le point de départ de toute création d'œuvre d'art et non uniquement le point d'arrivée (perception de l'œuvre créée). L'attention esthétique « contrainte » est une autre routine d'ordre culturel comme le fait de regarder à droite et à gauche avant de traverser la route.

Ne pensez-vous pas que l'attention portée aux œuvres d'art est suggérée par l'œuvre et non par la situation d'ancrage ? Elle est spontanée comme l'attention esthétique libre. Elle se passe de tout musée.

Réponse à P. Cartwright (3) : l'ontologie complexe des situations d'ancrages

Maria Rossi

12 janv. 2003 23:16 UT

Nous semblons être d'accord sur les grandes perspectives. Il reste des clarifications techniques à faire. (1) Une rectification d'ordre ontologique. Le présent texte est une version (un peu trop) abrégée qui vous a induit en erreur au sujet de la notion de 'situation d'ancrage'. Par ce concept, j'entends principalement désigner 'CE' que l'artiste a fabriqué pour l'exposition ou la performance, et qui a une extension spatio-temporelle : l'agencement de matériaux, de corps ou de symboles qui a une exemplification dans l'univers objectif -- et qui a donc une certaine indépendance à l'égard de l'esprit et des cerveaux des observateurs (= ontologie réaliste relativement à ce que les situations contiennent). Exemples : un agencement particulier de peinture acrylique sur une toile, un agencement de certains patterns acoustiques, un agencement dynamique de certains corps dans un espace scénique dramatique ou chorégraphique. Le point qui est tendu du point de vue conceptuel est que je cherche à utiliser ce concept pour décrire 'toutes' les formes (ou genres) d'œuvres d'art, car il me semble qu'il s'agit d'une condition nécessaire (et que nous avons besoin de concepts ayant une indépendance à l'égard des média employés, car ils sont en nombre illimités). Le point théorique central : les situations d'ancrage contiennent les CIBLES (physiques et objectives) de l'attention esthétique (de l'artiste ou du spectateur). (2) Les agents qui ont la principale 'responsabilité' (juridique, morale, artistique) des situations d'ancrage sont les artistes (quoiqu'il y aurait beaucoup de questions à examiner à ce sujet). Par conséquent, il n'y a pas lieu de céder la responsabilité des situations d'ancrage aux seules institutions qui les conservent -- ni non plus celle de l'inhibition de certains types de routines liée à l'exploration des situations. (3) Il y a des routines institutionnelles, en effet. (Il nous faudrait une théorie des types de routines pour ce débat.) En outre, je suis aussi attiré que vous par la spéculation d'après laquelle l'attention esthétique procède par une rupture par rapport à des routines, et que cette rupture est liée à la notion (hélas confuse) de création. (4) « L'attention esthétique est suggérée par l'œuvre » : c'est exactement ce que j'essaie d'analyser, en procédant à une réduction incomplète du concept (confus) 'd'œuvre' (dont on ne sait s'il s'agit d'une représentation ou d'un objet physique visé par une représentation). (5) Là encore, j'ai l'impression qu'il est utile de distinguer l'analyse normative et non-normative. Le 'critère minimal' auquel je faisais allusion était descriptif et non-normatif (liés à l'acquisition d'information sur une certaine situation d'ancrage artistique). Vous tendez à utiliser en premier lieu le concept normatif (plus complexe à analyser).

Expérience précognitive

Jose Luis Guijarro

8 janv. 2003 8:48 UT

N.B. écrit : "(...) c'est une stratégie d'analyse qui vise à disposer de généralisations (les plus suffisantes possibles) tout en préservant la possibilité de l'analyse des cas particuliers". Je ne suis pas sûr de comprendre cette stratégie, mais c'est vrai qu'elle fonctionne à un certain niveau (le niveau cognitif). Ce que j'essaie de trouver, cependant, est (1) le genre de traitement d'information qui permet aux humains l'expérience artistique. Schématiquement, on pourrait le représenter ainsi :

[évaluer (X)]

C'est clair que notre capacité d'évaluation est variable : on évalue des situations (dangereuses ou positives, des théories, etc.). Donc, (2) cette évaluation doit être, au moins, une mise en valeur :

[valoriser (X)]

Mais il y a aussi trop de manières de valoriser pour que cela soit considéré l'origine de l'expérience artistique sans décrire le type de mise en valeur nécessaire et suffisant.

C'est à dire (3) ma spéculation est que cette mise en valeur est, en quelque sorte, semblable aux processus qui se mettent en marche dans le nouveau-né et qui conduisent à la formation (i.e., CRÉATION) de sa subjectivité.

Remarquez que je dis « en quelque sorte » parce que, pour le moment, je n'ai pas une idée claire de comment se déclenche cette « créativité subjective » qui me semble être la seule condition nécessaire et suffisante pour décrire l'expérience artistique : Vous semblez croire à une amplification du contexte donné comme condition d'une expérience créative. Et votre description de ce processus me semble valable. Mais je pense qu'il y a une expérience plus forte (comparable à celle de l'expérience mystique) qui, justement, essaie de gommer le plus possible du contexte pour parvenir à une interprétation tout à fait nouvelle. Peut-être faudrait-il tenir compte des deux possibilités

Exposer(x) et Valoriser(x)

Maria Rossi

10 janv. 2003 22:25 UT

Commentant le texte de R. Casati, J.L. Guijarro, vous avez écrit : "ART (...) could be schematically represented as: ART = DISPLAY (X). (...) So, if you see a pebble near a river you process it like X; but, if you think that it has some qualities that are worth watching,

you display it (putting it in a box in a museum is one way of doing that): D(X)." Mon analyse est proche de celle-là. Le concept de situation d'ancrage vise de la même manière l'utilisation d'un arrangement d'éléments X pour remplir un rôle fonctionnel du genre 'Display(X)' lié à un attitude ou une opération du type 'Valoriser(X)'. L'intérêt de ce point de départ, que nous partageons, est qu'il semble s'agir d'une condition nécessaire de l'effectivité de tout dispositif artistique, voire peut être de toute expérience/attention esthétique. Il est remarquable que les procédures telles que 'Sélectionner(x)' ou 'Valoriser(x)' soient typiquement des opérations liées à ce qu'on appelle l'attention ou l'attention sélective. Nous semblons aussi être d'accord sur la difficulté liée au fait qu'il y a d'innombrables manières de valoriser X. Enfin, vous parlez d'une expérience 'plus forte' et 'comparable à celle de l'expérience mystique', qui viserait 'à gommer le contexte'. Là, beaucoup de questions complexes se posent. (1) Quelle est la nature et le contenu de cette expérience ? (2) Quelles sont ses conditions d'occurrence ? (3) Pour quelles raisons serions-nous en mesure de décrire l'expérience esthétique d'un point de vue unitaire étant donné (i) la variété des cibles qui constituent les situations (d'ancrage) artistiques et (ii) la variété des attitudes des agents qui les explorent ?

Replies to Dominic Lopez on explanation, cognitive mechanisms, routine inhibitions

Maria Rossi

8 janv. 2003 19:41 UT

Explanation in art theory: explanatory pluralism & case study. The issue of what can actually explain artistic phenomena is a central issue in the project of linking art theory and cognitive science. This is yet a complex issue. Prima facie, it appears to me that many types of explanations may be used in art theory since artistic behavior involves many types of highly complex phenomena. Therefore, I favor a certain kind of 'explanatory pluralism'. According to it, first, the putative gathering of local explanations (historical or functional accounts, case studies) is useful. Second, we have to be cautious, or even skeptical, about the attempt to find any illuminating tool which could have both explanatory power and wide context-independency (i.e. extreme generality). Furthermore, art theoreticians are biased toward certain types of explanation rather than others. In this paper on aesthetic attention, I am trying to find a path that would be both cognitive and historically situated. However, I do believe that other types of explanation are possible and needed. Hypothesis H belongs more or less to a case study.

Replies to Dominic Lopez 2: The relevance of mechanisms, (a) background assumptions

Maria Rossi

8 janv. 2003 19:53 UT

Here, I will restrict my replies to the type of explanation I have developed in accordance to hypothesis H. D. Lopez said: 'My worry is that there is not a single cognitive mechanism that fails to be engaged in our appreciation of some artwork. Thus proposals of the form "mechanism X is involved in appreciating some art works" are hardly likely to be illuminating.' My reply (in two times): First, let me specify the general purpose of H. My concern was to find a framework where knowledge on basic cognitive mechanisms could be relevant -- in one way or another -- for the understanding of artistic behavior. This project may be controversial. (In particular, I am interested in studying basic sensory-motor behaviors because these are often neglected phenomena, and may be more interesting than common sense and introspection could predict.) I reasoned in that way. First, it seems acceptable to think that cognitive science affords knowledge on many mechanisms that underlies routine-based behaviors (and object-based attention). Second, many routine-based behaviors of everyday life are 'disturbed' in contact with artistic devices. Then, it is appealing to think that many artistic devices (artworks) are based on situations that affect the mind in using some modifications or inhibitions of routines. We could use our knowledge of involved mechanisms in order to have a better description of what is actually happening during the disturbance of these routines. This is the basic idea. This idea is neutral regarding the straightforward specification of the mechanisms or strategies that are involved (I believe they to be context-dependant). It is also neutral regarding whether the mind is exhaustively driven by routines operations. It requires yet that some routines drive the mind in certain circumstances, and even in certain recognition procedures. Of course, I am aware of the considerable varieties of routine disturbance/inhibition due to artistic situations. Of course, I acknowledge that this is not a comprehensive explanation. But it may appear to be a starting point for analyzing particular artworks (i.e., anchoring situation of/in artworks) conceived of as strategic devices, that operates in modifying different types of mental states. This is the theoretical background. The complementary side of the work would be then to develop an account of the strategic role of building an artistic situation.

Replies to Dominic Lopez 3: The relevance of mechanisms, (b) 'which one?' & the case of electroacoustic music

Maria Rossi

8 janv. 2003 19:57 UT

Second, I agree, of course, with D. Lopez for stating that when any interaction with an artwork x occurs, a number of cognitive mechanisms fails to be engaged. I though do not see the direct connection of this fact with H. In my framework, this fact simply means that we have to know which kind of mechanism has failed to be engaged that would otherwise be involved in everyday life -- with the same kind of situation/object as target of attention. Recall: the idea behind H is that many artistic situations frequently disturb capacities that are massively engaged in everyday object-perception. Then, the interesting fact is to study only the relevant mechanisms (given characteristics of the target-object of attention), and to study both sides of its (dys)functioning in order to achieve a clear comparison. My background intuition is that this analysis of a particular artwork should reveal its operating structures, and even a part of the artistic project or intention (whether it was initially or was not an "conscious intention" does not really matter here). We need to flesh out this on examples (case studies).

Electroacoustic music is relevant here, I claim, because many works in electroacoustic music rely on a two steps composition process. First, the composer use of environmental sounds (recordings of physical objects and situation signatures) on which (auditory-recognition) routines can be smoothly applied. (Note that musical instruments are also physical objects.) Second, the composer build acoustic situations in modifying the initial database of recorded sounds. Pioneering works: for instance, Stockhausen 'Gesang der Jungelinge', Schaeffer and Henry 'Symphonie pour un homme seul'. The basic tools for modifying recorded sound are now widespread (mixing, spatial modifications, reverberation, echo, delay, filtering, and many more specialized processors) -- these seem to be analogs for the composer of the painter brushes. Each tool is a signal processor that can alter the recorded acoustic signals, and then allows to build anchoring situations where the mind faces unfamiliar patterns (because some recognition-routines are inhibited or disturbed).

Au pied de mon arbre

Jose Luis Gujarro

9 janv. 2003 12:10 UT

Je n'arrive pas à comprendre l'affirmation de N-B. : « Each tool is a signal processor that can alter the recorded acoustic signals,

and the ALLOWS TO BUILD ANCHORING SITUATIONS where the mind faces unfamiliar patterns » (je m'excuse d'utiliser des majuscules pour souligner ce que je ne comprends pas).

Est-ce que l'expérience artistique ne peut pas se déclencher subitement sans une situation d'ancrage préalable. Ou bien est-ce que cette situation d'ancrage surgit au même moment que l'on a une expérience artistique ?

En tous cas, la fin du message de N.B. me semble très d'accord avec ce que je propose : dégager le contexte « utilitaire » et traiter l'information « créativement » dans mon sens (i.e., d'une manière semblable à celle qu'on traite l'information quand notre esprit n'est pas encore formé et on la perçoit, disons, « directement » sans avoir recours à l'information contextuelle apprise socialement).

Par exemple, je me promène tous les jours sans un parc avec mon chien et je passe près d'un vieux arbre qui me plaît. Mais un jour, en regardant son tronc rugueux, je ne vois plus l'arbre mais, justement, ses « rides » et c'est à partir de cela que je perçois l'arbre d'une manière « créative » tout à fait nouvelle. Avant je ne voyais que l'arbre, un arbre qui avait une place dans les informations contextuelles de mon esprit. Maintenant je vois l'ARBRE pour la première fois, « directement », sans cette information contextuelle qui m'empêchait la perception mystique-artistique.

C'est très flou, je sais. Mais c'est dans cette voie que je « rêve » (N.B. dixit !) de la condition nécessaire et suffisante.

Art and heuristics for cognitive science

Roberto Casati

10 janv. 2003 16:47 UT

Commenting on Nicolas Bullot, Dominic Lopes wrote:

"My worry is that there is not a single cognitive mechanism that fails to be engaged in our appreciation of some artwork. Thus proposals of the form "mechanism X is involved in appreciating some art works" are hardly likely to be illuminating."

Agreement on this skeptical point is compatible with the idea of studying appropriately chosen artworks, however defined or characterized, as guiding cases for the study of some cognitive mechanisms. If selective attention and routine inhibition are enhanced in our engaging with artworks, then we could interestingly use them for heuristic purposes.

Réponse à J.L.G. : (...) allows to build anchoring situations (...)

Maria Rossi

10 janv. 2003 23:34 UT

Quelques précisions. (1) Les situations (d'ancrage) artistiques sont des artefacts (ou composées d'artefacts). Elles sont donc, au moins partiellement, fabriquées et conçues par des agents humains. J'adopte une position réaliste et externaliste à leur sujet. Les situations existent indépendamment de l'esprit de l'observateur -- contrairement au dispositif artistique dans son intégralité fonctionnelle (qui dépend aussi des attitudes des agents qui interagissent avec la situation) ou à l'expérience esthétique ayant lieu indépendamment d'une situation artistique. Les situations d'ancrage respectent des types qui déterminent les genres artistiques. (2) Au sujet de la question technique concernant la musique électroacoustique : il me semble admissible de considérer le milieu acoustique d'une salle de concert comme une situation sur laquelle les capacités de reconnaissance auditive des agents viennent s'ancrer. Le milieu acoustique permet, comme les médias visuels, de véhiculer des informations spatiales, objectives et sémantiques. L'hypothèse est que beaucoup de travaux en musique, et spécialement en musique électroacoustique (mais pas uniquement, d'autant que ce point est aussi valable pour les arts visuels), jouent avec les capacités à reconnaître l'identité des sources informationnelles (ici, dans cet exemple, sources sonores). Il s'agirait de jeux sur la reconnaissance de l'identité des objets. Or, pour jouer avec les apparences (de l'identité) de X, il faut disposer d'outils pour modifier les apparences de X, et être capable de présenter X sous la forme d'un pattern inhabituel (sur lequel la routine du système de reconnaissance ne pourra pas complètement s'exécuter). A ce sujet, il y a une relativité historique des techniques utilisées et utilisables (la technique photographique a modifié l'histoire des arts visuels, les techniques électroacoustiques ont modifiées l'histoire de la musique etc.).

Réponse à J.L.G. : L'arbre, la routine, le concept, la ride, l'analogie

Maria Rossi

10 janv. 2003 23:37 UT

Nous sommes d'accord sur le fait que l'expérience esthétique est courante quand la routine cesse, car l'exécution des routines ne laisse généralement pas de temps pour scruter ou examiner l'objet X. Cependant, nous divergeons sur ce que permet la cessation de la routine. Le fait d'être sensible aux 'rides' du tronc suppose de disposer du concept de 'ride' et de l'opérer, par exemple, une analogie entre les rides d'un visage et les crevasses d'un tronc. Par conséquent, le plus vraisemblable, c'est qu'un certain type de pensée conceptuelle (ou plus minimalement de catégorisation) commence lorsque les routines cessent ou ne s'exécutent pas automatiquement. Il n'y a donc pas de raison évidente pour restreindre l'expérience esthétique à l'expérience non-conceptuelle.

Reply to R. Casati: Two types of 'art & cognition' heuristics

Maria Rossi

11 janv. 2003 1:57 UT

It seems that we are faced with two types of heuristic roles. Type 1: Artwork study may have heuristic roles for cognitive mechanism study. Type 2: Cognitive mechanism study may have heuristic roles for artwork study. Debates on type-1 and type-2 heuristics have different scopes, but may be somewhat related. Type-1 heuristics is interesting and not trivial, I agree with R. Casati. Moreover, hypothesis H endorses the validity of type-2 heuristics. Now, if hypothesis H is true, then the truth of H implies that the aesthetic mind has a particular interest for routine inhibition. This phenomena could have several explanations, depending on routine and inhibition types. A basic explanation is that routine inhibition -- in general -- allows conscious access, and that conscious access is required for aesthetic experience. A slightly more sophisticated (but speculative) hypothesis is that routine inhibition is used by the aesthetic mind to achieve a reflexive -- or meta-representational -- 'analysis' of its own mental operations, through the mediation of

special-effect artefacts (in anchoring situations). I let you find the relevant hundreds of examples (as an exercise of type-1 heuristics).

H and two predictions

Roberto Casati

13 janv. 2003 11:33 UT

Bullot writes:

...if hypothesis H is true, then the truth of H implies that the aesthetic mind has a particular interest for routine inhibition."

I would like to point out two interesting and promising side-effects of this characterization of the aesthetic mind.

1. If hypothesis H is true, then we are bound to expect that some cases in which there is no artwork around and in which there is a routine inhibition, the perceiving subject will be aesthetically engaged. (I can right now see from my window a beautiful snowstorm in which snow whirls in surprising patterns.)

2. If H is true and situations such as those in 1 occur, then we may ambitiously look for an explanation of the "origins" of artistic creation, as an attempt to "replay" situations such as those described in 1 by means of artefacts.

Reply to R. Casati: Two applications of H hypothesis related to (i) art origins and (ii) the relation of 'free' aesthetic attention to the conception of an anchoring situation

Maria Rossi

14 janv. 2003 2:47 UT

R.Casati has pointed out two helpful developments/implications of hypothesis H. I agree with him about their particular interest. These implications may be a first step in order to understand the relation of 'free' aesthetic attention to the conception of artistic (anchoring) situations.

The first application, call it 'H-a1', is a theoretical prediction about the occurrence of an aesthetical event : "If hypothesis H is true, then we are bound to expect that some cases in which there is no artwork around and in which there is a routine inhibition, the perceiving subject will be aesthetically engaged. (I can right now see from my window a beautiful snowstorm in which snow whirls in surprising patterns.)" I add in the description: ... and when you were paying attention to each particular snow whirl, you have to stop to hit (routinely) the keyboard for looking at a particularly unexpected and rare event in Firenze or Paris landscapes (urban anchoring situations of the Casati-mind aesthetical event). Then, in this kind of example, H-a1 prediction seems to work and is appealing from both a phenomenological and a behavioral point of view (and even, arguably, a neural point of view). A problem remains for us: we have to find a means for distinguishing aesthetic routine inhibitions from other types of routine inhibition, since many routine inhibitions may not be aesthetical at all. Here, we may have help in crossing the specification of the target of perception (broad content), the type of behavior which is the result of inhibiting, and the general attitude (experience-oriented).

The second application, call it H-a2, is about art origins : "2. If H is true and situations such as those in 1 occur, then we may ambitiously look for an explanation of the 'origins' of artistic creation, as an attempt to 'replay' situations such as those described in 1 by means of artifacts." According to my intuitions, H-a2 is a very exciting hypothesis. The (anchoring) situation of the artistic device would be conceived of as a medium for (re)producing a mental event elicited from a routine-inhibition process (in the mind of the artist or any observer). Even if it seems more plausible for explaining the genesis of figurative art, it appears to me as relevant even for the study of abstract arts. The reason is that artifacts in abstract art, even if they are not strictly depictive, have typical mental effects that can be reproduced in the mind of each observer. Moreover, H-a2 could help in the generalization of H scope. Finally, in accordance to the theory that I assume, artwork can be compared to experimental design (or set-up). H-a2 is a principled grounding for this hypothesis.

For the record

Roberto Casati

15 janv. 2003 8:34 UT

Neither Florence nor Paris, but Leipzig. If anchoring matters, then my aesthetically pleasing, routine-interrupting snowstorm must be located correctly!

Objets

Clotilde Lampignano

13 janv. 2003 11:36 UT

Comment pourrait-on expliquer avec la théorie exposée (entre la perception et l'esthétique) la relation entre l'exposition d'un tableau (oeuvre d'art) et celle-là d'un produit manufacturé (la roue, un objet de tous les jours) posée sur un escabeau (objet de tous les jours)? . Quelle pourrait être la relation entre un tableau, pour exemple, les icônes, qui sont des objets populaires de dévotion, et qui étaient aussi dans les maisons, objets de dévotion de tous les jours, tandis que exposées dans les musées deviennent matière d'exposition? . Encore quelle pourrait être la relation entre un tableau méconnu tenu dans une maison (par exemple) d'un peintre fameux et le tableau fameux du même peintre dans un musée? . Ou dans les oeuvres en série, ou dans le design de tous les jours, alors qu'un exemplaire , quand le temps passe, peut venir prélevé et devenir appris comme oeuvre d'art.

Statut courant des objets artistiques et dépendance à l'égard des situations

Maria Rossi

13 janv. 2003 19:32 UT

Il s'agit de questions importantes. Je vais vous répondre partiellement, en important des concepts provenant d'autres travaux. Vos questions concernent la relation entre (i) la reconnaissance, l'évaluation et l'effectivité du STATUT artistique ou esthétique et (ii) les situations d'exposition et d'ancrage. D'après la théorie que j'admets, aucun objet spatio-temporel n'a de STATUT artistique indépendamment des agents qui le lui accordent. Il n'y aurait pas d'objets artistiques s'il n'y avait pas des agents et des penseurs pour leur reconnaître ou leur assigner ce STATUT (d'abord mental et expérientiel, puis institutionnel et légal). Par conséquent, l'assignation du STATUT artistique ou esthétique à un élément-cible X dépend des attitudes des agents, et des situations (d'ancrage) qui ont été fabriquées en relation avec ces attitudes (peut être en accord avec les deux points discutés avec R. Casati). Par ailleurs, étant donné que les situations d'ancrage portent la trace des attitudes et intentions qui ont conduit à leur fabrication, il existe dans certains contextes historiques un MARQUEUR objectif et externe du STATUT artistique ou esthétique qui dépend simplement de la position spatio-temporelle d'un objet : être ou ne pas être dans un musée (versus hors du musée), être ou ne pas être sur la scène dans une salle de concert (versus dans la rue lors de la fête de la musique) etc. Ce marqueur spatio-temporel est un phénomène relativement 'extérieur' à l'expérience et la pensée esthétique (aesthetical mind), mais fondamental pour comprendre l'institutionnalisation des produits artistiques. Marcel Duchamp est, je crois, un maître dans la conception d'expériences sur ce marqueur externe (et sur la dépendance contextuelle du STATUT artistique). L'intérêt de poursuivre une théorie de l'attention esthétique est de montrer que, in fine, les analyses (e.g., sociologiques) qui limitent l'analyse de l'art à l'analyse de ce genre de marqueur externe sont incomplètes. Maintenant, quelles sont les raisons pour lesquelles le STATUT artistique et esthétique est assigné à tel objet X, c'est là une longue histoire (qui concerne la relation entre les propriétés de X et les intérêts de ceux qui portent leur attention sur X).

Procédures d'exposition ou de représentation?

Jérôme Pelletier
14 janv. 2003 8:38 UT

N'est-ce pas plutôt parce que la cause de ma perception est, par exemple, un tableau et parce que j'ai la capacité d'avoir une attention duelle, parce que j'ai la capacité de voir dans le tableau ce qu'il représente tout en percevant la surface bi-dimensionnelle de la toile (cf. Wollheim), que ma reconnaissance du contenu représenté n'est pas accompagnée des routines habituellement associées à la perception non-esthétique? Selon cette explication alternative de H, ce ne serait pas les procédures d'exposition mais les procédures de représentation qui expliqueraient l'inhibition de certaines routines. Dans ce nouveau cadre explicatif, les ready-made et l'art moderne seraient alors, non plus des exemples, mais des contre-exemples. Mais je doute que cette conséquence soit réellement dommageable.

Réponse ci-dessus

Maria Rossi
14 janv. 2003 16:19 UT

Réponse ci-dessus.

Procédures d'exposition ou de représentation?

Jérôme Pelletier
14 janv. 2003 8:51 UT

N'est-ce pas plutôt parce que la cause de ma perception est, par exemple, un tableau et parce que j'ai la capacité perceptuelle de voir dans le tableau ce qu'il représente tout en percevant la surface bi-dimensionnelle de la toile (Cf. Wollheim sur l'attention esthétique conçue comme une attention duelle) que ma reconnaissance du contenu représenté n'est pas accompagnée des routines habituellement associées à la perception non-esthétique? Dans ce nouveau cadre explicatif de H, ce ne serait pas les procédures d'exposition mais les procédures de représentation qui expliqueraient l'inhibition de certaines routines perceptives dans la perception esthétique. Une conséquence de l'acceptation de ce cadre explicatif serait que les ready-made et l'art moderne seraient non plus des exemples mais des contre-exemples de l'explication proposée. Mais je doute que cette conséquence soit réellement dommageable.

Exposition et Représentation

Maria Rossi
14 janv. 2003 16:27 UT

J. Pelletier : « Selon cette explication alternative de H, ce ne serait pas les procédures d'exposition mais les procédures de représentation qui expliqueraient l'inhibition de certaines routines. » Réponse : Le concept de 'dispositif artistique' (occurent lors d'interactions entre (i) les 'Xn' éléments-cibles de la situation d'ancrage et (ii) les attitudes des agents explorant la situation) est plus général que le concept d'artefact représentationnel ou de 'contenu représenté' d'un tableau, tel qu'il pourrait être analysé à partir d'une approche apparentée à celle de Wollheim. La notion de 'dispositif artistique' ne renvoie pas nécessairement à des œuvres 'représentationnelles'. Par exemple, un monochrome d'Yves Klein, une toile blanche de Robert Rauschenberg, ou une composition de Morton Feldman, ne sont apparemment pas des situations d'ancrage 'représentationnelles', au sens faible où il ne s'agit pas d'œuvres figuratives (il est peut être possible d'imaginer/représenter à partir des surfaces ou des patterns de certains de ces objetsST, mais c'est là un problème plus spécifique). La notion d'exposition de 'Xn' éléments-cibles dans une situation d'ancrage est plus générale, et peut être plus fondamentale, que celle d'exposition d'un TYPE particulier d'élément-cible ayant des 'propriétés représentationnelles'. (Par ailleurs, il me semble important de cesser de centrer unilatéralement les analyses sur la perception visuelle des tableaux.)

Cependant, il est vraisemblable que certaines 'propriétés représentationnelles' des artefacts artistiques puissent expliquer l'inhibition de certaines routines, mais il est improbable que cela puisse être une explication suffisante. Mon inclination irait dans une mise relation de ce point avec les hypothèses H-a1 et H-a2 formulées avec R. Casati (dans cette même discussion) : les artefacts 'représentationnels' restent dans ce contexte des cas particuliers. Mais ces questions sont en effet à examiner de près.

Autres problèmes (attention, 'objet représentationnel', readymades)

Maria Rossi
14 janv. 2003 16:30 UT

Il y a un autre problème en relation avec le concept d'attention : quelle est la nature de cette 'attention duelle' ? L'attention peut-elle être 'duelle' (beaucoup ne le pensent pas) ? L'attention esthétique doit-elle être duelle ? Pourquoi n'y aurait-il que deux niveaux de perception ou d'examen dans la perception esthétique ? Pourquoi n'y en aurait-il pas beaucoup d'autres ?

Les readymades et l'art moderne : exemples ou contre-exemples ? Ce sont des exemples de dispositifs artistiques. Maintenant, quel est leur rapport avec la capacité de reconnaissance d'un contenu représenté (devant les 'objets représentationnels') ? Il faudrait préciser la question car l'art moderne comprend un nombre important d'œuvres figuratives. Pour les readymades, la situation est là aussi complexe, l'œuvre d'un artiste contemporain comme Bertrand Lavier est un travail où la frontière entre 'strict ready-made' et 'objet représentationnel' est continuellement incertaine.

Autres points : (i) Il faudrait spécifier les conditions d'un artefact artistique ayant des propriétés représentationnelles. Quelle est exactement l'extension de cette notion ? (ii) Comment libérer ce genre d'analyse théorique du fait qu'il s'agit essentiellement d'une théorie des tableaux (or il y a beaucoup d'autres formes de situations d'ancrage artistiques), voire même d'un type particulier de perception des tableaux dans l'art occidental ?

Situation d'ancrage objets cibles

Gloria Origg

14 janv. 2003 12:22 UT

Dans l'article de Nicolas Bullot il me semble que l'existence d'une situation d'ancrage est un élément central de la mise en place d'un dispositif artistique.

Et, bien sûr, la "situation d'ancrage" d'une oeuvre artistique est liée à l'institutionnalisation de l'art, c'est à dire, elle représente ou elle met en discussion les institutions médiatrices qui consacrent une oeuvre en tant que "art".

Dans beaucoup d'art contemporain la situation d'ancrage est elle-même l'objet de l'expérience esthétique (les exemples des oeuvres de Serra dans l'article d'Alva Noë ou celles de Ikam et Fleri dans celui d'Alain Grumbach vont dans cette direction).

Est-ce qu'on peut alors vraiment distinguer entre "situation d'ancrage" comme contexte spatio-temporel à l'intérieur duquel un agent perçoit une oeuvre et l'oeuvre elle-même ?

Dispositifs interactifs et situations d'ancrage

Maria Rossi

14 janv. 2003 17:14 UT

La question est en effet intéressante, dans la mesure où j'utilise ce concept pour désigner un trait universel et nécessaire des dispositifs artistiques. Les œuvres interactives pourraient sembler constituer une difficulté pour l'ontologie que j'admets. Ce n'est pourtant pas le cas pour la raison suivante : le concept général de 'situation d'ancrage' n'implique pas que la situation soit immuable ou incorruptible (en dépit des efforts considérables des institutions pour conserver ou restaurer certaines). Dans la mesure où il s'agit d'un ensemble d'éléments ou d'événements physiques ayant une extension spatio-temporelle, les situations d'ancrage peuvent être modifiées ou altérées par les interactions avec les individus qui les explorent. Cela est vrai pour toutes les situations d'ancrage (des grottes ancestrales aux œuvres de Carl Andre).

Dans l'art contemporain, les œuvres interactives sont un cas particulier de ce qu'on appelle parfois les 'installations' (= exposition de Xn éléments-cibles sans véritable contraintes sur le format), dans lequel les interventions du spectateur modifient l'apparence ou l'organisation de la situation d'ancrage. Dans ce cas, ces modifications des situations d'ancrage ont été décidées (mais, généralement, pas complètement déterminées) par les concepteurs des situations. Certes, lors de l'occurrence des interactions, les situations sont largement modifiées par les actions des visiteurs (artistes ou spectateurs), mais il y a cependant un système physique (le dispositif d'exposition et d'interaction) qui reste relativement peu modifié. Ce dispositif (ordinateur, projecteur, interfaces, convertisseurs etc.) correspond à ce que le concepteur du dispositif artistique a paramétré (pour obtenir, peut être, certains effets cognitifs et attentionnels) – réalisant en cela une sorte de dispositif expérimental. La notion de situation d'ancrage fait dans ce cas référence à ce système particulier, qui a des propriétés d'indépendance à l'égard des états mentaux des visiteurs. Par exemple, l'architecture des circuits de l'ordinateur qui contrôle le dispositif est indépendante des états mentaux des visiteurs lors de l'exposition.

Est-ce que la situation d'ancrage fait partie de l'expérience perceptive ?

Gloria Origg

16 janv. 2003 13:17 UT

Dans la partie finale de ta réponse, Nicolas, tu fais l'exemple des circuits d'un ordinateur comme faisant partie d'une situation d'ancrage qui reste relativement indépendante de l'état perceptuel de l'observateur. Mais cela me pose des problèmes. En effet, il me semble que dans ta définition de « dispositif artistique » la situation d'ancrage fait partie de l'expérience perceptive : elle représente la région spatio-temporelle qui « encadre » cette expérience et participe de l'activation ou de l'inhibition de certaines routines. D'où ma question si l'on peut toujours distinguer entre situation d'ancrage et objets cibles, surtout dans certaines œuvres d'art contemporain.

Et je crois qu'il y a en effet un problème particulier dans certaines expériences artistiques qui utilisent les nouvelles technologies. Par exemple, dans le cas de la Web-Art c'est le site même qui est l'œuvre, et l'expérience de l'utilisateur qui se promène sur le site coïncide avec son expérience « artistique » (pour une analyse de l'art sur l'Internet voir Annie Gentes : « Les sites artistiques sur Internet : réflexions sur la médiation aux œuvres d'art » Solaris, 2001).

Situations : Réalisme et dépendance causale versus phénoménisme

Maria Rossi

17 janv. 2003 2:40 UT

La manière dont on répond au problème dépend de l'ontologie de la perception qui est admise. La notion de situation d'ancrage que j'emploie jusqu'ici dépend d'une option réaliste concernant les éléments-cibles présents dans cette situation, et d'une théorie causale de leur rôle dans la genèse de l'expérience perceptive. Différentes options réalistes restent possibles. Ici, c'est principalement l'option phénoméniste -- d'après laquelle n'existe que ce dont on fait l'expérience -- qui est écartée. Cela permet de

préserver la possibilité d'une analyse d'un contrôle exogène et partiel de l'expérience par la situation d'ancrage. Il n'est pas plausible que le sujet percevant dispose d'une connaissance de la totalité des conditions causales qui déterminent son expérience perceptive (e.g., les circuits mentionnés). Certaines conditions non- perçues peuvent cependant exercer un rôle causal qu'il peut être utile de prendre en compte pour comprendre l'organisation du dispositif (e.g., la place des musiciens ou sources sonores dans les opéras de Stokhausen, Nono ou Lachenmann). Sans nier qu'il y ait des spécificités propres à une situation telle qu'un 'site Internet', le visiteur du site se retrouve confronté à des environnements contrôlés par des chaînes causales (ordinateurs, logiciels et des concepteurs des sites) dont il ne connaît pas le détail, mais dont l'organisation peut être instructive pour comprendre l'expérience qu'il a de tel site particulier.

Looking in

Noga Arikha

15 janv. 2003 20:49 UT

An interesting dichotomy has arisen in the course of this symposium, one which, in a sense, was at the root of its conception: on the one hand, we have art historians and artists, who take for granted the particular status of the genre, or category, work of art; on the other, philosophers or cognitive scientists such as Roberto Casati, Nicolas Bullot or Alain Grumbach, for whom the very existence of this genre or category is suspect. It does seem, however, that the twain shall never meet if this very basic disagreement about the status of our subject-matter continues to hold.

I, for my part, believe that confusions are deepened if one continues to take as exemplars for the discussion of art cognition precisely those works that put in question the whole history of art. Those works - Duchamp's in first line, of course - arose at a particular historical moment. Their message is contingent on this moment; their (relative) success in turning the concept of artistic creation on its head does not at all *entail* a justification of this success that is not also contingent on a particular history. The fact that it was possible to do what Duchamp did does not negate or put in question the status, value and ontology of what came before him. I do not see how an 'anchoring situation' is *necessary* to the experience of an art object as such: a Leonardo drawing remains a very particular object indeed (irreducibly so) wherever it is shown. Looking at a work of art entails looking *into* it, at the details of composition, colour, plastic execution; only then can it pay off to look *around* it - that is, at the historical, cultural context of execution. But here too, the context that matters is historical; the physical one is incidental.

If some people need an anchoring situation to take a close look, that may be because they need to be reminded that a very particular experience indeed is in store for them if they look carefully. (How one may describe what this experience is without reducing it remains an open question, which we are all engaged here in trying to answer.) It might be at this, didactic, crudely psychological level that attention is modulated by anchoring situations. But - to echo Gloria's question below - how would this have anything to do with the ontology of a work of art? And so, of what use is the discussion of this ontology to the unravelling of art cognition?

Reply to Noga Arikha (1): A multifarious disagreement

Maria Rossi

16 janv. 2003 22:13 UT

I strongly disagree with all these points, but am very grateful to Noga Arika for having expressed these detailed criticisms. They will allow us to be explicit on some of the deepest challenges of the art and cognition relationships. Moreover, it appears that the time is now arrived to endorse explicit normative claims. In a sense, this is also an intellectual pleasure of the cognitive life that cohabits with art work. Finally, this will be a more vivid end for the discussion. It will be finished on a multifarious intellectual and practical disagreement. It bears on the normative conception of art evaluation, the methodology that has to be chosen for linking 'art' and 'cognition', the research programs that can be related to this link and probably on the very nature of 'art'. I will not be consensual, because sometimes important issues require controversies.

Reply to Noga Arikha (2): A false dichotomy

Maria Rossi

16 janv. 2003 22:19 UT

Arikha: "An interesting dichotomy has arisen in the course of this symposium, one which, in a sense, was at the root of its conception: on the one hand, we have art historians and artists, who take for granted the particular status of the genre, or category, work of art; on the other, philosophers or cognitive scientists such as Roberto Casati, Nicolas Bullot or Alain Grumbach, for whom the very existence of this genre or category is suspect."

This dichotomy cannot be accepted under the present formulation, since it does not describe correctly the respective positions of each actor. Moreover, it evades a fundamental intellectual cleavage.

First, many professional artists are not 'naïve' regarding the theoretical complexities linked with concepts or practises such as 'artwork kind', 'artistic status', or 'medium'. Many artistic devices have therefore a critical dimension. Here is an historical argument: many art works cannot be properly explained or understood if we do not think of them as related to such and such theoretical and critical complexities. We have to think in the first place about modern art, but the relevance of this claim may be more general. The statement in the example is normative: an agent that interacts with this type of artwork can fail to grasp this critical dimension. For instance, you may not have properly understood the critical dimension of Duchamp's artworks and posterity, or refused to accept this dimension as essentially belonging to the particular artistic device 'readymade'.

Second, art theoreticians such as Casati, Grumbach or me were reflecting in this symposium on the basic principles of a general theory of art -- with cognition in the mind. We have discussed the problem of the identity of the kind 'artwork' in relation to the purpose of this general theory. For my part, I have admitted as a temporary tool a social and non-normative specification of artwork extension (what is recognized as such, for instance in museum or theatre). Therefore, if any "disagreement about the status of our subject-matter continues to hold", this is at the level of a normative conception of art work.

Reply to Noga Arikha (3): An other dichotomy and a normative engagement

Maria Rossi

16 janv. 2003 22:24 UT

I am inclined to think that the interest for the mentioned theoretical complexities (linked with concepts or practises such as 'artwork kind', 'artistic status', or 'medium') is at the root of the thinking and acting of Duchamp and his allies (such as Beuys, Cage, Kosuth, Kounellis, Lavier, Buren). More generally, many artworks are linked with philosophical, theoretical, cognitive and political problems. This is the relevance of this link that renders the art and cognition relationship attractive. If there were not any of such conceptual links, who would have cared of art as 'art' and not 'decoration' ?

Therefore, according to my analysis, the dichotomy is not between artists and theoreticians. Artists can be theoreticians and theoreticians can be artists (think, for instance, about the writings of contemporary composers). The crucial dichotomy is between:

(1) artists/theoreticians who take into account certain deep cognitive or political problems in the process of their own work production (artistic or theoretical, it does not matter), or even in a particular aesthetical-attention event; and,

(2) artists/theoreticians who do not take into account these deep cognitive or political problems, because, among many other reasons, they remain attached to a particular ancient and prestigious tradition, which has lost its particular critical power in a given social context.

I will try, in my present and future work, to defend an approach of type (1). The reasons belong both to theory and ethics. In that line, the normative background of my article is a defence of experimental art. Experimental art = any action (whatever media are used for the memory of this action) based on the building of an anchoring situation that takes into account, or reveal, any cognitive or political problem. Under that conception, art works are targets for cognition and critical thinking, and not decorative object in the apartments of richest people.

Reply to Noga Arikha (4): Number compositions, from 1 to 4

Maria Rossi

16 janv. 2003 22:26 UT

Arikha: "(1) I, for my part, believe that confusions are deepened if one continues to take as exemplars for the discussion of art cognition precisely those works that put in question the whole history of art. (2) Those works - Duchamp's in first line, of course - arose at a particular historical moment. (3; 4) Their message is contingent on this moment; their (relative) success in turning the concept of artistic creation on its head does not at all entail a justification of this success that is not also contingent on a particular history.

Replies: (1) We have stated in the discussion that H assertion is valid not only for Duchamp's art works, but for many others. (2) I agree on the historical dependency, but do not have the same interpretation. (3) We have to distinguish the explanatory/descriptive phase and the normative phase of the analysis. (4) Regarding the normative phase, I give in the present reply the outline of a justification of experimental art.

Reply to Noga Arikha (5): Number compositions, from 5 to 12

Maria Rossi

16 janv. 2003 22:30 UT

Arikha: "(5, 6) The fact that it was possible to do what Duchamp did does not negate or put in question the status, value and ontology of what came before him. (7) I do not see how an 'anchoring situation' is necessary to the experience of an art object as such: a Leonardo drawing (8) remains a very particular object indeed (irreducibly so) wherever it is shown. (9) Looking at a work of art entails looking into it, at the details of composition, colour, plastic execution; (10) only then can it pay off to look around it - that is, at the historical, cultural context of execution. (11) But here too, the context that matters is historical; (12) the physical one is incidental."

Replies: (5) In the non-normative phase of the analysis, I admit all 'art' phenomena as being relevant for the understanding of aesthetic mind. (6) Same point as in (3). (7) Misunderstanding. Anchoring situation refers to the physical objects/events with which you are interacting. In case of Leonardo's drawing, we can distinguish two types of anchoring situations: (i) the paper sheet and deposit on it (e.g., ink, red chalk or charcoal), and (ii) the socio-cultural context where the drawing can be seen. Incidental: you endorse an idealistic and romantic conception of artwork-content access. If anchoring situations are not necessary, then telepathy does exist. (8) This point is false: put it in the water or in a fire, I predict some physical modifications of it. (9) Of course, but it means that you pay attention to the target-elements of the anchoring situation (organization, feature, localization, image if any...). I note that you restrict art work to painting... see below. (10) Dogmatic assertion about methodology. In the analysis of interacting elements, there is no such a mandatory starting point. Moreover: same mistake about anchoring situation. (11) Social factors are not independent of the physical configuration of anchoring situations. (12) Indeed, this remark is so deeply idealist and dualist !

General comment: This is a principled error of aesthetics to be systematically biased toward the theory of paintings. In agreement with M. Duchamp among others, I endorsed the view that it is historical contingency if occidental artists favoured painting production (note the past tense). Duchamp's work is a salutary critic of this favouring. Art is too important to be left in the hands of only one social category. Painters have no more privileged access to the essence of art than everyday people, sculptors, composers, dancer, performers, actors, writers, thinker, installers, photographers, film-makers and so forth. The concept of anchoring situation intends to do justice of this variety of possible artistic interventions in a complex social world. It is linked with a critic of the common sense view about artwork, in particular the one which assumes that artwork have to be equated with the instantiation of a particular distal and physical object. The later = "physical object hypothesis" according to Wollheim (e.g., 1980: §4, §§ 9-10, § 20, Essay III). Situated mental acts may be at the foundation of artwork ontology.

Reply to Noga Arikha (6): Number compositions, from 13 to 17

Maria Rossi

16 janv. 2003 22:34 UT

Arikha: "(13) If some people need an anchoring situation to take a close look, that may be because they need to be reminded that a very particular experience indeed is in store for them if they look carefully. (14) (How one may describe what this experience is without reducing it remains an open question, which we are all engaged here in trying to answer.) (15) It might be at this, didactic,

crudely psychological level that attention is modulated by anchoring situations. (16) But - to echo Gloria's question below - how would this have anything to do with the ontology of a work of art? (17) And so, of what use is the discussion of this ontology to the unravelling of art cognition?"

(13) More or less H-a hypothesis, if I understand correctly. We will perhaps try to develop this idea later. (14) We cannot explain without reducing. We have to know that a particular explanation does not intend to explain a whole complex phenomena. H is partial explanation. (15) Attention is a central phenomenon if we want to understand art and cognition relationships. The fact that we have scientific tools for studying attention does not impede us to analyse the epistemological and aesthetical roles of attentional capability. The modulation or control of attention is not a trivial question – and it is not only a psychological question. Regarding the aesthetical mind, it may help to understand the way a work of art may have cognitive goals or effects on individuals or groups, and therefore political or social effects. (16) A clue: 'look around' (in discussions) and avoid in this case 'look in'. (17) Ontology and historical situations are relevant in order to understand the aesthetical mind, since the aesthetical mind picks up its targets in the public world studied by ontology.

Reply to Nicolas Bullot - I

Noga Arikha
21 janv. 2003 22:26 UT

Many thanks to Nicolas Bullot for this extensive, detailed reply. It does, I think, call for further discussion, and I shall try here to address the points he has helpfully unpacked.

First, with regard to Reply 3: my point was precisely made to counteract the claim that 'theoretical complexities', or 'philosophical, theoretical, cognitive and political problems' are necessarily a helpful description of what art is about. I do not think this is a universalizable claim. One may of course believe that it need not be to have some usefulness. But, be that as it may, I would go further and suggest that, were art importantly and explicitly about such problems and complexities, it would not be art anymore, but indeed, simply one aspect of philosophical, theoretical, political discourse. To describe art as a type of discourse strikes me as deflationary both about art and about discourse. Oddly enough, no mention is made within these replies of emotion - whereas the capacity to elicit emotional response of a particular kind, whatever its nature may be, would seem to be the one necessary component of an artwork. Given that there is much ground nowadays to understand emotion as a form of cognition, why should it not take priority in the search for the nature of art cognition?

For to conflate "artists and theoreticians" cannot be right: artists are not theoreticians, just as potatoes are not carrots. To each his own. Some might be theoreticians, but again, some provision must be made for the possibility that some artists on the one hand, and some theoreticians on the other, might want to hold on to their job description without any need for further justification. To hold on to it does not entail that one understands artworks to be "decorative objects in the apartments of richest people" - a deflationary view if there ever was one!

Reply to Nicolas Bullot - II

Noga Arikha
21 janv. 2003 22:44 UT

(Continued from below.) However, point taken about the specificity of Bullot's approach with regard to experimental art. On that count, I would agree that his approach can yield interesting results (see in particular the ongoing exchange with Bernard Gortais). In Reply 5, apologies for not understanding fully what was meant by 'anchoring situation': again, point taken. I quite agree that an anchoring situation is needed - a drawing is a physical object. (I wrongly assumed anchoring situation to denote the space in which it happened to be shown, such as a museum, or a frame.) Yet, one can argue that a dance exists in the absence of dancers, and that a symphony exists without an orchestra; the relation of a scripted form to its realization in the performing arts requires, on examination, quite a different ontological analysis from that called for in the case of the visual arts. One need not be an 'idealist' or 'dualist' to note this complexity, although it is true that there is no artistic experience without the "instantiation of a particular distal and physical object". There might also, however, exist an interesting psychological ground for the leaning to 'idealism' or 'dualism'. In some ways, the insistence on the centrality of 'discourse' to art might strike one as equally 'dualist' - the manifestation of a strong attachment to verbalizable rationality. But this is the sort of disagreement that can lead one away from the topic of art cognition. How may one return to it?

I do agree that painters need not be accorded "privileged access to the essence of art". But the view that "social factors are not independent of the physical configuration of anchoring situations" is rather more contentious than Bullot seems to acknowledge. Not all instantiations of physical objects, however present the social factors and political message, are art - to say so would be to make redundant the whole category of art and to deny the existence of any difference between a good work and a bad one. It is also, curiously, to adopt the position of a joykiller or partypooper. A great work of art is one that transcends the here and now - an idea that seems, oddly, to frighten off theoreticians. Relativism and social constructivism are still fashionable, but they obfuscate, rather than elucidate, the why and how of artistic emotion as a response to the perfect, multilayered marriage of form and content. The study of attention, which Bullot mentions in Reply 6, is definitely a good starting-point for the analysis of response.

Quite evidently, the study of art cognition cannot do away with confrontations between differing points of view such as these. I thank Nicolas Bullot for the opportunity to take a close look at these differences, which could eventually result in the elaboration of a more wide-ranging programme of research.

Reply to reply I: Number composition from 18 to 21 (thought and theory in art)

Maria Rossi
22 janv. 2003 17:59 UT
Thank you for your very welcome replies. Your unpacking here is useful too.

N. Arikha: "First, (18) with regard to Reply 3: my point was precisely made to counteract the claim that 'theoretical complexities', or 'philosophical, theoretical, cognitive and political problems' are necessarily a helpful description of what art is about. (...) that, (19) were art importantly and explicitly about such problems and complexities, it would not be art anymore, but indeed, simply one aspect of philosophical, theoretical, political discourse. (20) To describe art as a type of discourse strikes me as deflationary (...). (21) Oddly enough, no mention is made within these replies of emotion (...) Given that there is much ground nowadays to

understand emotion as a form of cognition, why should it not take priority in the search for the nature of art cognition?

Reply: (18) Well stated: here is our opinion difference. It appears to be slightly contaminated with normative assumptions. I maintain my view, which is this: I do NOT claim that addressing these (cognitive, political) problems is a necessary condition for ALL kinds of art. I claim it is a necessary condition only for what I call provisionally 'experimental art' -- which is art of value, among other kinds of valued art. (19) Your thesis is a particularly (too) strong thesis. In order to be true, it requires a binary separation between two realms of expressiveness: (i) the realm of art expressiveness and (ii) the realm of (theoretical) discourses. But such a cleavage cannot hold because artwork production, artwork emotional expressiveness, and discourses about artwork continuously interact. (20-21) I do not reduce art to discourse. It is possible to address cognitive and political problems with a general tool which (temporarily) is a non-discursive tool. This tool is the (artistic) anchoring situation. Any particular anchoring situation can have many cognitive effects that 'plain discourses' cannot have (but, by the way, many artwork include discourses in their anchoring situation...). In fact, the cognitive effects of a particular art work may be multifarious: these may involve emotional effects, yes, but also effects on thinking, sensing, discriminating, expecting, believing, imagining, and so forth (including propositional attitudes). Thus, I am skeptical about opposing emotion versus discursive cognition. Moreover, why should be emotion such a necessary condition? Actually, many emotional responses may be linked with both beliefs or thoughts and perceptual experience. And, these beliefs and thoughts may be linked too with analyses (phenomenologically, behaviourally, sociologically) of the artwork (situated) effects. Crucial point: such an analysis may not necessarily be articulated neither in linguistic utterance nor in organized discourses (controversial questions, I know). Sensory delineating an object or an event without any concept for categorizing this object may help for addressing a cognitive problem. Cognition is multifarious. Cognition does not reduce neither to emotion nor to discourses (I already have presented this objection to R. Casati in a previous discussion).

Brief comment on this exchange

Noga Arikha
23 janv. 2003 3:11 UT

Thanks to Nicolas for this reply to the reply to the reply - at this point the misunderstandings are emerging, the agreements as well as the disagreements. I would also like to draw attention to Nicolas's response to Clotilde Lampignano below - which helps to understand very succinctly the richness of the notion of 'anchoring situation' - and, for our purposes in this discussion string, to the point he makes there: "L'intérêt de poursuivre une théorie de l'attention esthétique est de montrer que, in fine, les analyses (e.g., sociologiques) qui limitent l'analyse de l'art à l'analyse de ce genre de marqueur externe sont incomplètes."

Déjouer la routine

Bernard Gortais
17 janv. 2003 15:13 UT

Une caractéristique commune des œuvres artistiques est de permettre la relation entre un monde réel « connu » sujet aux routines de la perception comme l'écrit N. Bullot et quelque chose d'autre, insoupçonné, jusqu'alors. Dans cette relation les routines sont dans un premier temps déjouées; c'est ce qui permet l'expérience artistique. Je crois que cela est vrai pour le public et pour l'artiste. L'art n'est possible qu'à deux conditions : qu'il y ait du connu et qu'il y ait de l'inconnu accepté comme tel. Le processus artistique joue avec l'inconnu sans vouloir le conquérir et sans lui il n'est pas possible.

Réponse à Bernard Gortais

Maria Rossi
20 janv. 2003 10:50 UT

Merci beaucoup pour cette remarque qui est parfaitement en accord avec ce que j'ai essayé d'analyser. L'expression 'déjouer les routines' est bien trouvée. Elle a le mérite d'être plus neutre que la notion d'inhibition que j'ai employée, et d'ouvrir l'analyse, peut être, sur une dimension ludique. L'idée que les travaux artistiques reposent sur des stratégies pour 'déjouer' des routines est attrayante. Elle a des vertus de généralité et de clarté qui devraient satisfaire plus d'un théoricien ou d'un artiste.

Il me semble en outre qu'elle pourrait avoir des vertus pédagogiques pour faire comprendre certaines recherches peu populaires (et pourtant importantes) de l'art moderne. Vous semblez vous intéresser à un puissant outil pour déjouer les routines : le hasard (cf. votre élégant jardin des hasards). Il y a une magnifique tradition de travaux d'artistes qui parviennent à utiliser le hasard pour produire des événements pour l'attention esthétique. C'est un exemple que j'aurais du évoquer avant.

Je ne sais pas jusqu'où remonte cette histoire, mais elle passe par Duchamp et Cage ('chance operation'), Stockhausen et Boulez (pièces pour piano) et beaucoup d'autres dans les arts plastiques et la littérature. Utiliser le hasard, c'est stricto sensu utiliser une procédure pour déjouer/inhiber les routines.

La relation entre stratégie et routine

Bernard Gortais
20 janv. 2003 10:52 UT

La relation entre stratégie et routine est à développer. Coté créateur, je pense que dans la genèse d'une œuvre, la période du "début" qui correspond à la mise en place des contraintes est un dispositif stratégique qui vise à créer un cadre pour accueillir le hasard.

Coté public, une œuvre d'art est le support d'une relation artistique tant que la routine de la perception est déjouée; c'est à dire tant que le discours culturel ne s'est pas substitué au jeu de la relation artistique.

Récapitulation, stratégies et hasard, variété des processus d'inhibition

Maria Rossi
21 janv. 2003 14:55 UT

Résumons les principes de la théorie : pour rendre compte d'un trait commun aux dispositifs artistiques, j'ai introduit la notion de situation d'ancrage. La notion critique « l'hypothèse de l'objet physique » et les biais des théories esthétiques en faveur d'un genre artistique unique. Une situation d'ancrage est ce qu'il faut examiner pour examiner l'œuvre. La situation (ou les éléments dans la situation) est 'ce sur quoi' porte l'attention esthétique, ce qui est pris pour cible par des processus d'identification

démonstrative. Si le sujet peut 'promener' son attention librement sur les éléments de la situation, la situation exerce néanmoins en retour certaines contraintes -- ou a certains effets typiques -- sur les capacités sensorielles, motrices et cognitives du sujet explorant la situation. Ces effets sont généralement liés à des stratégies choisies par les artistes pour obtenir certains effets cognitifs ou sociaux (mais pas nécessairement). Les situations sont des contextes de type 'elicitors'. Parmi ces effets, l'hypothèse H suggère l'existence de processus d'inhibition 'déroutant' (dixit B. Gortais), pour ainsi dire, certaines routines. L'inhibition des routines est un concept qui s'est avéré étonnamment utile pour appréhender l'attention esthétique et les facteurs susceptibles d'expliquer la relation entre la fabrication d'un artefact artistique et la répétition d'une expérience antérieure (cf. discussion avec R. Casati). Cependant, H n'est qu'un premier principe d'analyse relativement rudimentaire. Chaque œuvre particulière correspond à un dispositif spécifique pour 'dérouter' les routines : l'analyse doit donc être poursuivie dans l'analyse des procédés utilisés dans chaque situation/œuvre particulière, ou chaque type de procédé. Nous avons trouvé un exemple important avec les procédés utilisant le hasard et les opérations aléatoires (j'ai oublié de mentionner Xenakis à ce sujet).

Il n'est pas trivial que des processus aléatoires puissent s'intégrer dans des stratégies (à développer). Quant à la « période du début », « côté créateur » : peut être. Mais, il faudrait maintenant commencer à distinguer les différents types d'inhibition de routines. L'inhibition repose sur un contraste : on empêche X pour permettre Y. Parmi X, il peut y avoir : (a) X = des routines sensori-motrices (on m'objectera que c'est de 'bas niveau'), (b) X = des routines d'identification et de reconnaissance, (c) X = des routines culturelles plus globales, liées au respect de certains canons ou styles esthétiques (académisme, art officiel etc.), ayant une forte dépendance à l'égard de la situation historique. La rupture « du début » à laquelle vous faites référence me semble être un trait lié à (c) ; et en effet l'histoire de l'art est remplie d'histoires héroïques qui font la narration de ce genre de rupture, pour parvenir à la 'création' d'un nouveau style ou genre. C'est à ce niveau aussi que la « substitution du discours culturel à la relation artistique » (je prends note de l'arrière-plan normatif) se place : il correspond, peut être, à la perte du rôle critique assignable à l'inhibition inaugurale.

Le doigt qui montre la lune

Bernard Gortais

21 janv. 2003 18:10 UT

...Chaque œuvre particulière correspond à un dispositif spécifique pour 'dérouter' les routines : l'analyse doit donc être poursuivie dans l'analyse des procédés utilisés dans chaque situation/œuvre particulière, ou chaque type de procédé... N. Bullot

Les artistes sont des individus particuliers en ce sens qu'ils perçoivent et qu'ils expriment de manière inhabituelle des aspects cachés de la réalité liés à des perceptions non routinières, (N. Bullot) dans un contexte social donné. Il mettent en œuvre des stratégies, des dispositifs matériels et des séquences d'action/perception pour vivre cette relation au monde ou pour la provoquer. L'usage de ces dispositifs contingents à la relation artistique converge vers la production d'œuvres qu'on appelle œuvres d'art quand elles parviennent à un public. L'artiste peut être n'importe qui ayant ce type de perceptions dans un contexte donné, et pouvant leurs donner une forme à l'aide de moyens d'expressions. Ces perceptions particulières peuvent survenir dans des cadres variés et prendre des formes diverses. Le passage à l'acte demande cependant plus ou moins d'audace. L'œuvre d'art peut-être n'importe quoi à condition d'être la trace du processus précédent. L'œuvre est jugée bonne quand elle est efficace, c'est à dire lorsqu'elle peut médiatiser une relation non routinière pour le public. Celui-ci peut être large ou petit sans que la relation en soit affectée car elle qualitative et subjective. La relation peut déclencher des émotions de toutes sortes dans l'éventail des émotions qui est le nôtre. Le contexte social changeant, une œuvre peut être jugée bonne ou mauvaise et réciproquement. L'étude des dispositifs matériels mis en œuvre permet de repérer a posteriori des écoles, des styles, des grammaires mais ne peut révéler le principe d'une relation subjective qui se réinvente au fur et à mesure qu'on en parle (bien que je pense qu'elle ne soit pas d'abord faite d'abord pour cela- en ref à Mr Casati). Dans ces conditions "l'analyse des procédés utilisés dans chaque situation/œuvre particulière, ou chaque type de procédé..." n'est-elle pas une impasse? Ne vaudrait-il pas mieux s'attacher à comprendre les conditions qui permettent de déjouer les routines.

Lunaire, de 1 à 10

Maria Rossi

22 janv. 2003 16:52 UT

B. Gortais : (1) Les artistes sont des individus particuliers en ce sens qu'ils perçoivent et qu'ils expriment de manière inhabituelle des aspects cachés de la réalité liés à des perceptions non routinières, (N. Bullot) dans un contexte social donné. (2) Il mettent en œuvre des stratégies, des dispositifs matériels et des séquences d'action/perception pour vivre cette relation au monde ou pour la provoquer. (3) L'usage de ces dispositifs contingents à la relation artistique converge vers la production d'œuvres qu'on appelle œuvres d'art quand elles parviennent à un public. (4) L'artiste peut être n'importe qui ayant ce type de perceptions dans un contexte donné, et pouvant leurs donner une forme à l'aide de moyens d'expressions. Ces perceptions particulières peuvent survenir dans des cadres variés et prendre des formes diverses. Le passage à l'acte demande cependant plus ou moins d'audace. (5) L'œuvre d'art peut-être n'importe quoi à condition d'être la trace du processus précédent. (6) L'œuvre est jugée bonne quand elle est efficace, c'est à dire lorsqu'elle peut médiatiser une relation non routinière pour le public. Celui-ci peut être large ou petit sans que la relation en soit affectée car elle qualitative et subjective. (7) La relation peut déclencher des émotions de toutes sortes dans l'éventail des émotions qui est le nôtre. (8) Le contexte social changeant, une œuvre peut être jugée bonne ou mauvaise et réciproquement. (9) L'étude des dispositifs matériels mis en œuvre permet de repérer a posteriori des écoles, des styles, des grammaires mais ne peut révéler le principe d'une relation subjective qui se réinvente au fur et à mesure qu'on en parle (bien que je pense qu'elle ne soit pas d'abord faite d'abord pour cela- en ref à Mr Casati). Dans ces conditions "l'analyse des procédés utilisés dans chaque situation/œuvre particulière, ou chaque type de procédé..." n'est-elle pas une impasse? (10) Ne vaudrait-il pas mieux s'attacher à comprendre les conditions qui permettent de déjouer les routines.

En dépit du fait que vous ne vous attardez pas du tout sur les arguments possibles en faveur de ces propositions, je suis en accord avec un grand nombre d'entre elles. Précisons : (1) Sur les grandes lignes, je suis d'accord (mutatis mutandis pour les détails conceptuels et les détails stylistiques). (2) De même. (3) De même. (4) De même. (5) De même. (6) De même. (7) De même. (8) Oui uniquement partiel. Il me semble utile de résister au relativisme des valeurs esthétiques (admettre des clauses normatives non-relativistes). Mais c'est un long débat. (9) Là aussi, il me semble utile de résister au relativisme. Les dispositifs matériels (situations d'ancrage) ont des propriétés et des effets objectifs : la relation à l'œuvre n'est pas fondée sur des principes totalement arbitraires. (10) Si : la prédiction que fait la théorie que je propose, agrémentée des extensions amitiieuses H-a1 et H-a2, est que, dans l'analyse d'une œuvre particulière, nous nous approcherons de ce qu'elle a de proprement esthétique ou d'artistique à partir du moment où nous comprendrons comment elle a pu 'dérouter' certaines routines.

New examples suggested by Jerrold Levinson : minimal art, optical art, 'trompe-l'œil'

Maria Rossi

22 janv. 2003 18:46 UT

In a personal communication, Jerrold Levinson has suggested to me several points that are relevant for our discussion. I will discuss them here (with his authorization), and thank Jerrold for these suggestions. Basically, Levinson seems to be in agreement about the general claim initiated with H hypothesis. (He wrote : « Evidemment, la situation esthétique peut bien se caractériser, pour une part, par un "putting out of gear or out of order" de nos habitudes/dispositions comportementales à l'égard de notre environnement spatio-temporel (c'est à peu près ce qu'a dit fameusement le psychologue anglais Edward Bullough vers 1910) et il est également probable que certaines de nos "routines" normales pour "nous faire" au monde entourant (par exemple, "fixing an object with one's eyes and then manipulating it") se trouvent dans ce cas "hors de combat" ou pour le moment caduques. »). He then suggests to further analyze three examples : « Et quant à cette pensée centrale : "...many works of art rely on the construction of situations that interfere with the application of subsets of ordinary routines.", je me demandais à quelle mesure 1) l'art minimal (minimal art) 2) l'art optique (optical art) et 3) les trompes-l'œil pourraient être tous les trois intéressants de ce point de vu. Par exemple, pour (1), on se dit "What am I supposed to do or discover about this, simple and plain as it is?". Pour (2) on se dit "How can I continue to look at this without getting dizzy or a headache?". Tandis que pour (3) on se dit "How can I get hold of the representation here, since the thing itself seems to have taken its place?" (c'est à cause de ça, en fait, que Wollheim considère -- à mon avis, pas tout à fait justement -- qu'un tableau trompe l'œil parfaitement réussi n'est pas même une oeuvre d'art!)."

These examples discussed by Levinson, in addition with those of chance-based art woks (discussed with Gortais), are relevant for testing the scope of H-hypothesis. Their discussion may also be a good means for reflecting on the way H hypothesis may be related to the descriptive level of particular style or artwork.

Example (1) : Varieties of routine inhibitions in minimal art

Maria Rossi

26 janv. 2003 20:26 UT

Minimal art is a relevant example for expanding H hypothesis. One may conceive of minimal art broadly (= without restricting the scope of the phrase to its traditional extension: minimal American art as a particular artistic movement that has begun in the 50s and 60s). In that way, minimal art could include minimal paintings (e.g., monochromes of Malevitch, Klein, Ryman, Serra, paintings from Sol Lewitt, the first Stella, Brice Marden...), minimal sculptures (Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, and even perhaps Richard Long...), and also minimal music (the first S. Reich, some pieces of Cage, Felman, Lachenmann, Sciarrino, and contemporary composers such as Phil Niblock or Bernard Günter...) and danse (Cunningham...). The basic minimal-art procedure is to furnish an impoverished perceptual stimulation on one or another perceptual dimension. Thus, this procedure tends to impede or replace the recognition-based perception of complex everyday scenes. In a minimal artistic device, only a very simple and plain stimulation is being presented. This stimulation does not seem to deliver any 'deep message' or any 'significant representation' of what may be thought of an interesting object: everyday routines gets blocked. Moreover, if by chance you have developed routines for appreciating representational art: this kind of routines gets blocked too. However, several possibilities remain still open, at least two. First, you may attempt to exert perceptual tracking of close-to-threshold changes in the field of the anchoring situation. This would involve a particular acute use of your sensory and attentional capabilities. Second, you may reason on the context-dependency of the anchoring situation: why was this particular place chosen as opposed to an other one (what is it for)? It appears to me that routine inhibition is a crucial condition for these two kinds of mental acts.

Précision

Bernard Gortais

24 janv. 2003 13:35 UT

Globalement, je suis de votre avis. Je précise la proposition 8 qui dit que le contexte est changeant : les éléments qui forment ce contexte changent à des vitesses différentes et certains sur une période de temps peuvent être considérés comme invariants; exemple : en art plastique les formats des supports gardent depuis plusieurs siècles la même signification liée au sens symbolique de la verticale et de l'horizontale. On peut les considérer comme invariants sur cette période tandis que l'usage des couleurs est beaucoup plus variable sur la même période. A posteriori on peut toujours comprendre comment (avec quels éléments de langage) est fabriquée une oeuvre d'art et demander à un système d'en refaire du même style, c'est ce que font les faussaires avec talent, tandis qu'il est déjà beaucoup plus difficile de comprendre pourquoi cette fabrication a une fonction artistique dans ce contexte. Pour ma part je m'attache aux éléments du langage et à leur sémiologie, cela me semble plus facile. <http://www.lami.univ-evry.fr/~hutzler/Projets/MisesEnScenes.htm> Pour les points 9 et 10 il s'agit d'interrogations

Immersion and reflection in art

Jérôme Dokic

26 janv. 2003 14:33 UT

A few remarks and/or questions about Nicolas Bullot's important hypothesis H. First, why does he restrict his hypothesis to cognitive relations underlying perceptual attention? Of course these are relations centrally involved in many artistic devices, but I suggest that we extend the account to cognitive relations in general, be they perceptual or not. (I think this is in the spirit of Nicolas's main insight.) An artistic device is at least a device in which our normal cognitive relationship to the world is somehow disrupted or questioned. However, such disruption can take place at the non-perceptual, intellectual level: think of reading a novel, for instance. (Reading a novel need not disrupt my perceptual attention mechanisms.) My second remark is about the emphasis on reflection. In art, disruption of our normal cognitive relations to the world is accompanied by reflection on these very relations – sometimes in a quite abstract way, perhaps essentially using the concept of art itself ("What am I doing here? What is going on? Is this art?"). Now, aesthetic experience has often been described in terms of "immersion" rather than reflection. This is not restricted to traditional art: think of John Cage's 4'33" or Yves Klein's blue paintings. When we are immersed in a piece of art, our cognitive relationship to it is precisely not made explicit. So I think the notion of immersion should be taken into account along with that of reflection. Both notions are important, and a speculation is that Wollheim's notion of seeing in is a tentative to integrate them in the specific case of figurative paintings. Sometimes they cannot be integrated. The beauty of John Cage's silent piece is precisely that it highlights so clearly the tension between immersion and reflection, and shows the impossibility of reconciling them.

The artwork and its creator

Alain Grumbach (ENST, CNRS)

(Date of publication : 13 January 2003)

Abstract: New technologies allow for the simultaneous creation of artworks of a single, virtual support. This paper explores the process of collective creation in the pictorial domain and asks whether it can generate works of art.

(Translated from French by Marcel Lieberman)

Introduction

New information and communication technologies make possible the simultaneous creation of artworks upon a virtual setting. Such a possibility raises questions regarding collective interactive creation in the pictorial domain. Can a collective creation process produce works of art? How can one adjust the process in order to improve the artistic character of the created works?

A common feature of these new environments of artistic creation is that the "artist is no longer viewed as the creator of objects, but as the creator of situations where the public's creativity can be unveiled". The question that arises today regarding these creative contexts is: who is the creator? Indeed, a number of players can lay claim to this role: the one who conceives the work, the one who produces it, and even the "specta(c)tor" (spectator/actor), to use a term coined by [HYPERLINK "http://www.revue-cinemas.umontreal.ca/vol001no03/04-dumouchel.htm"](http://www.revue-cinemas.umontreal.ca/vol001no03/04-dumouchel.htm) [Réjean Dumouchel](#). The present paper examines such questions by drawing on the CATI (Création Artistique sur Toile Interactive—Artistic Creation on Interactive Canvas) creative environment, a tool inspired by the Surrealists' [HYPERLINK "http://www.exquisitecorpse.com/definition.html"](http://www.exquisitecorpse.com/definition.html) [Exquisite Corpse](#) technique.

Techno-logical evolution

As a prelude to these questions, let's take a look at the evolution of pictorial creation techniques. Pictorial creation upon a virtual support introduces a significant change in artistic practices. Yet, we can sketch a fictitious "techno-logical" course of development regarding the relationship between pictorial creation and its supports that makes it possible to consider electronic creation as one mode among others for inscribing images. The various stages in this evolution are the result of what can be seen as a progressive loosening of constraints: constraints concerning the support, the creation process, the shapes, the layout, etc. This fiction is thought of in a cumulative sense: new technologies build upon possibilities introduced by those preceding it.

*One starts with the physical world, the real. To this is added the **image** of the real — the imagined, figurative representation that one finds, for example, in cave paintings. Next, the fixed **support** (cave walls) is extended to movable objects found in the environment which have an ascribed function, such as an amphora. In the following stage, the support is no longer limited to practically useful objects, but becomes a **support specific** to artistic expression: tablets, canvases. Technology introduces the **digital**, computer-generated image, and the means of **processing** information (via computers), which in turn make possible the creation and manipulation of images. With the arrival of advanced sensors, such as spatial location sensors, the modalities of interaction have also moved forward. The artwork is the product of the environment and the spectator's **interactions** with it. Lastly, the introduction of high-speed communication between networked computers opens up the possibility for the simultaneous production of works among several participants, i.e. collective creation.*

The CATI collective drawing environment

In order to illustrate this point, we'll examine the collective pictorial creation environment of CATI.^[2]

The creation process

CATI is a creation environment designed for use primarily by non-artists (and non-computer experts). The creation process is modeled around the surrealists' [HYPERLINK "http://www.exquisitecorpse.com/definition.html"](http://www.exquisitecorpse.com/definition.html) [Exquisite Corpse](#) experiment from the turn of the century, but extends it along two spatial dimensions and one temporal dimension.

The Exquisite Corpse was a party game and just one of the techniques perfected by the Surrealists for exploring the "mystique of accident." Georges Hugnet, in his *Petite anthologie poétique du surréalisme* (1934), describes it as follows: "There are five people around a table. Each person writes on a sheet of paper, without letting the others see, a noun to be used as the subject of a sentence. The sheet is then folded in order to cover the word, and transmitted to the person on the left, at the same time that one receives a folded sheet from the neighbor on the right. Below the noun that remains hidden, one then writes an adjective. The same process is followed for the verb, then for another noun serving as the direct object, etc." The example, which became a classic and provided the name for the creation process, is taken from the very first sentence created : *The exquisite corpse will drink the young wine*. The same process was applied to the creation of drawings, in which each participant's task was to draw, for example, a part of the body.

Several people (usually three) can participate in the CATI process, which takes place within a grid of boxes (usually nine boxes arranged in a 3x3 matrix).

Figure 1: Canvas-Grid

In the first drawing stage, each participant can draw only within his/her own pre-assigned boxes. He/she sees only the edges (margins)

of other participants' drawings whose boxes are contiguous with his/her own. Each participant is assigned a [HYPERLINK "http://perso.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/ecran-createur.jpeg"](http://perso.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/ecran-createur.jpeg) \n _blank [creation window](#) containing a drawing area and a set of tools, such as: a pencil, paint brush, eraser, a drawing tool for basic geometric shapes, text, image, color palette, and line styles. The creation process involves several successive stages, each one resembling the previous one. At the start of each stage, participants are able to see the entire drawing currently being produced. However, during the drawing stage, one cannot see the others' drawings, except along the margins whose size and dimension can be adjusted. A participant can only draw within boxes assigned to him/her. The creation process usually stops after three complete stages.

The coordinator of the creation process has access to a [HYPERLINK "http://perso.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/ecran-coord.jpeg"](http://perso.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/ecran-coord.jpeg) \n _blank [control window](#) in which he/she can set parameters (e.g. usable tool palettes), assign boxes to participants, and see the overall image currently being created from the individual drawings.

The example of the [HYPERLINK "http://www.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/ecran-coord.jpeg"](http://www.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/ecran-coord.jpeg) \n _blank [coordinator screen](#) shows the coordinator's control window, which includes the following elements:

on the upper left-hand side is the overall image currently being created from the individual drawings

to the right is a set of definable parameters and the start/stop buttons

2/3 of the way down is the assignment grid for participants (in this case, 3 participants and 9 boxes)

at the bottom one finds the list of tools and palettes available to participants

The example of the [HYPERLINK "http://www.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/ecran-createur.jpeg"](http://www.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/ecran-createur.jpeg) \n _blank [creator screen](#) shows the window that participants use:

occupying most of the screen is the drawing area (on a light background), including margins

to the left of the drawing area are buttons for activating the available tools

to the right are the settings for selecting colors, line styles, etc.

CATI fits within the context of cooperative creation. One of the first digital productions was [HYPERLINK "http://www.infres.enst.fr/~auber/index.html"](http://www.infres.enst.fr/~auber/index.html) \n _blank [Olivier Auber's](#) poetic generator for pictorial creation among several participants. In this case, each person can express himself/herself within one small part of the overall work. A difference with CATI is the fact that within Auber's environment, the entire work is always visible to participants, whereas in CATI participants see only part of the overall work, just as in the game of the Exquisite Corpse.

The principle of the Exquisite Corpse has been used on several occasions to create texts or images: one such as example is found at [HYPERLINK "http://sgva-vr1.ucsd.edu/ARTSLAB/VA40ProjSpring96/"](http://sgva-vr1.ucsd.edu/ARTSLAB/VA40ProjSpring96/) \n _blank [artslab.ucsd](#). An important and original aspect of CATI is that it puts in place a number of heuristics for focusing in on "artistic quality": heuristics that take into account the fact that participants cannot see the overall work.

Other creation environments, such as [HYPERLINK "http://www.work.de/cgi-bin/HypArt.sh"](http://www.work.de/cgi-bin/HypArt.sh) \n _blank [Work.de](#), whose main advantage derives from a creation tool capable of integrating high-quality images, differ from CATI in that their creation process is neither simultaneous nor in real time.

The artistic quality of a work

While using CATI we noticed that some drawings could be qualified as artistic (in a very subjective sense, of course) while others made up a category that one might call "cacographic" (in the sense of pictorial writing). It is not my aim to enter into a discussion over the artistic nature of a work. Rather, I want to note what seemed to us to constitute a necessary (but not sufficient) condition: namely, the ability to trigger an emotion. We thus sought ways of promoting the creation of drawings that, on the face of it, did not show signs of belonging to the cacographic category. Different heuristics resulted from the search for such methods.

The first heuristic (H1) concerns the **background** which, if not the same for all the boxes, can lead to a reading structured in terms of boxes rather than in terms of the overall drawing itself.

A second heuristic (H2) has to do with image content. In order to promote greater homogeneity of content (which is optional), it seems useful to choose a common **theme** (as was the case to some extent with the Exquisite Corpse). We therefore explored a variety of themes: some more concrete (water, a party), some more abstract (geometric shapes); and yet others more conceptual (fantasy, euphoria).

A third heuristic (H3) concerns the drawing's homogeneity as understood in terms of correspondence between the box-contents: **continuity of lines, shapes, color selection**, etc. We considered two ways for improving such homogeneity:

by using margins: the margins allow the illustrator to control the drawing's continuity; their relative size can be adjusted (from 0% to 100%)

by using box assignments: two neighboring boxes that are not homogeneous can be assigned to the same person in the hope that he/she realizes what the problem is and makes the necessary adaptations. In CATI, assignment is entrusted to a human coordinator; it would be interesting to automate all, or part, of this task.

In order to illustrate our approach, three examples of drawings created with CATI are shown below. The drawings are the work of Irène

Charon, Olivier Hardy and Alain Grumbach. [HYPERLINK "http://perso.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/cati1.gif"](http://perso.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/cati1.gif) \n _blank [Example 1](#) was produced using the heuristics H1, H2 and H3: the theme was: "euphoria".

A fourth heuristic (H4), which is somewhat more subtle, concerns what we called "**style**".CATI makes it possible to influence the creation process with the aim of imitating an artist's style.This is done by selecting certain tool palettes (lines, basic shapes, etc.) and colors similar to those used by an artist. For a Mondrian style, only squares and horizontal and vertical rectangles are made available; the color palette is made up of three primary colors (which can be chosen), as well as black and white. It is thus possible to create a drawing that resembles a painting by Mondrian, but which consists, of course, of its own specific significant elements. [HYPERLINK "http://perso.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/cati3.jpg"](http://perso.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/cati3.jpg) \n _blank [Example 2](#) was created using heuristics H1, H3 and H4, and applying the Mondrian style.

A fifth heuristic (H5) has a graphic form: **initiating a drawing**. In a preliminary step it is possible to begin a drawing in one box (usually the center box which is adjacent to the other eight) and then let the illustrators elaborate upon it within the remaining eight boxes. At the end of the process, some adjustment can be made to the starting box. Initiating the drawing is the coordinator's task. Such a method was used in conjunction with heuristics H1, H3 and H5, with the coordinator first drawing inside the central box. Figure 2 below shows the initial drawing. I invite the reader to elaborate upon the drawing within the other eight boxes, using his or her own imagination, before looking at the actual result shown in [HYPERLINK "http://perso.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/cati7.jpg"](http://perso.enst.fr/~grumbach/cati/cati7.jpg) \n _blank [Figure 3](#)

Figure 2: Initiating a drawing

H1 through H5 constitute the set of heuristics used by CATI. They are in keeping with a traditional view regarding "works of art". Yet, one could have chosen other heuristics, and thus explored the possibility of producing artworks belonging to a potentially new genre. One such possibility, which seems quite interesting, is found in Maurice Benayoun's installation [HYPERLINK "http://www.ircam.fr/produits/technologies/multimedia/tunnel.html"](http://www.ircam.fr/produits/technologies/multimedia/tunnel.html) \n _blank [The Tunnel under the Atlantic](#). Benayoun combined a set of dynamic images that came into play during the process. *The tunnel under the Atlantic* is a tunnel of images commemorating the ties between Canada and France. At each end of the tunnel a spectator digs with the help of a joystick. In this way he/she is able to move about within a virtual gallery whose walls are covered with images. The system chooses these images based on the spectator's presumed tastes: tastes that are assessed according to the amount of time spent in front of each image. The heuristic used here leads to automatic interventions during the process. In relation to CATI, such an intervention could be applied to the assignment of boxes: a (brief) analysis of the box-contents (tools and palettes used) could make it possible to influence the assignment of boxes, and hence the creation process itself.

Within the context of this creation process, another question arises: Can one produce a new type of artwork? The heuristics presented so far tend to reproduce features that traditionally characterize works of art, which constitutes first step towards collective creation. Nevertheless, the question is worth raising, though the answer remains open.

The "creators"

Having examined the creation process, I'd now like to turn attention towards the creator of the artwork by asking the following question:

Who is the creator of such a collective interactive work?

This question provides an opportunity for clarifying who the contributors are in a collective creation process.>

The poetics of the open work establishes a new type of relationship between the artist and his public.

Several actors can lay claim to the role of **creator**. The first creator is the **designer** of the tool, who is closely followed by the **developer** (the programmer).

An installation by Catherine Ikam and Louis Fleri [[HYPERLINK "http://www.235media.com/media_art/install/the_other.html"](http://www.235media.com/media_art/install/the_other.html) \n _blank [Ikam 2000](#)] consists of a space in which a spectator (or "participant", "interpreter") can move about. The image of a young woman's face is projected upon one of the walls; the facial expressions change in relation to the spectator's position and movements. In this installation, the role of the **designer** is important since it is he/she who defined the behavior of the created images.

In CATI, the designer has a limited role in the work: he/she creates a tool without having to worry about the artistic nature of the "creatable" objects. Instead, this worry is the responsibility of those who assume the role of spectator, i.e. the illustrators. Moreover, as we already saw in the discussion on heuristics, the creation process presupposes the intervention of a "**coordinator**" whose role is to manage the use of heuristics: to choose a theme and background, to assign boxes, control the time, etc. The coordinator can either be human or automated, as in the case of Benayoun's *The Tunnel under the Atlantic*.

Collective interactive creation thus involves the cooperation of several participants: the designer (or author who had the idea); the developer (who actually produces the computer tool); the coordinator (who manages the creation process); the observers; and the actors (illustrators). To the terminology corresponding to this set of functions we can add the "**creator**", the subject of this section's opening question, who brings together under one role the different functions (with the exception of that belonging to the pure, non-acting, observer).

Conclusion

The process of artistic creation has evolved from its original state as much in terms of its tools, forms and styles, as in terms of content and participants. This evolution is now passing through an important phase as a result of new possibilities opened up by modern technologies.

Artistic creation, in this context, is oriented towards modes that draw on the contribution of (a) spectator(s). The designer envisions and

creates an environment that is shaped by the spectator. If an artwork created in such a manner is not to become mere cacography, the designer must take care to respect certain constraints concerning the potential creation process used by the spectator. These constraints are necessary for the artistic creation process to function, but they are not, of course, sufficient. The spectator's intuition takes care of the rest—with greater or lesser success.

SHAPE

[1] ENST, 46 rue Barrault, 75634 Paris Cedex 13 - Groupe des Ecoles des Télécommunications (GET)
CNRS, URA 820 HYPERLINK "mailto:grumbach@enst.fr"grumbach@enst.fr

[2] CATI is a GET project: Groupe des Ecoles des Télécommunications. It was created by teachers-researchers and students of ENST Paris: Fabrice Alves, Jérôme Berger, Alexis Blavette, Irène Charon, Matthew Coyle, Romain Czarny, Thierry Gourdin, Alain Grumbach, Olivier Hudry, Cédric Laruelle, Amélie Plu, Martin Renard.

Discussion

A propos de L'oeuvre et son créateur par Alain Grumbach

Mario Borillo

14 janv. 2003 9:34 UT

Le texte proposé par Alain Grumbach soulève (au moins) trois types de questions qui associent des problématiques significatives de l'art contemporain, mais en les situant dans le contexte du recours aux technologies cognitives.

1. Un regard rapide distingue peut-être tout d'abord une question qui ne fait en elle-même aucune référence particulière à la nature des instruments mis en oeuvre dans la "création". Vous avez dit Art? Puisque référence est largement faite au "cadavre exquis", comment ne pas penser à Dada et au quasi-contemporain urinoir de Duchamp. Et aujourd'hui aux différents courants de l'"art conceptuel" par exemple. Qu'est-ce qu'une oeuvre d'art dans la culture contemporaine? Cette interrogation n'est en rien propre aux produits nés de l'utilisation de CATI et Alain se la pose avec la lucidité qui convient. CATI est vraisemblablement "neutre" dans cette perspective, même si son utilisation contrôlée ouvrira peut-être des perspectives d'expériences cognitives inédites sur l'art.

2. Si l'on entre maintenant dans l'univers de CATI, il est remarquable que sa conception, son fonctionnement, donc son utilisation, reposent sur un choix "structurel" spatial, en l'occurrence l'espace/temps du cadavre exquis, et sur cinq "heuristiques", qui sont des choix, aux effets perceptuels, opérés par les concepteurs du système. De ces choix "cognitifs" résultent autant de contraintes dans lesquelles doivent se couler le(s) utilisateur(s) de CATI. Une sorte de "syntaxe" propre aux productions de CATI dont la "sémantique" serait à chercher dans les états mentaux des opérateurs/regardeurs (voie ouverte à des expériences cognitives sur la perception, l'interprétation, l'émotion). Bien entendu, ceci est évoqué allusivement dans la distinction - et le rejet - de la "cacographie".

3. Au chapitre de l'origine de la "création", à la question de savoir qui y contribue de manière "significative", Alain n'inclut plus les préparateurs de pigments et les fabricants de pinceaux des arts plastiques conventionnels. Mais il distingue très bien les différentes catégories (au nombre de 5) d'acteurs/participants au processus créatif (ou cacographique), avec l'irruption des créateurs/réalisateurs/utilisateurs de l'instrumentation cognitive mise en oeuvre dans CATI. L'interactivité placée d'entrée au cur de la conception. Qui déjà a dit: "L'art sera fait par tous, non par un"?

Réponse à Mario Borillo

Alain Grumbach

16 janv. 2003 15:28 UT

Je remercie Mario Borillo pour ses remarques très éclairantes et la prise de recul qu'elles apportent à mon article, en inscrivant la problématique de la création artistique dans le domaine de la cognition, à travers les "technologies cognitives", voire des "expériences cognitives inédites sur l'art".

Point 1 : Je ne me hasarderais pas à répondre à la question : "Qu'est ce qu'une oeuvre d'art dans la culture contemporaine ?" Comme le souligne Mario Borillo, CATI et moi resterons neutres sur ce sujet. L'article apporte seulement un élément de réponse ponctuel (création numérique, collective, simultanée, picturale, etc) qu'il serait inapproprié de généraliser.

Point 2 : J'ai beaucoup apprécié la nuance introduite par Mario Borillo fondée sur les points de vue "syntaxique" et "sémantique". CATI en effet propose un cadre, des contraintes ... une syntaxe (spatio-temporelle), la sémantique relevant des états mentaux des créateurs. C'était très exactement l'objectif visé. Ce commentaire jette une passerelle interdisciplinaire relative à l'activité de création artistique, entre les domaines de l'outil, de la forme produite, de l'activité mentale engendrée et du ressenti engendré. On pourrait parler en termes sémiotiques de signifiant (forme), signifié (activité mentale) ... à condition d'ajouter une catégorie :

ressenti.

Point 3 : Dans l'énumération des acteurs, j'ai effectivement omis les préparateurs de pigments ... ou plutôt de pixels. La raison peut être associée à une notion de niveau d'implication de l'acteur concerné. Dans le contexte de la création numérique, suivant un point de vue subjectif, je ressens l'effet d'une heuristique comme plus impliquante dans le processus de création, que la préparation d'une couleur.

En résumé, j'ai beaucoup apprécié les commentaires de Mario Borillo dont la très grande culture en matière cognitive a permis de rendre notoirement plus explicites les aspects cognitifs de ce travail. La contribution de Mario Borillo constitue un réel apport à l'article initial. En ce sens, elle illustre de manière très manifeste les possibilités d'enrichissement de l'article original offertes par la formule "colloque virtuel".

Potentialités expérimentales de CATI

Mario Borillo

18 janv. 2003 10:42 UT

Cher Alain, Les questions ouvertes par ton article et le premier pas de notre dialogue sont évidemment multiples. Permits-moi de n'en retenir qu'une pour le moment, sur laquelle quelques-uns de nos amis cognitivistes (je pense en particulier à la psychologie) pourraient apporter des précisions intéressantes.

Il s'agit des potentialités expérimentales ouvertes me semble-t-il par ton dispositif CATI, en matière d'études d'intentions, de décisions, d'émotions... , dans la phase de production "contrôlée", "paramétrée" de l'oeuvre, comme dans la phase de sa réception, son interprétation, sa jouissance...

Très intéressé comme tu le sais par les relations Art & Cognition (cf. notre bouquin " Cognition et Création..." chez Mardaga), j'aimerais connaître quelles sont les suggestions, les propositions qui pourraient être formulées par ces chercheurs. Ce serait une démarche précise dans un domaine complexe - et important - qui est prêt à la recevoir. Et bien au delà de l'"art numérique", de telles questions éclairent le véritable apport de l'informatique dans l'étude des phénomènes artistiques. Comme tu le vois, tu stimules ma curiosité. Merci Alain. Mario

Œuvres artistiques collectives et créateurs

Bernard Gortais

17 janv. 2003 8:41 UT

Est ce qu'un processus collectif peut produire des œuvres artistiques ? On peut répondre oui tout de suite, les pyramides, les cathédrales dont l'édification s'étend sur plusieurs décennies, sont des œuvres collectives qui le prouvent. Plus récemment, la collaboration du musicien John Cage, du chorégraphe Merce Cunningham et du plasticien Rauschenberg le montrent de façon étonnante puisqu'ils travaillaient séparément et sans se concerter.

Dans le domaine des arts électroniques; la plupart des grandes réalisations sont le fruit d'un travail d'équipe avec des concepteurs, un réalisateur, des coordinateurs et des acteurs. Ce qui fait l'intérêt d'une équipe ou d'une autre, d'un moyen ou d'un autre, c'est de permettre une expérience artistique. La création artistique est un processus - pré création, procréation, création, du côté créateur, recreation du côté public - comme le disait Paul Klee. Le principe reste à peu près le même pour les nouvelles technologies. L'œuvre d'art existe au bout du processus de création c'est-à-dire au moment où l'artiste s'en détache. Ce qui, à mon avis, caractérise de manière constante le processus de création artistique c'est la relation, médiatisée par une ou des pratiques d'expression (du fusain à l'art multimédia), avec un monde plus vaste que celui que l'on appelle la réalité ». Alain écrivait « Tous les arts sont comme des miroirs où l'homme connaît et reconnaît quelque chose de lui-même qu'il ignorait ». Dans ce processus, le but c'est le chemin et l'œuvre d'art en est la trace contingente.

Réponse à Oeuvres artistiques collectives et créateurs

Alain Grumbach

20 janv. 2003 8:50 UT

Merci à Bernard Gortais pour ses commentaires qui précisent et prolongent les points majeurs de ma réflexion concernant le créateur et l'objet créé.

Bernard Gortais évoque le fait que que "l'oeuvre d'art existe au bout du processus de création". Elle peut aussi exister pendant le processus, dans la mesure où les participants au processus peuvent ressentir des émotions en cours de création. Avec CATI ceci intervient en particulier lorsqu'une interaction se produit par exemple dans les zones partagées (marges), ainsi qu'en fin de phase lorsque chaque participant découvre la création des autres, et tente de la mettre en relation (de proximité, d'affinité, d'opposition ou d'indifférence) avec sa création propre. Bernard Gortais évoque cette idée dans son 3ème commentaire lorsqu'il dit qu'il faut "favoriser le caractère artistique du processus de création, et non de l'objet créé qui est son état final".

Qui est le créateur?

Bernard Gortais

17 janv. 2003 8:45 UT

La relation troublante à la réalité qui émerge dans l'expérience artistique peut se manifester à travers des émotions très diverses : sentiment de beauté, de tristesse, de dégoût, d'apaisement, d'humour etc. Peu importe. L'œuvre d'art prend autant de formes qu'il y a de créateurs, c'est à dire d'individus qui prennent les moyens de vivre ces étranges relations qui n'ont souvent en commun que leur

efficacité à remplir leur fonction de mise en relation d'un monde évident avec un monde caché.

Peut-on comparer un monochrome de Klein avec un tableau du Titien ? Elles résonnent singulièrement sur l'ensemble du registre émotionnel humain et différemment pour chacun. L'artiste, quel qu'il soit, est celui qui vit ce processus individuellement ou collectivement, et qui quelquefois, permet à un public, quel qu'il soit également, par la médiation de son œuvre, de vivre subjectivement cette relation à un univers plus vaste. C'est un médiateur qui prend des risques. L'artiste ne s'identifie pas à sa catégorie sociale mais à l'aventure qu'il vit. Comment alors parler d'un « non- artiste ? ». Que ce soit des « artistes » ou des « non artistes » qui expérimentent CATI n'a pas d'importance et savoir qui est le créateur n'a pas d'importance non plus car pendant qu'il crée il est absorbé dans son activité et quand c'est fini, il disparaît derrière son œuvre.

Qui est le créateur ?

Alain Grumbach
20 janv. 2003 8:23 UT

Je partage l'idée que de connaître le créateur n'a pas d'importance (sauf à considérer des aspects de propriété ou économiques). Il en est de même pour le fait que le créateur soit artiste ou non ... à condition qu'il soit capable de s'adapter à un processus de création dont il n'est qu'un acteur parmi d'autres.

Comment favoriser le caractère artistique de l'objet créé ?

Bernard Gortais
17 janv. 2003 9:07 UT

Il est relativement aisé de repérer objectivement les éléments d'un langage artistique et les écoles d'art qui caractérisent une époque tandis que le caractère artistique d'une œuvre particulière relève toujours d'un jugement subjectif. Si la qualité artistique était une propriété objective de l'objet, les écoles d'art sauraient en produire à tour de bras, mais ce n'est pas le cas. La perception du monde est subjective et ses conditions changent continuellement, c'est pourquoi l'efficacité du processus artistique est à réinventer sans cesse. Il est inséparable de son contexte social qui lui fournit ses outils et la matière de ses langages. Aussi il me semble que la question importante est de favoriser le caractère artistique du processus de création, et non de l'objet créé qui est son état final. Toutes les technologies, des plus archaïques aux plus complexes, sont conviées à servir de moyens de production d'œuvres d'art . Il est naturellement intéressant de s'approprier les nouvelles technologies comme outil de création mais je ne pense pas que les technologies nouvelles bénéficient des possibilités de celles qui les ont précédées. Sinon nous aurions des moyens de créations artistiques de plus en plus efficaces et l'art ferait des progrès ce qui me semble un non-sens dans ce domaine. Ce qu'on fait avec un crayon est différent de ce qu'on fait avec une palette graphique; sur la plate-forme multimédia, le temps comme matériel de création, les supports d'images et de sons sont des moyens radicalement nouveaux. Je suis très investi à la fois dans la création d'atelier et dans la création et la recherche multimédia.

Dans un cas comme dans l'autre ce sont les conditions de la relation à l'œuvre qui m'importent : matériel, langages, composition, structures, mises en scènes, relation d'équipe de travail etc. La relation artistique arrive par accident, elle me surprend toujours et me pose la question de savoir si je suis un créateur, c'est de mon point de vue, passer du temps à ne pas l'être.

Comment favoriser le caractère artistique de l'objet créé ?

Alain Grumbach
20 janv. 2003 9:01 UT

Quant au contexte social et culturel, personnellement j'éprouve toujours quelques difficultés avec cette inscription a priori d'une œuvre dans un contexte socio-culturel, que j'assimile plus à une contrainte qu'à une propriété. Peut-être naïvement, je considère cette propriété comme le résultat d'une théorisation, d'une catégorisation a posteriori, non indispensable à l'existence de l'œuvre. De plus cette catégorisation est faible dans la mesure où si l'œuvre n'entre pas dans une catégorie existante, il suffit de créer une nouvelle catégorie correspondante.

Concernant les moyens de création, comme Bernard Gortais et son œuvre "Le jardin des hasards", je pense que l'œuvre est différente suivant l'outil utilisé. Pour situer une œuvre, je proposerais volontiers de lister des caractéristiques associées à celle-ci, puis d'ordonner ces caractéristiques suivant notre perception de son importance dans l'œuvre. Pour fixer les idées, voici une petite liste de caractéristiques potentiellement candidates : - émotion engendrée : beauté, tristesse, humour, surprise, etc - signifié : sémantique du contenu - signifiant : formes élémentaires, structure plaquée sur ces formes - outils utilisés : argile, peinture, pixels, etc. Je pense que chaque créateur accorde une importance maximale à quelques caractéristiques qui lui apparaissent non modifiables, les autres étant moins importantes dans son point de vue de l'œuvre.

Enfin j'ai bien aimé l'observation finale de Bernard Gortais : "la relation artistique ... me surprend toujours" ce en quoi j'abonde, et, dans le contexte de CATI, je multiplie par le nombre de participants au processus de création..

CATI comme instrument d'exploration cognitive

Mario Borillo
17 janv. 2003 14:36 UT

Cher Alain, Les questions ouvertes par ton article et le premier pas de notre dialogue sont évidemment multiples. Permits-moi de n'en retenir qu'une pour le moment, sur laquelle quelques-uns de nos amis cognitivistes (je pense en particulier à la psychologie) pourraient apporter des précisions intéressantes. Il s'agit des potentialités expérimentales ouvertes me semble-t-il par ton dispositif CATI, en matière d'études d'intentions, de décisions, d'émotions... , dans la phase de production "contrôlée", "paramétrée" de l'œuvre, comme dans la phase de sa réception, son interprétation, sa jouissance... Très intéressé comme tu le sais par les relations Art & Cognition (cf. notre bouquin " Cognition et Création..." chez Mardaga), j'aimerais connaître quelles sont les suggestions, les propositions qui pourraient être formulées par ces chercheurs. Ce serait une démarche précise dans un domaine complexe - et important - qui est prêt à la recevoir. Et bien au delà de l'"art numérique", de telles questions éclairaient le véritable apport de l'informatique dans l'étude des phénomènes artistiques. Comme tu le vois, tu stimules ma curiosité. Merci Alain. Mario

Ambiguity and intention

David Cohen (critique d'art, éditeur, Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture)

(Date of publication : 20 January 2003)

Abstract: Ambiguity is equally the hallmark of very fine and very poor art. More than any other quality (or defect) it engenders anxiety. This in turn invites the "intentional fallacy", for believing that an artist meant some awkwardness or oddity persuades of its expressive value.

As my paper more properly concerns aesthetic appreciation than the mechanics of perception I feel, within the context of this symposium, a need to assert that, in my opinion, cognition and evaluation are to all intents and purposes, inseparable. There is no "fresh", innocent seeing free of judgement in relation to a work of art. One is from the outset engaged in valuation. The cognitive psychologist will acknowledge, I think, that the act of seeing entails split-second operations of categorization and organization which are in themselves reflexive, unconscious judgements of sorts. But I am going so far as to argue that conscious, deliberate judgement cannot be turned off the moment one becomes aware of art.

If judgement is imagined as the hot faucet in a sink, then at the very least it will leak as soon as the cold is turned on (cold being the raw, primitive act of seeing). And, as the "institutional definition" would have it, it is the act of being looked at as art that makes art art. Actually, that very question, "Is it art?", ubiquitous in the experience of much innovative art of the last century, places ambiguity center-stage in the appreciation of modern and contemporary art. The critic Harold Rosenberg coined the phrase "the anxious object" to describe this situation.

Ambiguity is equally the hallmark of very fine and very poor art, and knowing this in itself breeds ambivalence. What I am looking at could be very fine, it could be very poor. Anxiety, we could say, is the royal road to the Sublime and a back alley to disappointment. But

then, ambiguity by its nature unsettles, which explains its appeal to romantics and to the avantgarde. For the latter in particular, disruption of norms, of patterns of seeing or experiencing the world, has been their self-allotted mission. Ambiguities abound in the strategies adopted by the avantgarde. Collage, montage, the found object, painting from photographs so as to arrest and creatively exploit discrepancies: each of these test received boundaries of cognition in ways that teach of the experience of modernity.

My paper, however, focuses on a different kind of ambiguity. My contention is that, more than any other characteristic of art, ambiguity brings into question the notion of intentional fallacy. This idea, which gathered pace in the twentieth century, is dear to formalist and structuralist alike, and frankly indeed to any kind of serious attention to art, however free of doctrinal allegiance. The sophisticated viewer has been educated to believe in the supremacy of the text or object under view over extraneous considerations. The moralizing cul-de-sac of Tolstoy's theory has been cordoned off (which, for sure, is a service to criticism). The "death of the author" is an article of faith for the committed aesthete. But as soon as ambiguity and quality cross paths, issues of intention once again arise.

By intention I don't mean that the artist consciously has this or that fully articulated objective in mind at the moment of creation and that the success of the work is somehow mortgaged to the extent to which it was followed through. That would indeed be banal and reductive, robbing art (and for that matter ambiguity) of its organic quality, its ability to live and thrive independently of its originators' intentions. We can ask the question in a more "critically correct" fashion: does the ambiguity sustain itself in the experience of viewing? If it does, if it has "quality", then it was present as a living, worked-through entity in the creative process and is not just a fluke discovered (deconstructed) at the viewer's end. It has purposiveness, even if it is not there "on purpose". It has the "weight of decision", whatever the extent to which it was consciously decided upon.

It is not possible in the space of this article to begin to chart degrees of intention, nor to map a typology of ambiguity for the visual arts, let alone to correlate these two in some kind of graph. I would say, however, in considering types of ambiguity, that an ambiguity that is so obviously intended by the maker that it is axiomatic to the work ceases by definition to be an ambiguity from the point of view of evaluation. The reason I mention this is because in doing so I stake the claim of ambiguity's relationship with intention. Consider *double entendre* (specifically, in visual art, anamorph). As an example, take Arcimboldo's [HYPERLINK "http://www.illumin.co.uk/svank/biog/arcim/garden2.html"](http://www.illumin.co.uk/svank/biog/arcim/garden2.html) \n _blank [The Gardener](#) (c.1590) where an assemblage of vegetables turned 180° ingeniously becomes the portrait of the gardener, the bowl his helmet. Here is ambiguity that converts upon cognitive impact into a convention. Arcimboldo neatly exposes the contradiction at the heart of mimesis. The Ekphrastic poet extols a painting of seeds that is so realistic that a poor bird is fooled into pecking at it. This case underlies the extent to which all our cherished conventions are borne out of resolved ambiguities.

For to represent three-dimensional experience onto a two-dimensional plane is by definition a dubious trade; clarity is the lie, whereas truthfulness to what one actually sees generates ambiguity. The anamorph is not alone: a host of sometime ambiguities have been absorbed into the fabric of artistic convention: compressed space, distorted limbs, unfinished, any knowing subversion of the rules of perspective. All these formal strategies look, on face value, ambiguous, but they are taken on trust by the knowing consumer, for they work as expressive devices. Wölfflin made this case in *The Principles of Art History* putting forward, for instance, the category of "unclearness"; when unclearnesses are means of making the drama more tangible, they need no longer induce ambivalence or anxiety. In fact, they can add to the clarity and beauty of our experience rather than threatening us with the sublime. Just as in perceptual cognition we fill in gaps to complete a picture, so in judging a work of art we bridge stylistic gaps to meet the artist's intentions.

We have spoken about types of ambiguity within depiction, of shapes and forms that degenerate into less legible passages or motifs. But in abstract art, the opposite phenomenon is responsible for ambiguity: forms that obstinately assume an unanticipated legibility which conflicts with the artist's stylistic intentions. Of course, there is an enormous range of purpose after a near-century of abstract art. Some abstractionists retain a modicum of depictive interest, requiring the presence of a motif to abstract *from*; others are more purely non-objective, but can adopt a robust attitude towards accidental intimations of the objective world. Some strive for compositional dynamics, others for open fields, others still for mechanical impersonality.

Even the most seasoned viewers of abstract art, however, are so conditioned to look for representation in an image that they will often have the experience of seeing strange faces and limb-like forms in passages where such "gremlins" are completely unintended, and quite likely unrecognized by the artist. (Incidentally, the same figures are often to be found grimacing in drapery and rock formations in Northern Renaissance painting.) The effect this has is to re-impose pictorial conventions on a work that is trying hard to be, not a picture but a painting. We could say this is just an occupational hazard for abstract painting. But maybe we could also say that, despite the best anti-pictorial intentions of the abstract artist, the mimetic origins of painting craft comes back in the shape of these gremlins to haunt the form. However "abstractly" the abstract painter loves the depictive art of the past, in seeking to emulate and join that tradition, the depictive urge undermines their abstracting intentions.

To return to representational painting, ambiguity that morphs into convention becomes essentially a mode of rhetoric. In contemporary painting, one cannot proceed far without encountering that all-pervasive mode of rhetoric, irony. I notice that more than one earlier participant in this symposium has felt the need to confront the phenomenon of kitsch. Contemporary art looks to kitsch (hackneyed, cloying images of low-brow appeal) as ubiquitously as painting and sculpture one century ago looked towards "primitive" art, and art of the nineteenth century looked to classical and renaissance models. From the point of view of our argument, we can say there is a shift from ambiguity *in* style to ambiguity *about* style. To draw upon kitsch is no more likely to make knowing contemporary artists kitsch themselves than, say, faithfully transcribing old masters would make them masters. Kitsch has simply revealed itself as a fertile source of inspiration. "Inspiration", of course, is a word with romantic connotations, and truth be told the inspiration of kitsch lies in its potential to destabilize notions of quality or originality. It appeals to iconoclasts, or at least that is what it did once. It may be, with certain current artists, that the infatuation with Bad Painting has moved beyond its initial conceptualist strategy to "assassinate" painting from within, to become instead an autonomous tradition, in the way that mannerist or baroque shock tactics once settled into polite pictorial conventions.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, recently mounted a survey of young contemporary artists, "Drawing Now: Eight Propositions". In one room, which looked at artists who exploit illustration techniques, two artists were pitted against one another who, to my taste, represent the zenith and nadir of Bad Painting: [HYPERLINK "http://www.artcritical.com/davidcohen.htm"](http://www.artcritical.com/davidcohen.htm) \n _blank [Elizabeth Peyton](#) and

HYPERLINK "<http://www.artcritical.com/blurbs/MCLSDrawingNow.htm>" \n _blank[John Currin](#). Bad Painting may be inherently bad to some people, but it is nonetheless an established genre, and as such (confounding though this will sound to the uninitiated) it has good and bad adherents. On the surface Peyton and Currin have much in common, and it was perfectly responsible of the curators to hang them together. Where they crucially differ, I will argue, is in the quality of the ambiguities that they arouse, and how these make manifest contrastive sets of intentions between the two artists.

The late Louis Finkelstein (painter and teacher) coined a phrase, "split intentionality", although it is one he preferred as an educational rather than a critical tool: it helped him explain to painters where he felt they were going awry. Finkelstein, despite flirting rampantly with many styles in his own painting, was a modernist: reconciliation and wholeness were his goals. It seems perfectly reasonable to me that current artists should want to orchestrate more complex projections of self and intention than a classic modernist might allow. I find Finkelstein's term attractive, and in putting it forward I need to argue for a distinction between conflicting ambitions and a conflicted intention. The difference is akin to that between the dubious and the ambiguous. Currin is the example of conflicting ambitions, Peyton of split intentionality.

John Currin is an example of an artist who would have his cake and eat it. He deploys rendering skills which have largely evaporated from commercial illustration although they were the norm in that trade but half a century ago, and he does so with a dexterity that recalls Norman Rockwell. Where Rockwell fulfilled the traditional criteria of kitsch by satisfying the million with received pictorial devices and homespun sentimentality, Currin's target audience is (slightly) more sophisticated and select - the artworld. His vulgarity is all-knowing rather than incidental. There seems, however, on the basis of the current vogue for Currin, to be such a diminution in the sensibility for old master techniques in a contemporary art scene where for several generations an anti-formalist, neo-dadaist, iconoclastic discourse held sway, that Currin's tongue in cheek riffs on the old masters genuinely flatter the taste of new collectors for the very qualities he seeks to deconstruct. It is clear from the works themselves, however, that, enervated by their own disingenuousness, they do not have the capacity to be moving beyond their shock value.

Elizabeth Peyton comes out of a totally different experience of kitsch. Where Currin is attempting a bravura double act - seeking to excel in the very tradition he must simultaneously denigrate - Peyton's is an art of poignancy, of tender confusion, in which she is emotionally invested in the slowness of her chosen genre. Her subjects blur the boundaries of public and personal, making intimates out of elusive stars, and rendering as overnight celebrities her actual personal circle. By working the ephemeral, ditsey, inconsequential conventions of the fashion plate of yesteryear "as if" they were the most malleable of fine art techniques, Peyton finds a common ground between her spiritual and expressive fragilities. Ambiguity pervades her relationships with medium and motif alike. This ambiguity is kept alive in her images, and transfers intact to the sensibility of the viewer, an exquisite sensation.

I can anticipate, but must resist the charge that I am moralizing my response to Currin on the basis of speculation about his intentions. I fully accept that the road to paint heaven is paved with bad intentions. My problems with Currin are entirely qualitative. I can feel the negative and conflictual energies at play in his attitudes towards form and iconography alike. In metaphysical terms, Currin has an I-It relationship with artistic means, Peyton an I-Thou relationship. Each can be as resolved or unresolved in their ambiguities as they like; resolve is not the issue. The quality of their results has to do with the quality of certain organizing energies in their artistic personalities - thus the interest in intention. Art is essentially communication (a sine qua non for a symposium on art and cognition). Ambiguity makes communication more complicated, but also more powerful. All the more so if it flows richly in both directions.

Read more by David Cohen on HYPERLINK "<http://www.artcritical.com/DCThankHeaven.htm>" \n _blank[Elizabeth Peyton](#) and on HYPERLINK "<http://www.artcritical.com/DCCurrin.htm>" \n _blank[John Currin](#), at HYPERLINK "<http://www.artcritical.com/>" \n _blank[www.artcritical.com](#).

Discussion

The essentiality of evaluation

Roberto Casati

21 janv. 2003 10:31 UT

valuation is part of many a transaction we have with artworks. And surely it is part and parcel of the curator's choice or in the suggestions of the advisor to a young painter (as nicely described in the accompanying paper by Cohen). But which kind of life do artworks live after the choosing, the buying, the hanging on walls? I wonder whether our evaluation practices go on forever, and whether the fact that they fade away entails that no artwork hangs from my wall anymore.

The question is whether being the target of an evaluation practices is constitutive of art.

casati's walls

David Cohen

21 janv. 2003 15:47 UT

Picasso displayed split intentions when he deliberately hung his Matisse at a crooked angle. The bad intention was to knock his rival off course; the good intention was to shock himself always to look at the painting anew, and not take it for granted as decor. Underlying the gesture is a recognition of the ambiguous status of art objects which can at any moment cease to be art and become merely "things", a status to which art is powerless to object.

The ambiguity between art and artist

pol knots

22 janv. 2003 13:54 UT

Is there any art without artists? Is it thus enough to consider art piece by piece and deny that it is the result of a complex process involving the person/machine behind the scene (le "derrière" the artist), the object (le "dedans", the product) and the other actors (le "devant", the public and market). If the answer is yes, yes evaluations processes are constitutive of art. If not, evaluation is not -on itself- a constitutive factor.

Evaluation, validation, valorisation... what?

Jose Luis Guijarro
23 janv. 2003 11:02 UT

Roberto says: "(...) But which kind of life do artworks live after the choosing, the buying, the hanging on walls? I wonder whether our evaluation practices go on forever, and whether the fact that they fade away entails that no artwork hangs from my wall anymore".

I think there are two levels here:

1. The art experience, which implies (a) an evaluation which is (b) a kind of valorisation.
2. The art anchoring situation which, if I understood N.B's paper rightly, seems to be the social triggering spatial condition of the art experience.

Now, "artistic" objects that hang on a wall qualify as possible triggers and therefore are normally taken to be ART in themselves. What strikes me is that, inspite Roberto's ideas against essential qualities of artistic objects (which I share), he now comes with that question about his (mostly) nice artworks hanging in the walls of his flat.

And of course, one may have continuous art experiences with a special object if, and only if, one is able to reset (in one way or another) the mind in order to grasp the object creatively. Otherwise the experience may be something else (i.e., esthetic, memory-filled, etc.) which is also an evaluation, and maybe a validation, but not a valorisation in the creative sense which I have in mind when I speak about the art experience.

PS: Do the three terms exist in English? I know "evaluation" does and "validation" seems to be common in this forum. But I am afraid valorisation is a pebble-English word! In any case, I keep it.

Diachronic views

pol knots
22 janv. 2003 12:33 UT

The reference to Arcimboldo is illustrating how difficult it has been to bring up new questions during all the representative or figurative area. By evidence, this period for plasticians is not finished yet. And more, indeed, abstraction is not as abstract as it could be. There is still ambiguity about concepts, figures, etc... However, the fields of arts are not a constellation of consensus production units. On the contrary. And it is exactly within the spaces liberated from the old (obsolete?) questions about representation that one can find some material to develop and understand more about cognitive systems. That supposes to invest less and less time in Bad Painting and assimilated subjects and to put the highest priority on more crucial themes.

Three questions and a hint

Jose Luis Guijarro
22 janv. 2003 16:07 UT

The idea of ambiguity as the most salient element of aesthetic appreciation seems a nice idea to me, since, if it were really waterproof, it would solve my fuzzy idea about the kind of validation I propose for considering art art.

However, in order to be sure of its impermeable nature (to demolishing criticism, that is), I would like to clarify some points that I don't think I understand rightly.

1. Let me start by the end of David Cohen's paper: "Art is essentially communication (a sine qua non for a symposium on art and cognition)". Is it? Let me suppose it is, for a while. But surely not for the reason given between brackets? We can have a symposium on, say, happiness, but happiness is not therefore essentially communication. Moreover, although a lot of art is made as an expression of something (feelings, ideas, concepts, whathaveyou), it does not follow automatically that this (or any) expression needs to be communication. Finally, there are "artistic" events that do not entail expression at all -let alone communication! When I perceive the singing of the wind inside a "artistically validating" representation in my mind (that is, when I adopt a special "art" stance towards a natural phenomenon), nothing needs to be expressed or communicated for it to become ART.

2. The idea of ambiguity works well when we face semantically coded phenomena. It works less well when there is no coded meaning around. And it doesn't work at all when what are at stake are events with no meaning and/or sense. It is indeed difficult not to make some sense of whatever noise, image, taste, text we come across, I grant that. But it may be very unlikely to make, not only "some" sense, but a couple or more of that "some sense" effort in order to have real ambiguity working.

I really treat some collections of sounds as artistical without needing to find a sense for them. I treat some tastes as art as well without interpreting them in any way, and so on.

3. Finding faces or strange animals in abstract or otherwise non naturalistic pictures is indeed a strange phenomenon that should perhaps be explained in cognitive terms. When I was a kid I used to play with my siblings in order to see "things" in the clouds, for instance. But it does not seem to be criterial for "ambiguity", unless this word is amplified to a much larger concept that will probably

encompass almost anything, art and non art as well.

4. Finally, D.C.'s distinction of "ambiguity" levels in Peyton and in Currin represents, I think, what Casati had in mind when he said that art is a kind of prompt for conversation –an intelligent conversation in this case!

birdsongs

David Cohen

23 janv. 2003 17:33 UT

It was probably irresponsible of me to drop that clanger in the last but one sentence of my essay, that art is essentially communication. Of course, that is a majorly dogmatic statement; Croce for one gave a lifetime to defending it! I think, however, with due respect to Guijarro, I may be using parentheses with a different intent to, perhaps, a logician. I put things in brackets if they are an aside, of lesser consequence than the main contention. And I'm not saying that because there is a symposium on art, that art must be communication; I'm saying that because there is a symposium on art and cognition, that at a basic level, art communicates.

I'm delighted that Guijarro brings up the point about unintended art, in his case bird whistles. This I think goes to the core of any debate about the nature of art. By virtue of being made by homo sapiens, art is a phenomenon of nature, but when we think about it philosophically we need to be able to divorce art from nature. It is the artifice and the communication in art which makes it distinct from other phenomena of nature with which it shares certain properties. The Venus de Milo will elicit certain sensations similar to a pretty girl walking down the street. That's because the Venus de Milo is intended as a representation of female physical loveliness. But to conclude therefore that one's sidewalk excitements are an aesthetic experience, and furthermore that one's fellow ambulator is a work of art, is illogical (never mind politically incorrect!) If Guijarro finds himself having similar initial sensations with his birdsongs and say, the music of Olivier Messiaen, that's swell, and Messiaen and birds alike would be flattered by the comparison. But remember Ruskin's crucial distinction between aesthesis and theoria: "Now the mere animal consciousness of the pleasantness I call Aesthesis but the exulting, reverent and grateful perception of it I call Theoria". Guijarro's recognition of the beauty of birdsong, and his initial pleasure in Messiaen, is Aesthesis; but his deeper recognition of the organizing principles at play in Messiaen (intended, communicated) is Theoria. It is at that level that sounds become music, that natural phenomena become art.

Incidentally, I hear an objection that many of the objects in our museums are not "intended" to be looked at, on a pedestal, dispassionately and aesthetically, as "art". Forget the problem: it is anthropological, not philosophical. Whatever the conscious and specific intentions of the maker of a given work (a tribal artefact, a religious reliquary) the object remains invested with artistic decisions that communicate artistic intentions, and which make it a valid object for aesthetic attention. Of course, there are complicating factors: to take the Venus de Milo, already cited, it was never intended to be monochrome with its arms missing. But this is an exception to the rule, arousing ambiguities with which the receiver will learn to live.

Sophisticated Discourse

Gloria Origg

23 janv. 2003 22:16 UT

D.C. writes above : "Whatever the conscious and specific intentions of the maker of a given work (a tribal artefact, a religious reliquary) the object remains invested with artistic decisions that communicate artistic intentions, and which make it a valid object for aesthetic attention".

To what extent are these "artistic intentions" specific to art? Isn't a feature of any sophisticated discourse to require a certain degree of reconstruction of the implicit meanings, the hidden allusions or the ironic references to a piece of background knowledge?

It seems to me that each "cultural game" has its "interpretive bias" which are based on reconstructing intentions through the detection of voluntary or involuntary ambiguities, as the famous joke about the two psychoanalysts who meet in the street illustrates: One says : "How are you?", and the other thinks " I wonder what he meant by that".

Aesthetic and Artistic experiences I

Jose Luis Guijarro

24 janv. 2003 11:17 UT

I thank D.C. for his reply to some of my questions. However, I am afraid that I still have some problems with his ideas. I grant that perhaps I am too fussy to be content with his replies. Take, for instance, the "aside" ART = (a special kind, I take it, of) COMMUNICATION. I know many researchers, (Croce among others) tried to point to the fact that this formula was an essential aspect of the phenomenon. But in Croce's time, I am afraid, the distinction between communication and information was not all that clear. We all have heard, I suppose, that smoke "communicates" where fire is burning, or that dark clouds "communicate" a storm is about to start. Perhaps I am wrong but I think that D.C.'s statement

"(...) because there is a symposium on art and cognition, that at a basic level, art communicates"

would make a lot more sense (at least to me!) if it went:

"(...) because there is a symposium on art and cognition, that at a basic level, art informs"

D.C.: "(...) philosophically we need to be able to divorce art from nature. It is the artifice and the communication in art which makes it distinct from other phenomena of nature with which it shares certain properties"

Why would that be the case? I remember that some time ago, somebody let a couple of apes play around with colours, brushes and paper. Finally, it seems they got some "likely" results, which were hanged in an exhibition of modern painting in which they got enormous success. When the creators were found out, however, there was a big outcry claiming that people had been totally fooled because these pictures were really not art. Well, D.C. seems to be on that line too, while I am unable to understand what may be the difference of the art experience one feels while perceiving those ape paintings or some of the modern works if we concentrate "philosophically" in the process of retrieving a special kind of information from them and not, i repeat, NOT, in the likely creator of the objects.

ambiguity

Avigdor Arikha
22 janv. 2003 20:31 UT

Although I am in agreement with David Cohen's approach, I would like to add a remark concerning ambiguity. In painting - I mean in 'good painting', it is not the obvious ambiguity of the subject matter that is crucial, as in the case of 'bad painting' (regrettably Arcimboldo...) but the subliminal one which is made of formal and chromatic ambiguities. For example, the ambiguities between foreground and background, space and form - active and passive areas, or tonal ambiguities. These ambiguities are hidden in the finest paintings of the past, and Mondrian was still concerned with them. However, the last quarter of the Twentieth century was generally no longer concerned with them, and future generations, if still aware of quality in painting, will probably cast a puzzled eye on their relics.

nuance

David Cohen
23 janv. 2003 17:49 UT

Arikha hits upon a crucial difference between levels of appreciation for old master painting (and he will be flattered, I hope, if I count him as an old master) and the kind directed towards much contemporary art. The difference boils down to a single word: nuance. And it touches on all kinds of appreciation, not just the savoring of ambiguities. It is provocatively original of him to cite Mondrian as an example of nuanced painting as opposed to its opposite ("blatant"?) when to many observers, Mondrian's austere abstraction signals the kind of conceptualism and minimalism in painting that militates against nuance. Where ambiguities of nuance pertain to form, the kinds of ambiguity aroused by "blatant" art generally have to do with style: these are still artistic decision-making problems, but at what I would call a meta-executive level. Incidentally, with Peyton ambiguities of form are present, whereas with Currin the form is seamless; ambiguity is aroused singularly in relation to his decision to employ such forms, which is an issue of style.

decisive subjectivity

jeff jahn
28 janv. 2003 21:58 UT

I enjoyed the distinction of ambiguities between Peyton and Currin. Peyton and Currin flaunt technical issues in two different ways. To make a subjective distinction, I too prefer Peyton because her handling of the materials sets up an ambiguity as to the merits of her paintings. I end up wondering why work like hers are in a museum until I realize it is her work that I crave to see on the walls of one. Whereas Currin telegraphs his pandering intentions technically and patronizes the viewer with his illustrative skills. Although both have style only one has ambiguous style. In other words Currin's strategy is blatant, whereas one wonders why and what Peyton is getting at with such nonchalance, allowing the charge of ambiguity to run rampant. Currin will be more popular amongst those who see narrative as their chief concern. Peyton appeals to my personal subjectivity as a more ambiguous, quicksilver sort of art. Let Currin remain in the galleries and Peyton enter the permanent collections.

General Discussion

Noga Arikha (Institut Jean-Nicod, Paris) and Gloria Origgi (Institut Jean-Nicod, CNRS)
(Date of publication : 27 January 2003)

The moderators round up the virtual conference, offering a preliminary assessment of the main themes that have been raised by the papers and the discussions, and open a general debate with the speakers, participants and organizers.

The Web conference *Art and Cognition* was launched in November 2002 - an interdisciplinary theme explored entirely through the means of the Internet. The novel format that is a Web conference made possible a conversation, virtual but intellectually substantial, between people from a variety of disciplines, backgrounds and nations. Authors from three continents contributed papers and responded to them without having to fly to a central meeting place; and, partly thanks to the free-floating nature of Web-based communication, a dialogue was established between members of disciplines that rarely are able to meet on physical ground. Misunderstandings due to the often rigid boundaries between disciplinary cultures became apparent, as did the possible ways of addressing these misunderstandings. In this way, it appears that the Web is an ideal forum in which to launch innovative, truly cross-disciplinary debates and in which to establish the conceptual groundwork necessary for their development.

We would like to recall here, succinctly, the main points that have been discussed in the course of what is no more, and no less, than a brain-storming session on a topic of increasing interest to many people, from scholars, philosophers and scientists, to artists and the lay public. The conference was conceived on the basis of general, 'meta' questions. In our call for papers, we merely asked authors to reflect on whether the cognitive sciences could tell us anything of relevance about art; and vice versa, whether an analysis of artistic experience could tell us anything of particular interest about the brain. The resulting ten papers and discussions all represent attempts at addressing these 'meta' questions, through which a number of key themes emerged. The 'round-table' discussion which this concluding text opens should be an occasion to evaluate the extent to which these themes represent satisfactory answers and to pinpoint the questions that arise out of them.

1. Art and language

The nature of the relation between art and language was raised in at least three papers. Avigdor Arikha explored what he calls "pictorial

language", suggesting that pictures obey a syntax which, once learned, enables one to understand them. In a completely different perspective, Roberto Casati defined works of art as essentially communicative objects that prompt conversation. David Cohen insisted on the role of communicative intentions in the understanding of a work of art. Even if the parallel holds, however, one may argue that language and art each are powerful and highly structured systems of representation, whose primary function is to represent the world, and not necessarily to communicate. How, then, is the "syntax" of the representational systems that are both language and art connected to their communicative use?

2. Art and consciousness

Another central theme of discussion was the view that art itself makes us aware of our perceptual experience. Alva Noë talked of the artist as "a kind of *experience engineer*", where "The painter literally enacts the content of a possible experience". Nicolas Bullot defined experimental art as "any action (whatever media are used for the memory of this action) based on the building of an anchoring situation that takes into account, or reveals, any cognitive or political problem". In this way one role of art is to make the spectator aware of his/her own way of perceiving the world. How does this notion help us understand the phenomenology of artistic experience? Could it be that this emphasis on awareness is a specific feature of contemporary art, embedded in the historical motivations of the twentieth-century avant-garde? Or is it a fundamental ingredient of all artistic experience, and in this way a key to the understanding of consciousness?

3. Cognition and awareness

Connected to the issue of art's function in making us aware of our representations is the view that art exploits our perceptual, emotional and cognitive systems but that we do not actually realize that this is the case. François Quiviger's work on proprioception in Renaissance art and David Freedberg's theory of response seem to go in the same direction: artistic representation may be a function of the universality and stability of our emotional response to it, but the awareness is of the work as experienced via the response, not of the response itself. How crucial is the awareness of our perceptual and emotional experience in the perception of a work of art?

4. Universality

The measure of emotional response would seem to be a central aspect of the study of art cognition, but questions did arise in the course of the discussion about what criteria such a study should adopt. If one takes artistic experience to have universalisable qualities, and if one assumes that there is a class of specifically artistic emotions, such an investigation should be possible. But a certain scepticism with regard to claims of universality was present throughout the discussion of these issues. The question of the unity of the kind "work of art" - to borrow the title of Roberto Casati's paper - may indeed presuppose an answer before investigative work on the response to art can be conducted. V. S. Ramachandran's view of an "Aha" experience as central to such response arises out of such investigative work; but how plausible is it?

5. Historicity and normativity

Underlying these questions, and returning often to the forefront of discussion, was thus the difficulty of studying artistic experience without establishing norms for the definition of what counted as artistic experience in the first place. The problem was raised in various ways, by John Armstrong in his description of Kantian aesthetics, by Alain Grumbach in the analysis of collective efforts at very new sorts of works of art, and by Nicolas Bullot in his recognition of a "normative" undercurrent to many of the reactions to his paper. Art historians, attuned to the ways in which the inflections of artistic production are specifically configured within historical moments, all tended to share, in this conference, an explicitly normative stance with regard to the objects of artistic experience, but the possibility of a dialogue between cognitive scientists and art practitioners in general clearly depends on a resolution of this debate. Is it possible not to adopt a normative stance, and to suppose that appreciation is a different matter from cognition? In the same way, to what extent is the cognitivist approach to art in conflict with a historicist one?

Feedback

We would like to ask all of you - authors, discussants, participants, silent onlookers - to give us your reactions to the discussions that took place during these few weeks. Clearly, we are left with more questions than answers: does the perception of works of art require specific cognitive resources? How can one evaluate it? Is this evaluation necessarily dependent on norms? And would these norms be meaningful without their history? Can one investigate artistic experience without over-simplifying artistic intention?

What themes do you think should have been introduced or developed further?

We also would appreciate your feedback regarding the technical dimension of the event: Did you find the format useful? Is it easy to use? In what ways could it be improved? Did you find the rhythm of two texts a week satisfactory? Too fast? Too slow? Would you have liked more images? More links? More bibliography? More contact with us, the moderators, or with the authors?

Over to you!

Lastly, we would like to thank you all for your participation. An interactive event of this kind depends for its success on the enthusiasm of the participants, and, if we are to judge by the intensity and the high calibre of the discussions, the idea to launch this conference has clearly paid off.

And now, the debate is wide open. Feel free to submit any comment and any question, on whichever text of the conference, for further discussion.

Discussion

Thank you, merci.

Pascale Cartwright

27 janv. 2003 10:02 UT

Avant d'entrer dans un débat sur les contenus des textes et des discussions, je tiens à exprimer ma gratitude aux organisateurs et organisatrices de ce colloque. Votre mérite est infiniment grand. Je dis « infiniment » car je suis sûre qu'on ne mesure pas pour l'instant la multitude des conséquences positives d'une telle démarche d'ouverture. En premier lieu, vous ouvrez les portes de la connaissance, de l'actualité et de la recherche intellectuelles aux personnes qui vivent « loin » et qui sont coupées de tout accès aux « nouveautés ». C'est un cadeau d'une valeur inestimable, on ne saurait assez vous en remercier. Réciproquement, vous ouvrez l'univers de la recherche académique, cadré par les institutions prestigieuses, sur la richesse du monde et sa multiplicité d'individus de tous genres. Les divers experts que vous êtes en sont d'autant plus méritants que cela les oblige à adopter une attitude parfois difficile de modestie, attitude autrefois absente du fonctionnement de ces indispensables institutions. Les experts et particulièrement les philosophes, en seront d'autant plus récompensés que cette nouvelle possibilité de « s'ancrer » leur donnera accès à un mode de pensée débarrassé des limites qui n'étaient jusqu'à présent fixées que par eux-mêmes.

Expertise et grand public

Gloria Origgi

28 janv. 2003 10:12 UT

Merci à Pascale Cartwright qui a activement participé à tout le colloque en contribuant au succès de l'événement. Je partage son point de vue sur le rôle des nouvelles formes de communication sur le Web dans le changement du rapport entre "langage d'experts" et langage "grand public".

Un enjeu important pour la réussite d'une communication scientifique interdisciplinaire est le développement de nouveaux langages qui dépassent les « jargons » d'initiés dont chaque communauté scientifique se sert inévitablement.

Mon hypothèse est que les nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication peuvent jouer ici un rôle décisif à deux égards:

a) D'une part la présentation de la recherche et des institutions scientifiques sur Internet, même quand elle ne vise qu'un public professionnel, est potentiellement accessible à tout le monde. Grâce à Internet, la science se pratique de plus en plus dans une « maison de verre ». Cela leur crée cependant l'obligation de rendre au moins en partie leur travail intelligible au moyen de formes d'expression appropriées.

b) D'autre part, l'accès généralisé à toujours plus d'information scientifique rend le travail de vulgarisation scientifique fondamental. Il faut en effet aider le grand public de s'orienter dans un espace de faits et d'idées dont l'accessibilité matérielle ne va pas automatiquement de pair avec l'accessibilité intellectuelle.

Un colloque passionnant

Bernard Gortais

27 janv. 2003 14:13 UT

Le débat a été bien mené et s'avère enrichissant. Le dispositif technique est au point, et le timing aussi. Les modératrices ont bien encadré l'ensemble du colloque qui m'a généralement intéressé. Je pense plus particulièrement à la discussion sur l'esthétique Kantienne proposée par J. Armstrong, à celle sur le modèle conversationnel (Casati) et à l'article concernant l'attention esthétique et les objets (N. Bulot). Ma participation m'a obligé à formuler mon point de vue et m'a permis de le confronter à des approches que je n'imaginai pas. À l'issue de la conférence ma position diffère sensiblement de celle de la plupart des intervenants qui considèrent que la fonction de l'œuvre d'art est celle de la représentation et qu'elle possède une qualité artistique objective. Je pense pour ma part que les œuvres d'art ne peuvent être perçues que subjectivement qu'elles sont ancrées dans un contexte. Leur fonction principale est de servir de support à une expérience artistique (un processus), pour l'artiste et pour le public bien que ce ne soit pas la même, qui consiste essentiellement à mettre en relation des niveaux de conscience. Le beau, le laid, telles ou telles émotions sont des effets induits de cette relation mais n'en sont pas la cause. En ce qui concerne les arts plastiques, figuratifs ou non, ils sont fondamentalement abstraits et basés, mais comme toutes les images, sur des primitives de formes, de couleurs, de structure et de rythme etc. Ce dispositif abstrait permet quand l'œuvre artistique est réussie, à un niveau de conscience de pénétrer l'autre par une sorte d'effraction. Cette possibilité d'effraction est momentanée et en quelque sorte anormale. Elle change avec le contexte, elle est à réinventer perpétuellement, elle n'apprend rien, elle opère. Les œuvres d'art sont des opérateurs de fusion. Sur le plan cognitif, et sur le plan artistique ce sont les conditions de cette relation qui m'intéressent c'est à dire, l'étude des éléments du langage et des conditions de la création. Merci à tous ceux qui ont contribué à ce débat.

Art et conscience

Gloria Origgi

28 janv. 2003 9:53 UT

Les propos de Bernard Gortais, que je tiens à remercier beaucoup pour ses contributions très stimulantes à ce colloque, pourrait être mis en rapport aussi avec l'article d'Alva Noë sur l'art comme énamination.

En effet, Alva souligne l'importance du rôle de l'artiste comme "instigateur d'expérience". Nous avons repris cette ligne de réflexion dans le point 2 de nos conclusions.

Je me demande si Bernard Gortais voit ce parallèle comme pertinent.

Multiple perspectives

Noga Arikha
28 janv. 2003 21:14 UT

Many thanks to Bernard Gortais for his contributions and perceptive remarks. Although we have covered quite a lot of ground in the course of this conference, we are left with few conclusions. What has emerged, however, is the possibility for each of us to pinpoint and, perhaps, revise our presuppositions, or seemingly entrenched opinions, about the nature of art or aesthetic experience in general. The meeting of the scientific and the intuitive mind, so to speak, can bear fruit for that reason. Insights such as that of Bernard Gortais here may indeed correspond to the kind of analysis pursued by Alva Noë; the two differ in style and goal, but this yields a perspective on the matter at hand which is precisely what makes the interdisciplinary effort worth pursuing.

Trop ou trop peu ?

jean-francois Doucet
27 janv. 2003 15:20 UT

La conférence virtuelle se terminant, j'ai le sentiment d'avoir participé à quelque chose de très bien. Expatrié à l'Université d'Oslo en Norvège, il est évident que cette forme de communication me relie à un mode de pensée familier. Pour mon plus grand bien, j'ai eu accès à des formulations qui m'intéressent. Cependant la richesse des communications en qualité et en quantité ont repoussé en arrière-plan mes préoccupations sur " Dialogue virtuel et créativité ", une étude sur des Dialogues virtuels que j'ai eu avec des étudiants de Déc 2000 à Déc 2001 sur le processus créatif. (<http://membres.lycos.fr/ideasy/>) Ses conclusions auraient pu faire partie des thèmes traités : est-il trop tard ou bien aurais-je encore l'occasion ?

Dialogues virtuels

Gloria Origgi
28 janv. 2003 8:38 UT

Merci à François Doucet pour sa participation. En effet, c'est exactement un type d'usage qu'on envisage pour les colloques virtuels : rester en contact avec une communauté intellectuelle avec laquelle on a des affinités culturelles même dans des périodes de déplacement.

Je pense que l'idéal pour nous faire savoir plus sur votre étude sur les Dialogues Virtuels c'est de les présenter brièvement à l'intérieur de ce forum.

Thanks / merci, éloge du colloque virtuel, et recherches de formes nouvelles

Maria Rossi
28 janv. 2003 3:28 UT

De concert avec les autres messages, je tiens d'abord à exprimer mes remerciements à Noga Arikha et Gloria Origgi et à leurs collaborateurs pour avoir organisé ce colloque virtuel et nous avoir permis de participer à cette expérience intellectuelle, perceptive et collective enthousiasmante. Le genre du colloque virtuel est à développer et défendre pour des raisons pratiques, intellectuelles et éthico-politiques. Vous avez commencé à donner la nature de ces raisons. En voici d'autres formulations : (i) La temporalité du colloque virtuel permet des discussions plus réfléchies que les interventions brèves consécutives aux interventions orales traditionnelles. Ce genre donne du temps pour questionner et répondre. (ii) Dans la situation du colloque virtuel, les hiérarchies académiques interfèrent moins avec l'expression et l'évaluation du contenu des propositions. (iii) L'absence de dramaturgie ou d'éloquence permet de fonder directement l'analyse et l'évaluation sur des idées (par opposition à des traits contingents de la situation d'un colloque traditionnel, et à des attitudes rhétoriques ou sophistiques). (iv) L'accessibilité universelle du site a des avantages pratiques. Par exemple, c'était pour moi un réel plaisir de pouvoir développer une même discussion tout en ayant, au cours de cette discussion, changé ma localisation d'un continent à un autre (une partie de mes réponses ayant été écrite aux USA et l'autre en France). (v) L'accessibilité universelle du site a un intérêt éthique et politique : il rend disponible à chacun le contenu de la recherche – et s'intègre dans l'esprit du louable projet Open Archives (<http://www.openarchives.org/>).

Pour les questions techniques : l'interface est fonctionnelle et élégante. Il me semble qu'elle pourrait être développée (a) en mettant en discussion des textes en différents formats dont le format PDF (qui est un standard professionnel de communication et de stockage), comme par exemple dans <http://www.journalofvision.org/>, (b) en mettant en discussion (plus directement que des liens) non seulement des textes, mais aussi des démonstrations expérimentales et des œuvres d'art (films, animations, photographies, audio etc.). Allons plus loin et rêvons un peu : il serait intéressant qu'un jour, de créer un colloque-festival Web 'art & cognition', qui comprendrait à la fois des créations théoriques ET des créations artistiques, faites par des artistes contemporains, spécialement élaborées 'pour' le colloque-festival, et en rapport avec le thème du colloque-festival. Cela reviendrait à inventer un genre hybride entre le festival et le colloque.

Le futur d'interdisciplines

Gloria Origgi
28 janv. 2003 9:22 UT

Merci à Nicolas pour son engagement dans ce projet. La vivacité du débat autour de son texte doit beaucoup à ses réponses immédiates aux commentaires. Je partage aussi son analyse des raisons pratiques, intellectuelles et éthico-politiques. C'est en effet ce type de réflexions qui ont poussé les membres de l'Association Euro-edu à tenter de se servir du Web dans leur vie de chercheurs, non seulement pour y chercher un article ou l'adresse d'un collègue dans le Utah, mais aussi pour communiquer sur les contenus, sans le filtre des hiérarchies académiques, des rôles institutionnels, des provenances culturelles.

Je suis profondément convaincue que ce type d'outil peut jouer un rôle clé dans la transformation de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche, grâce à la souplesse de leur format, à la facilité de l'usage et à l'accessibilité gratuite de tout le matériel. Art et Cognition est un premier exemple d'usage d'une plateforme pareille : il réalise quelque chose de semblable au colloque

scientifique. Mais imaginons d'autres usages possibles.

J'ai enseigné pendant 7 ans à l'université de Bologne et mes étudiants profitaient beaucoup des projets Erasmus d'échange universitaire. Ces projets, qui ont sûrement aidé l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur en Europe, ont quand même la limite d'un manque de confrontation de la part des enseignants (et des étudiants) sur les cours réalisés sur un certain sujet dans deux pays différents. D'ici un certain niveau d'arbitraire dans l'évaluation du travail accompli par l'étudiant à l'étranger. Imaginons maintenant un cours collectif organisé par 2, 3 ou 4 professeurs de littérature italienne dans différentes universités européennes sur « le rôle de la musique dans la poésie italienne du XIV siècle » sur une plateforme comme interdisciplines. Les étudiants seraient encouragés à envoyer leurs questions (en jouant un rôle beaucoup plus actif que celui qu'ils jouent normalement dans un cours universitaire) et ils pourraient juger la qualité des différents programmes tout simplement sur la base du contenu, de l'intérêt suscité, de la disponibilité de l'enseignant à répondre à leurs questions.

La participation à un cours pareil pourrait jouer un rôle important dans l'enrichissement culturel de l'étudiant. Elle pourrait accompagner le déplacement de l'étudiant à l'étranger (en lui fournissant un point de référence culturel toujours accessible) et faire participer de l'internationalisation de la recherche et de l'enseignement même les étudiants qui n'ont pas les moyens de se déplacer.

Sur les possibles améliorations d'interdisciplines que Nicolas propose à la fin : tout à fait d'accord qu'on pourrait faire plus d'effort sur les formats : pour l'instant il s'agit d'une question de coût et de temps de gestion. Le format qu'on propose ne requiert pas de téléchargement et donc ne pèse pas sur les coûts d'hébergement. Mais ce sont bien sûr des possibilités envisageables dans le futur.

More on the Web

Noga Arikha

28 janv. 2003 17:20 UT

I would like to echo Gloria here in thanking Nicolas for his energetic, committed participation in this event. His ideas about possible ways of creating new forms of virtual conferences are also very welcome. François Quiviger's Java-animated essay was one effort in the direction of integrating images into text, but certainly, much more could be done. The software exists, the expertise too, and there are indeed quite a few examples on the Web already (see some links from this site). It is simply, as Gloria notes, a matter of cost and organization.

The accessibility and interactivity inherent to such an event are its main qualities, but Web-based exchanges are not yet mainstream. We should not forget how young the Internet is, and, despite their claims about the need to open disciplinary borders and so on, very few academic institutions have taken on board the full potential of this flexible, multifarious tool. Critics of Web conferences tend to cite the absence from them of any 'real', face-to-face meetings. True enough. But the qualities - enumerated here by Nicolas and by Gloria in her reply - of the Web form compensate for this, and there is no need to believe or to wish that Web conferences replace traditional ones. They simply fulfill a different, but increasingly needed purpose.

L'art est révélation e l'artiste un témoin

Giordano Mariani

28 janv. 2003 10:22 UT

Je pense que l'art est au niveau plus haut que la communication même : elle est une relation. Une relation qui devient sublime quand on atteint la communion.

Cette relation, ouverte, s'établit entre trois personnes. La première c'est l'artiste avec son intention créative. On ne peut pas ignorer ses intentions. Que ne sont pas toute l'œuvre, mais une partie de l'œuvre même, oui.

La seconde personne c'est celui qui reçoit l'œuvre, qui écoute, qui lit, qui regarde, o celui qui vit tout ça au même temps (synesthésie ?).

La troisième personne c'est l'oeil autre qui ferme (sécularisme des analystes, structuralistes, cognitivistes...) ou ouvre (mystiques, poètes, toutes celui qui se confie à l'intuition) le système de la communication entre le deux.

La relation est alors, dans le signe, révélation.

On ne sait pas, et on ne le saurait jamais, si le système de communication est donnée une fois pour toutes pendant l'histoire. L'œuvre se tient alors surtout et seulement si la conscience de l'artiste, qui rend l'unité de l'œuvre réussie, est cohérente avec le sens de ses signes. L'artiste est le seul garant de son signe. Et c'est pour ça que, il y a quatre ans, en présentant pour la première fois ma poésie à un public inconnu en cherchant la communion, en disant la relation, je me suis permis de titrer la rencontre, quarante ans après Paul Celan: « La poésie ne s'expose plus. Elle s'ostende ». Et c'est pour ça que je pense que l'artiste doit être, aujourd'hui surtout, un témoin. Parce que l'Occident ne va pas plus mourir dans ses mots, dans son cœur poétique, si ses mots mêmes sont vivants dans le cœur du poète. Du témoin.

Que ressort-il de ce colloque par delà les divergences?

Pascale Cartwright

29 janv. 2003 12:02 UT

Malgré les divergences, je vois un lien : « sensation active », « énaction », « inhibition des routines », objets qui doivent « attirer l'attention », « rasa » (capture de l'essence même afin de provoquer une disposition spécifique), « valorisation ».

Les œuvres d'art seraient des œuvres sur lesquelles on « s'arrête » pour les percevoir/concevoir « activement ». On cesse d'agir de

manière utilitaire, pour « agir sur l'inutile ». Pourquoi fait-on cela ?

L'attention esthétique est-elle point de départ de l'ensemble ?

Je pense que l'art « mis en œuvre » est débarrassé de toute émotion spécifique, même s'il provoque des émotions comme n'importe quelle image, scène ou parole. Lorsque Avigdor Arikha utilise le mot « émotion », moi j'utiliserais le mot « compréhension » (ici accès à la connaissance, de manière à la fois globale, détaillée et non linéaire). Je maintiens donc ce que j'ai dit au début du colloque. L'art « participe » à la connaissance au même titre que la science. C'est entre autre parce que l'art est débarrassé de toute émotion que l'art participe à la connaissance. Les émotions « déforment » l'information. Il serait intéressant de lire le texte de John Armstrong aux lumières des connaissances actuelles en biologie et psychologie entre autres sur la mémoire (mémoire collective, mémoire transgénérationnelle, génétique, évolution). J'ai observé en étudiant certains écosystèmes et leur fonctionnement que la science ne peut venir à bout de ces « systèmes ». Les études scientifiques ont la caractéristique de présenter le système de manière linéaire, alors que ce sont des systèmes qui fonctionnent de manière globale (tout, en même temps et partout). Cette globalité, perceptible par nos sens est difficilement exprimable par le langage discursif. Par contre, l'art nous amène à saisir cette « globalité ». Il semble que déjà une part de cette connaissance soit « en nous », engrammée au cœur de nos cellules, et qu'elle ressurgisse quand elle est sollicitée. Ainsi l'art fait « resurgir » en nous la connaissance.

Enfin, l'être humain semble être le seul « être » capable de nuire à ses pairs pour des raisons autres que sa propre survie. Si l'on considère l'art comme « attitude humaine », je dirais que l'art est la seule attitude humaine qui ne nuit pas à la perpétuation de l'espèce.

En cela, l'art serait l'attitude humaine la plus « élevée ».

Non-linearity and normativity

Noga Arikha

4 févr. 2003 0:09 UT

Thanks to Pascale Cartwright for this very interesting point. It brings together many of the themes we discussed in the course of the conference, from perception to attention, emotion and language.

I share the view that the non-linear nature of the processes at work in the experience of art perception is at the root of the difficulty, and the importance, of coming up with a convincing phenomenology of art. Pascale Cartwright's point also brings out the centrality of ethics to any reflexion about the building-blocks of aesthetics. The description of what makes art valuable might well be inseparable from a description of what is involved in the experience of art. This would reconcile us to the problem of the normative stance some of us prefer to adopt as an *a priori* requisite for any analysis of art cognition. A lot more could be said about this, and the topic could be a subject of further debate.

Déjà?

Jose Luis Guijarro

29 janv. 2003 16:18 UT

C'est toujours trop tôt quand un colloque comme celui-ci finit. Je crois que le travail des modératrices a été superbe et que sans elles le colloque aurait pu dégringoler sur des pentes pas du tout positives.

Merci mille fois! Et j'espère pouvoir rejoindre un autre colloque sur des problèmes cognitifs dans l'avenir car on apprend énormément de choses d'une manière sympathique et proche. Vraiment, ça a été un succès! ¡Hasta siempre, compañeras y compañeros!

Des nouvelles éditions d'Art et Cognition ?

Gloria Origg

30 janv. 2003 13:21 UT

Merci à José-Louis pour sa participation et pour son enthousiasme pour les colloques virtuels !

Nous terminons cette édition parce que je trouve que ce n'est pas mal que même sur le Web quelque chose ait un début et une fin: ça permet d'y consacrer le temps et la concentration nécessaire pour avoir un débat de bon niveau. On ne peut pas demander ça 365 jours par an (aux auteurs, aux discutants et aux modératrices aussi!).

Mais rien n'empêche de réfléchir à une nouvelle édition pour l'hiver prochain, avec peut-être une thématique plus ciblée et des nouveaux conférenciers.

Le support financier généreux de la DRRT nous a permis de réaliser cette première étape. Si vous avez aussi des idées d'autres sources de financement pour Art et Cognition II, nous sommes partantes !

Reply to J. Dokic : Aesthetical attention and object, H, reflexive procedures, routine disruption at the level of thought

Maria Rossi

29 janv. 2003 17:37 UT

This text is a reply to J. Dokic's comments on my contribution for the symposium. It is related to several points of the general discussion.

Jérôme Dokic: "First, why does he restrict his hypothesis to cognitive relations underlying perceptual attention? Of course these are relations centrally involved in many artistic devices, (1) but I suggest that we extend the account to cognitive relations in general, be they perceptual or not. (I think this is in the spirit of Nicolas's main insight.) (2) An artistic device is at least a device in which our normal cognitive relationship to the world is somehow disrupted or questioned. However, such disruption can take place at the non-perceptual, intellectual level: think of reading a novel, for instance. (Reading a novel need not disrupt my perceptual attention mechanisms.)"

Reply: (1) I admit this suggestion as crucial. I agree on extending the scope of the disrupting/questioning procedures to cognitive relations in general. My initial account is biased toward the analysis of perceptual processes because routine inhibition/disruption seems, in that particular case, easier to explain. Therefore, the reason for this bias is not a theoretical one; I only thought it was a good starting point for explaining the general insight. Thus, your suggestion is very welcome in order to single out a more general fact. (2) Moreover, your correction should invite us to analyze closely the role of thought and reflection in art appreciation. My stress of this role (in discussions) has been vigorously challenged by Noga Arikha in this symposium (cf. our discussion). Noga's view may reflect a more widespread conception of art than ours, and has to be taken seriously. The question which remains in my mind is whether this emphasis on the intellectual level is relevant only for conceptual, experimental and avant-garde arts. I do not think so, but this would need to be further argued.

Reply to J. Dokic (2): attention, immersion, reflection

Maria Rossi

29 janv. 2003 17:53 UT

J. Dokic: " (...) (3) In art, disruption of our normal cognitive relations to the world is accompanied by reflection on these very relations – sometimes in a quite abstract way, (4) perhaps essentially using the concept of art itself ("What am I doing here? What is going on? Is this art?"). (5) Now, aesthetic experience has often been described in terms of *immersion* rather than reflection. This is not restricted to traditional art: think of John Cage's 4'33" or Yves Klein's blue paintings. When we are immersed in a piece of art, our cognitive relationship to it is precisely not made explicit. So I think the notion of immersion should be taken into account along with that of reflection. Both notions are important, and a speculation is that Wollheim's notion of seeing in is a tentative to integrate them in the specific case of figurative paintings. Sometimes they cannot be integrated. The beauty of John Cage's silent piece is precisely that it highlights so clearly the tension between immersion and reflection, and shows the impossibility of reconciling them."

Reply: (3) I agree. (4) One may even think that we cannot account for a number of (experimental, conceptual) artistic devices if we do not take into account that they are sometimes grounded on a (historical) reflection about the concept of art. (5) The distinction between immersion and reflection is another useful distinction. For any given anchoring situation S, the aesthetical mind may have to choose between immersing itself in that particular situation S or reflecting about it. Thinking of this as leading (sometimes) to incompatible attitudes may explain a lot of normative preference/choice about artwork. Many persons may favor artwork as situation for immersion; some others may favor the reflexive phase of artwork scrutinizing. We may expect attentional procedures to be quite different in both cases. In other respects, some artwork kinds may more readily prompt for reflection, whereas others may be optimally organized for facilitating or constraining to immersion.

Un état cognito-artistique ?

pol knots

30 janv. 2003 16:14 UT

Merci à tous. Ce colloque m'a permis d'éclairer une laborieuse démarche artistique (la mienne). Il m'est à présent plus aisé de définir la vocation de l'artiste par rapport aux sciences cognitives. Un acquis fondamental étant de définir l'art, les arts, comme un ensemble d'activités dont le but premier est de déjouer les routines cognitives et, sans doute, de provoquer un état cognito-artistique ou cognito-plastique. Et cela quel que soit le support, le propos, la thèse, l'audience de l'artiste et quelle que soit l'époque considérée. Les icônes relèvent donc bien du genre artistique, même s'il n'y a plus aujourd'hui guère de sens à produire des icônes. Pas plus qu'il ne semble plus guère d'une urgence fondamentale pour un plasticien de faire de la figuration, ni même de la représentation.

Art et science

Caterina Saban

2 févr. 2003 21:40 UT

Vraiment merci à Gloria Origgi et à Noga Arikha pour m'avoir donnée l'occasion de suivre ce débat et pour comment il à été conduit. Parmi les plusieurs toutes intéressantes interventions et les nombreuses questions qu'elles ont suscitées et que j'espère seront traitées dans des prochains colloques, j'aimerais souligner un aspect: quand'est-ce que une expérimentation devient art? Je crois que c'est important tenter d'articuler cette question pour maintenir une distinction entre art et science, lesquelles, quoi que nécessairement se 'parent', ont des domaines d'intervention différents. Il m'arrive de ressentir par exemple dans certaines oeuvres d'art contemporaine une sorte de manipulation du matériel traité qui les rends trop explicites, presque des démonstrations scientifiques. Je pense que l'art n'as pas pour but d'expliquer, éventuellement celui de suggérer. C'est propre à une opération artistique réussite de donner une dimension esthétique à quelque chose qu'avant n'existait pas. Il ne s'agit donc pas seulement de comprendre ou de reconnaître ce dont on avait pas conscience, mais d'acquérir une 'nouvelle image' qui devient vivante. Le risque autrement c'est de transformer l'artiste dans un traducteur ou bien dans un expérimentateur ou un anthropologue. Toutes ces dimensions peuvent être excitantes mais sont-elles suffisantes pour définir un artiste?

Art et expérimentation

Gloria Origgi

4 févr. 2003 12:50 UT

Je pense que Caterina soulève une question importante liée au rôle de l'expérimentation dans l'art.

La définition même d' « art expérimental » proposée par Nicolas Bullot : "Experimental art = any action (whatever media are used for the memory of this action) based on the building of an anchoring situation that takes into account, or reveal, any cognitive or political problem", semble légitimer ce rôle de l'artiste en tant qu'expérimentateur. Mais est-il y a quelque chose de propre à l'art dans cette expérimentation?

Si dans le but le révéler le problème politique et cognitif de la credulité des êtres humains j'arrive à publier une fausse nouvelle sur un journal prestigieux concernant l'invasion de la Terre par les Martiens, est-ce que j'ai fait un « acte artistique » ?

Art, Science, exemple d'Orson Wells à la radio

Maria Rossi
7 févr. 2003 9:21 UT

Il y a des différences relativement claires entre l'art et de la science. Par exemple, l'activité scientifique est soumise à des contraintes qui visent à contrôler la validité des croyances qu'elle génère (e.g., falsification expérimentale, modélisation quantitative, prédiction), afin d'en faire des connaissances. L'activité artistique n'est pas soumise exactement aux mêmes types de contraintes. Généralement, l'art vise uniquement la production de l'expérience d'un phénomène X (image, événement etc.), et non la production de connaissances objectives sur X. L'expérimentation artistique peut donc avoir lieu sous des formes faiblement contraintes.

Gloria : « Si dans le but le révéler le problème politique et cognitif de la crédulité des êtres humains j'arrive à publier une fausse nouvelle sur un journal prestigieux concernant l'invasion de la Terre par les Martiens, est-ce que j'ai fait un « acte artistique » ? » Intéressant exemple. C'est ce qu'a fait plus ou moins Orson Wells à la radio, et qui lui a permis de décrocher le contrat pour réaliser 'Citizen Kane' (un film qui porte notamment sur le pouvoir des média pour manipuler l'attention). A mon avis, quand il lisait le texte sur les martiens devant le microphone, il n'était pas en mesure de prédire à quel point son expérience allait influencer l'esprit des auditeurs (avoir un tel impact socio-politique). L'expérience était faiblement contrôlée. Cependant, dès lors que l'événement a eu lieu, il était clair qu'il avait montré quelque chose d'important, en dépit du fait que cette « expérience » s'est produite de manière moins contrôlée qu'une expérience scientifique. Maintenant, à partir de quand l'expérience devient-elle artistique ? Pouvons-nous découvrir une frontière claire à partir de laquelle quelque chose devient artistique ? Ces notions ne tendent-elles pas à se confondre dans chaque dispositif artistique particulier ?

exemple Orson Welles

Caterina Saban
8 févr. 2003 21:30 UT

Pour répondre à Nicolas Bullot, oui je suis d'accord que le problème de quand quelque chose devient artistique se pose dans chaque dispositif artistique particulier et que c'est difficile de trouver une frontière claire à partir de laquelle quelque chose devient artistique. Il me semble néanmoins que c'est surtout un risque de l'art expérimental d'être parfois trop fonctionnel (bien que certaines opérations puissent représenter des démarches importantes) au discours philosophique, cognitif ou politique et de ne pas préserver certaines conditions d'autonomie qui puissent garantir l'existence de l'art en tant que art, quoique le sens de ce qu'on entend pour art puisse se modifier dans le temps. Pour faire un exemple, je ne suis pas sûr de reconnaître à la transmission à la radio d'Orson Welles le statut d'œuvre d'art tandis que je le reconnais au film Citizen Kane.

statut oeuvre d'art

laurent berry
9 févr. 2003 12:39 UT

Une expérimentation et un objet accède au statut artistique principalement par son inscription arbitraire dans le champs artistique. Le jeu de l'art a tendance à jouer avec ses propres limites (il y a eu une expo hors limites, ou l'art des limites) qui veut que Marcel Duchamp transforme par provocation un urinoir en œuvre d'art en le plaçant dans un lieu où il peut accéder à ce statut. De même, Jacques Kerchache qui est collectionneur d'art africain vous expliquerait avec d'autres artistes africains comment brusquement l'occident dit à un africain qui produit des objets ou dessins qu'il est un artiste et comment cet homme devient un artiste qui expose de l'art à l'expo "les magiciens de la terre". Il y aurait beaucoup à dire sur le sujet, d'autant que l'art expérimental est expérimental contre l'autre art de facture plus académique (cinéma versus cinéma expérimental où est toléré par exemple de ralentir un film de Hitchcock le faisant durer 24 heures=artiste Douglas Gordon). Un créateur intéressant sur ce point est Léonard de Vinci qui a une œuvre artistique et une œuvre scientifique. Pourtant nous n'avons pas de doute sur le statut à attribuer à ses différents travaux.

Instigateur d'expérience, réponse à Gloria Origgi

Bernard Gortais
14 févr. 2003 15:42 UT

Alva Noë parle de l'artiste comme instigateur d'expérience. Je suis tout à fait d'accord avec ce point de vue et je trouve l'usage du triangle de Kanizsa pour illustrer son propos très juste. Le processus de création artistique aboutit à mettre à la disposition du public des dispositifs expérimentaux de perception qui fonctionnent à la manière du triangle de Kanizsa. Quand cela marche, le dispositif est perçu comme une œuvre d'art, on perçoit une autre dimension du monde (de soi-même) qui nous le rend plus vaste : la perception de l'œuvre d'art (forme 1), perçue sur le fond du contexte social (forme 2), fait apparaître un monde plus vaste et non codifiable (forme 3). Ce sont les conditions de cette relation qui me paraissent intéressantes à étudier, sachant que l'arrangement adéquat de la forme 1 et de la forme 2 est à réinventer continuellement pour qu'il soit efficace.

[2] CATI is a GET project: Groupe des Ecoles des Télécommunications. It was created by teachers-researchers and students of ENST Paris: Fabrice Alves, Jérôme Berger, Alexis Blavette, Irène Charon, Matthew Coyle, Romain Czarny, Thierry Gourdin, Alain Grumbach, Olivier Hudry, Cédric Larielle, Amélie Plu, Martin Renard.