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WHAT DO (SHOULD) ARTISTS KNOW?

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the function of the humanities in the education of artists within a framing discussion regarding how knowledge itself is defined and described in relation to the role of artist as it is being performed in contemporary American society and described in the discourse of American art and art education. It drawing on the concept of role as developed in sociology, and on the work of Bakhtin, Mukarovsky, Langer, and especially Cassirer, it constructs a socio-semiotic, role-related definition of knowledge in the arts, and uses that definition in describing art and the activity of artists in an attempt to address issues arising in the ongoing discussion of the place of the humanities in the education of artists and the place of Fine Arts education within the broader context of Liberal Arts education. It discusses what artists in general know, as incumbents in their albeit shifting social role, in order to suggest what artists should know, and what art education should be.

THE PROBLEM(S)

For art educators to effectively answer questions regarding the function of the humanities in the education of artists, or what art education should be, or should include, an inquiry needs to be made into what artists do know, in general. If we don’t specify and describe clearly what knowledge is associated with the role of the artist, how can we possibly specify what components need to be included in that “body of knowledge?” How can a curriculum be developed if the end-in-view is not specifiable in general terms? This is the intrinsic problem of a definition of knowledge in the arts that focuses on “knowledge how.” If the definition of art is constantly shifting, how can art educators know what will artists need to know to function in a meaningful way in the future? What other than technique should they learn? This issue exists within the field of art education.

There is another issue in art education, one that shows up in Liberal Arts institutions of higher learning much more than within institutions which are dedicated solely to the education of artists. If art educators cannot answer the question, “What is knowledge in the arts?” in terms commensurate with those used in the sciences and social sciences, they are left with descriptions of the arts in terms of entertainment, catharsis, self-expression, etc., etc., and seem to cede the realm of knowledge, broadly defined, to other fields. Arts so defined are in danger of being seen, as they are so often in K-through-12 education, as a “frill,” something unimportant, unnecessary. After all, the institution exists to educate the pupils, to give them knowledge, and giving them the opportunity and the tools to express themselves, or, even more trivially, to entertain themselves, can be seen as not to “fit in” with the task of such institutions. This is the extrinsic problem of definitions of knowledge in the arts that focus on “knowledge how,” but the productions resulting from the processes covered in that “how” are not seen to be epistemologically
commensurate with the productions in the discourses and social systems of other disciplines in the academy. It shows up and functions in the communications between the field of art education and other fields within the educational context.

The problems briefly described above require change within the field of art education. According to Confucius, in order to change things, it is necessary to call them by their correct names. This paper suggests a new way of naming/describing knowledge in relation to the artist’s role, as a means of addressing those problems and making salutary change within art education.

A SOCIO-SEMIOTIC DESCRIPTION OF “THE ARTIST”

Although the term “artist,” is used everywhere in the discourses of art production and publication, art reception and history, art education, etc. with the assumption that it does not need to be defined or that to define it is too complex and difficult, “artist” is a social role, and may be described using the nomenclature developed in social psychology and role theory. Although by using such a definition, much of the complexity of the term is lost, what is gained for our purposes is a clarity and simplicity that can then be brought to bear on the epistemological questions so vital in the context of art education.

The online Encyclopedia Britannica defines role thus:

Role, in sociology, the behavior expected of an individual who occupies a given social position or status. A role is a comprehensive pattern of behavior that is socially recognized, providing a means of identifying and placing an individual in a society. It also serves as a strategy for coping with recurrent situations and dealing with the roles of others (e.g., parent–child roles). The term, borrowed from theatrical usage, emphasizes the distinction between the actor and the part. A role remains relatively stable even though different people occupy the position: any individual assigned the role of physician, like any actor in the role of Hamlet, is expected to behave in a particular way. An individual may have a unique style, but this is exhibited within the boundaries of the expected behavior.

For the purpose of describing what knowledge is in the arts, I wish to describe it in relation to one role only—the role of the artist. I will not discuss the other roles in the social systems of the arts or art education in which the artist takes part, as social actor or as concept, such as that of art teacher, or art critic, nor will I discuss what the term “knowledge” means in relation to any of these other roles. Thus, we are describing the artist in social terms, as a social actor, playing a role, as defined above. But what of the “semiotic” component of “socio--semiotic?”

For this purpose, I will here make a distinction between essential attributes of a role, that is, essential behaviors. Essential to the role of artist is the claiming of at least partial ownership of the processes of production of an art object or event. I write “event” because the framing of a work of art may be ephemeral, and may leave no physical trace. The work of art, however, must exist socially for the artist to function
socially. Our discussion is focused, again, on the social definition of the artist, not in issues of identity or interiority. One of the core behaviors of artists is that they claim ownership of and participation structured in relation to the idea of control in the processes of production of works of art. Thus, the works of art, as defined above, are evidence of the agency and activity of the artist. They are, finally, essential to the claim of incumbency in the role of artist. An artist who does not in some way participate in the production of art in a way that can substantiate a claim to ownership of the process eventually cannot substantiate a claim to being the incumbent in the role of artist. Note, please, that I am not here asserting that the artist has to make anything—they just have to be able to substantiate a claim to ownership of the process of production.

THE SEMIOTIC DIMENSION OF ART

I will also assert here that the activity of the ownership claim to the process of production of a work or works, however it may be blurred or problematized, is a claim to the process of production of an object or event which functions within the semiotic dimension of human behavior. Even for a human utterance or gesture, meaningless or inextricably ambiguous when perceived at too great a distance or under bad conditions, can be seen and interpreted as very meaningful when viewed in terms of its context, and the viewer’s puzzlement dissipates abruptly. That person waving to you from the distant, violent surf, is not expressing high spirits, but is hailing you for help. Already any work which invites interpretation in relation to the tradition or surround of art, has a meaning by reason of that reference, even if that reference is made through an act of rejection and renunciation.

Any event or artifact, including found objects framed in any of a myriad of different Duchampian ways, that is to be asserted as a work of art, functions in relation to those aspects of human behavior that have a semantic potential. If it is to be art, it functions in relation to the context in which it occurs/becomes public, if only to invite interpretation and response in relation to the tradition of such behaviors that have entered into the tradition of art. Even invocation and reference is meaning, if only from the point of view of the interpreter. Human artifacts or gestures that have no meaning or no social function or reference to that which is or has been considered to be art by both the person claiming ownership of the process of production is not socially defined as art, and by at least one other person, is not art in any meaningful social sense.

THE SEMANTIC GESTURE AND THE EXPANDED FIELD OF COMPOSITE DISCOURSE

Jan Mukarovsky, a member of the Prague Linguistic Circle in the 1930’s and 40’s, invented the concept of the semantic gesture as a way of analyzing the multiple aspects of works of literary art. The work of literary art was described as like a meaningful gesture in a conversation, with the literary discourse being like a conversation. This idea of the work of art as “a gesture in conversation” works with a distinction very similar to that which Susanne K. Langer makes between discursive and non-discursive symbol systems, in Feeling and Form. Drawing on the work of Ernst Cassirer, to whose work I will refer below, and accepting the distinction between thought and emotion, she sees discursive uses of language, mathematics,
etc, as being to symbolize thoughts and ideas, while nondiscursive symbol systems, i.e., different traditions and kinds of art, as being used to symbolize human feelings. All of these three thinkers draw a distinction between art and other forms of human semiotic activity, something I’ll address below.

Mukarovsky developed this concept specifically to describe the literary work of art. I, however, am drawing on Frantisek Deák’s use of this concept in his book Symbolist Theater, in which the work of art is not a text, but a performance, an event, which takes place in a social context, but which can be described in relation to “...the organizing principle of a work, the conceptual unity of semantic composition,...and locates it in the context of aesthetic norms and values as well as in the social and political context, and ultimately with all spheres of culture.” (pp. 8-9) The use of Mukarovsky’s metaphor of gesture to describe a literary text within a discourse, which functions like a conversation within a social context through time, when applied to a performance, inspired me to broaden the definition of discourse to encompass any symbolic interchange (an idea also consistent with the formulations of George Herbert Mead and the Social Interactionists whom he has inspired). Thus, the discourse of the arts is a composite one, in which works of art and texts both participate, in which verbal and nonverbal “semantic gestures” are interchanged. I do not wish to suggest for me that in my use of the metaphor/analogy, the distinction between “spoken text” and “gesture” is the same as that between “work of art” and “text.” Rather, I wish to think of any symbolic product being part of the “conversation.”

BAKHTIN, SPEECH GENRES, AND “CORE SYMBOLIC PRODUCT”

Mikhail Bakhtin also describes literary discourse, and other “higher” (more abstract) cultural interchanges using the metaphor of conversation and spoken language. In focusing on the pragmatic aspect of language, its use by human beings in situations, and then applying what he saw there to literature, he discovered the roots of literary genres, types of works, in ways of speaking and types of speech—in speech genres. Although Bakhtin was primarily a literary theorist, he was aware that his ideas could be applied to other forms of semantic behavior—to art. His insistence upon the social embeddedness of the “utterance,” which he takes as the basic unit of language communication, again brings us to the concept of role, because speech genres, the way that human beings use language in a particular situation, cannot be separated from the roles that they are playing in that situation. Again, if we expand the use of Bakhtin’s conversational metaphor, and, accepting the semiotic component of works of art, we can see that works of art can be described as among the utterances of artists.

But when we look at the expectations of a role, some are more essential than others. Let us describe the role in terms of products. Some of these products produced in role will be more essential to the role, described from a point of view, than others. From my point of view, I want the plumber I hire to fix the sink. I’m not so focused on him sending me the bill. But if we think in the most general terms, or, shall we say, in terms of educators of future incumbents in a role, these educators would want to educate their students in all the emergent aspects of that role—you need to train the plumber to weld pipes and to write up a bill, etc., etc.
Still, some of the aspects of the role, conceived of in the broadest terms, would be seen as more essential. Such an aspect is usually described in terms that are very closely related to those used to name the role. These are the core behaviors, resulting in the core products.

I assert that the core product of artists is art, as I defined and described “art” above. If a person cannot make a reasonably convincing claim to some form of ownership of the processes of the production of works of art, that person will with great difficulty sustain his or her claim to the role. Art is the core product of the artist, and art is a type of product (genre of utterance) that is *semiotic*/*symbolic*. Many roles in our society have key products that are not symbolic; the role of artist is among those for whom the core product *is* symbolic.

—DISCOURSES OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ARTIST

Let us return to the proto-semiologist, Ernst Cassirer, as a thinker who might provide concepts helpful in describing the activity of artists, and their core symbolic products, in relation to our reformulated question, “What is knowledge in relation to the artist’s role?”

Ernst Cassirer’s grand conception of “Symbolic Forms,” first elaborated in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1929) and later articulated more succinctly in his *Essay on Man* (1945), comes out of the German neo-Kantian, critical philosophical tradition (in which, incidentally, Mikhail Bakhtin was also trained). Cassirer finds in several of the symbolic forms different human ways of symbolizing, and as such they are representations out in the world of aspects of human nature. A valuable aspect of his thought is that art is seen as one of these symbolic forms, and that none of the symbolic forms are thought to supplant or replace any of the other forms. Thus, religion, language, myth, mathematics, science and art are each considered to have an unassailable validity. Human beings do not “outgrow” myth or religion, even though they might have come to science at a later date.

Because each symbolic form a represents an aspect of what it means to be human, human nature can be located, studied, and understood in terms of what man does symbolically, and by looking at the products of those differing kinds of symbolic behavior, which are collected in archives of those products, an archive that is structured in terms of human activity as it has unfolded in space and time; in terms of histories. In Cassirer’s thought, the archives of human symbolic activity are conceived of spatially, as if laid out on a two-dimensional surface that one could traverse at will—all there simultaneous potentiality. The archive of each symbolic form can be mapped, explored, added to, accessed from and at any point. You can go to different places within it, can move through it in different directions and paths. They are “out there,” socially available, even though in their totality, they reflect the inner nature of human beings. Cassirer starts with the mind of man, with the faculties of man and mankind’s ways of knowing, which we can’t see, touch, hear, etc., cannot sense directly in others, though we can at least think we can in ourselves, but he ends with the accumulations of the activities, articulated through the body, of that bizarre entity, the human mind.
There is an apparent affinity between this aspect of Cassirer’s thought and aspects of the thought of Michel Foucault that I note here in passing. Foucault begins from another point, as a historian trained in the French Annales School of history, while Cassirer, who was born in 1874, was educated in the 19th Century German tradition of scholarship that focused on the concept of “Wissenschaft,” a term poorly translated in English as “Science,” and misinterpreted in the 19th Century by American scholars as “pure science.” In the German usage, Wissenschaft refers to a structured body of knowledge—an archive of human symbolic activity, to be explored—but also formed and organized by the student. This approach met neo-Kantian critical philosophy, the archivist met intense critique and a search for abstract organizing principles. For Cassirer, the abstract organizing principle became the idea of the symbol, with each archive not only containing products of a certain type, but corresponding to a human way of symbolizing the world, of knowing. Cassirer originally focused on the sciences, conceived of as they are in both Germany and America, but eventually, his interests broadened to follow out the Wissenschaf ten that included structured bodies of symbolic product that would not in any sense be defined as knowledge in American English, e.g., myth and art.

I want to focus on this aspect of Cassirer’s formulation at its end point: the structured archive is “out there” in the world. It is not “in here.” Although Cassirer makes claims for the Symbolic Forms in the style of Kantian analysis as being evidence of what is “in here,” if not in human consciousness, as it is lived, then in human nature as it has been lived through human consciousness, through time. Yet, we do not have to accept those claims. Rather, we can look at the archives of the symbolic forms as collections of human symbolic products, and as the archives of discourses, as I defined them above, that were formed through the functioning of social systems. Although to suggest that we adopt in English a definition of knowledge derived from Cassirer’s exploration of “Wissenschaft” is radical, because to do so is to make a departure from the tradition of use of “knowledge” in English that certainly goes back to platonic texts in the Latin of the early Christian tradition, it would not be the first time such a departure occurred. The “12th Century Renaissance: re-absorption of Aristotle into Western philosophy, which was articulated in Scholasticism, and, eventually led to modern science, was a more radical turn.

One of the advantages of just such an adoption of Cassirer’s conception of the commensurability of all the symbolic forms of human behavior is that it does not involve a Cartesian definition of knowledge. Knowledge is not about consciousness, it is about behavior, it is about what is “out there,” socially, without denying the interiority of human beings. If the structured body of symbolic product, the Wissenschaft, the knowledge, is not defined in Cartesian terms, as something that is “in here,” is private, is an experience, like Descartes “clear intuitions,” on the model of mathematical discovery—that starting point of Greek philosophy, as well, but rather is social, is shared, is symbolized, and is in many Forms, with each Form being different. Significantly, no Symbolic Form is superseded by any other, that is, each is a discourse, a collection of genres of symbolic products, and none is more or less symbolic, valid, human, etc. than any other. If we consider each of these traditions, each of these discourses, each of these archives, as a tradition of knowledge, with those who are participating in the discourse as generating knowledge which,
through the operation of the social system is added to the archive, then the knowledge of artists shifts from being essentially “knowledge how” to make art. In relation to their role, the knowledge of artists is like that of the participants in every other knowledge discourse. It is their core symbolic product. That is, what artists know, and know essentially is their art work.

The above formulation is not to trivialize the personal experience of discovery, of knowing, of realizing. These experiences do occur and are part of the process of symbolization, which is an epistemological process. Rather, for the sake of argument, let us exclude the definition of “to know” based on that experience, and focus on the social proof of knowledge—the symbolic product that is placed in the public realm in some way or another (and a vast realm for interpretation opens up in describing the contexts in which those products are made public.) So, where is knowledge? For the sake of our discussion, it is “in” that which is symbolized when it is published, and enters into the public archive, then it is “out there,” in the public sphere, not “in here” in consciousness. Let us look at some of the implications of the complex of ideas I’ve laid out so far in this paper.

A FURTHER EPISTOMOLOGICAL OBJECTION

Is knowledge exclusively symbolized in language and mathematics? Can knowledge be symbolized “nondiscursively,” as Susanne K. Langer would have it? Although the epistemological tradition has a strong prejudice toward knowledge, in general, as being conceived of as symbolized in language and mathematical symbols, and toward the “hard sciences,” those which are most mathematical like physics and chemistry being privileged, if one scrutinizes the epistemological tradition, there is no necessary reason why this is so. In Plato, true judgment or opinion (that is, verifiable in relation to sense impressions), as warranted in language, was held to be insufficient. The experience, methods and forms of mathematics, in particular, geometry, were held up as the model for what knowledge must be, Thus, Platonic idealist epistemology, which held sway for hundreds of years in Western Europe, denied empiricism, in order to grasp at a chimerical certainty. Aristotle had rejected platonic idealism, in favor of a proto-scientific method of reasoning from sense impressions, and describing processes, rather than attempting to deny their reality, in terms of the conceptual framework of causes. Both vied for dominance for centuries, but Plato won out within the Christian context, and Aristotle was essentially forgotten until the 1100’s, when he rose to prominence. By the 1600’s, the systems of description and analysis that had been developed within Scholasticism broke down, and Western physical science began to rise to its position of intellectual dominance as a world view and as an epistemological model and standard. But this does not mean that it need remain so. Nor do we need in the United States to define knowledge as narrowly as we do. We take a hint from the great tradition of German scholarship as practiced in the 19th Century, and carried forward by Ernst Cassirer. In fact, if one views and describes the different traditions of symbolic activity, the different archives, the different discourses that generate those archives—both the generation of the products that are included in the archive and the organizing principles (social practices) that place those products at particular locations within the archive—as discourses that produce knowledge, then the pedagogical problems stated at the opening of this paper begin to dissolve.
Let us return to our original problem statement with which I began this paper. If an artist’s knowledge is their artwork, then they need produce no other symbolic product to warrant either their incumbency in their role, nor to make a claim to having the knowledge of that role, which is a role that functions in a social system that generates knowledge that is commensurate with that of physical scientists or social scientists or practitioners of the humanities, then art students should know whatever funds the processes of their artistic creation. Within the discourse of artistic production, they should be called upon to be articulate about research done to fund the processes of artistic production for which they take responsibility, so that their teachers and others in the academy can guide them effectively. When art students are acting in their role as artist, they do not need to write in order to provide a warrant that they “know something.” Their artistic production provides that warrant. This does not mean that they will not as part of their training have to create symbolic products that are produced in emulation of other role positions in the discourse of the arts (e.g., art historian, critic) and that are not directly related to the role for which they are training, that of artist. In the context of a Liberal Arts institution, this also means that the art student will often have to create such products from role positions other than within the discourse of the arts—for the chemistry lab, they’ll have to produce their lab book. However, in the later years of their training, as they focus on their thesis projects, their work should revolve more and more around art production.

This focus on art production should not necessarily mean the elimination of all subject matter other than that exists within the archive of/symbolic form of “art.” Art students need to have a broad background in the humanities and, yes, in the sciences, because they need to be full participants in their society. All of these subjects enter into what artists should know. I call this the Balanchine syndrome—Georges Balanchine was an artist of broad culture, and a dominating modern choreographer in the dance idiom of ballet, but few—if any—of the dancers who worked with him have gone on to become major choreographers in their own right, and certainly none approach the prominence of Balanchine. Why? I would suggest that the technical demands of Balanchine’s choreography left his dancers without the time and energy to function as broadly-based participants in their own culture. They essentially are left without an individual voice as artists. This is the danger of the conservatory system of education, the epitome of which was the Beaux Arts school of Paris in the late 1800’s, which turned out much accomplished work that is now seen as vacuous and retrograde. It is for that reason that artists should be broadly educated, even in art schools, and why “irrelevant” subjects should be taught to them. Students need to be educated to participate as citizens in the society of which they are members. This is the purpose of Liberal Education and the purpose of the Humanities and the Sciences within an art school.

But, with all this information, all these discourses, art students need to be coached to keep track of their purpose. They need to appropriate concepts and facts generated in other discourses into their own discourse, the discourse of their art production and art presentation, testing them in the context of their studio practice and writing based on their studio practice.
Anything they do and experience and learn and know (in the Cartesian sense of “knowing”) can become part of their symbolic product, but for them, there is a difference between making and writing that art history term paper, in terms of role definition the writing (or other symbolic products) done in any discourse other than that of art production is a kind of imitation. It’s useful in that it helps one to be a broadly-based participant in the different roles (with their different types of production for the different roles) in the discourse and the social system of the arts, because those different sub-discourses and their associated roles reciprocally define each other.

The second problem, that of the threat to the arts in general educational contexts and in Liberal Arts College contexts is also addressed if the arts are seen as a discourse that generates as its core symbolic product knowledge. Although that knowledge is generated through a different set of methods, in a different discourse, because we are describing them all semiotically, the knowledge of the work of art is commensurate with that of the report of a physics or psychology experiment, or paper reporting on historical research. If we think and describe semiotically, the issues that arise from describing the production of art as merely entertainment or self-expression, and therefore less important than activities that produce knowledge disappears. According to the criterion of the American Pragmatists, because this formulation is more useful, at least for those who are involved in art and art education, it is truer.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


TO BE SPIRITUAL IS TO BE NATURAL, TO BE NATURAL IS TO BE BALANCED

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Is “real life” possible in this “modern” world without nourishing the soul; embracing our instincts, listening to the inner voice, and creating a spiritual culture with Nature as we once did? We, as humans, have become highly disciplined, rational and organized through technology and science. We exalt such things as the creation of weaponry for mass destruction, genetically modified foods, factory farming and cloning and label those things “progressive.” We continue to be seduced by power and aggrandizement, and we dismiss our primitive voice as superstitious. This state of disorientation results in a culture that is restless, neurotic, dependent on prescription drugs, tobacco, and alcohol and consequently, fearful. Because we continually ignore the concept of what is sacred, mysterious, natural or numinous, Modern humans are disorientated and disconnected from our Mother Earth, others, and themselves.

What are the moral consequences of demonizing Nature, our abandonment of the unconscious, the unseen world, mythology, and the poetic? Can we continue to separate the spiritual from the educational process, business, or the artists’ studios, much less from our daily lives? Can we continue to be seduced by the latest iPhone, iPad, iConversation, iRelationship? We have become inferior to Nature, not a part of it. Our arrogant disassociation from Nature must be destroyed in order to open the portal for a redefinition of values. Then we can create a new paradigm based on relatedness and consciousness. The humanities can only elevate human consciousness if we are conscious in the first place. It is only then that our attempt to be balanced has a chance.

Reconnection to Nature is the vital beginning. Without developing our consciousness and a state of awareness, in order to be conscious, it will not matter what we create, work towards or teach. Activist Henry Spira’s mother wrote to him in 1954: “It is not the theoretic question if life has any purpose. It is the practical question which purpose do we put to life.”

We are aware that art exists within social, political, and cultural concerns. Artists, for one, who address political, environmental and social issues that inform, will transcend the Cartesian illusions which enhance detachment, the alienating views of separation which have been encouraged by technology, and the ever present environment of greed. This is necessary in order to create a new aesthetic. Transformation will require a redefinition of values, in order to take control of our destiny and stop our race to destruction into which modernism has seduced us. The ego must be displaced so we may heal our world collectively and reharmonize towards a consciousness based on relatedness, healing and the heart. Once this occurs one can rediscover the soul itself on this sentient earth. The realization of the anima mundi, the world soul, must be manifested in order to reweave, and to regain the earth for all creatures. We must again imagine the extraordinary and even the impossible, without human reason or fear. In the words of writer Suzi Gablik,
“The remythologizing of consciousness through art and ritual is one way that our culture can regain a sense of enchantment.”

Many artists have used their voices to create political art that challenges us and offers us a restoration of our moral consciousness. They present reminders as to who we once were, who we are and who we aspire to be by creating work that can transform one’s consciousness. Artists have worked alone and they have worked as collaborators, but some have worked with awareness in order to transform consciousness through art. Many have long abandoned the subjective individualism of modernity and expanded to speaking about the whole in an attempt to make intellectual, moral and spiritual sense of the world and all of its creatures.

Three living artists today have made conscious efforts to inform with awareness by incorporating the themes of power, powerlessness, containment and oppression in their work. These artists have used critical thinking and their individual, unique ability to problem solve in addressing ethical issues through their work. It is not surprising that all three have made specific reference to the Holocaust.

Judy Chicago has promoted a consciousness of moral importance in her major works, all of which have been collaborations. In 1993, after eight years of research, Chicago and her husband, photographer, Donald Woodman, premiered “The Holocaust Project: From Darkness Into Light” which incorporated painting, tapestry, stained glass and photography. In the book that followed, Holocaust Project, she wrote, “I wondered again whether art could really help in confronting the Holocaust so that its lessons could be applied. Perhaps the Nazis were afraid of modern art for a good reason. Visual art has the power to provide us with a way of facing aspects of reality that are too painful to approach except through the oblique path that art allows.”

Chicago comments her research had led her to the conclusion that it was essential to dehumanize human beings in order to “process” them:

I had learned that during the Industrial Revolution pigs were the first “things” on the assembly line. I began to wonder about the ethical distinction between processing pigs and doing the same thing to people defined as pigs. Many would argue that moral considerations do not have to be extended to animals, but this is just what the Nazis said about the Jews. Others argue, or believe subconsciously, that animals exist for human use. They assume that people are more important than other species and are horrified when human beings are treated like animals.

She comments still further:

Some people have been offended by the fact that we are suggesting parallels between the destruction of European Jewry and the genocide of other cultures and the mass slaughter of other species. But I believe that it is this larger context of genocide and destruction that created the conditions for the Holocaust and that, in the future, people will look
back upon the massacre of other species during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as being genocidal in nature. But that will be a shared view only when we evolve to the point where we understand that all species have the right to coexist on the Earth and that other creatures do not exist merely as means to human ends.\(^5\)

As philosopher Theodore Adorno, a German Jew forced into exile by the Nazis wrote, "Auschwitz begins wherever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they're only animals" (qtd. in Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka*, 53).\(^6\)

Proving that the comic can shape cultural ideology, Art Spiegelman won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for his graphic novel, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*. Based primarily on interviews with his father, it is his account, in comic book style, using cats and mice as characters, of his parents’ experiences as Polish Jews in the Holocaust. He said that it was not until he left home that he realized “[…] that not everybody had parents who woke up screaming in the night.”\(^7\)

*Maus* became two volumes: *Maus I, A Survivor’s Tale* and *Maus II: And Here my Troubles Began*. Spiegelman drew Jews as mice, the Nazis as cats, the Poles as pigs and the Americans as dogs. “By using these mask-like faces, where characters look more or less the same, a sketchier drawing style, I am able to focus one’s attention on the narrative while still telling it in comic strip form. So that distancing device actually brings one closer to the heart of the material than a true comix [sic] approach,” Spiegelman said.\(^8\)

Spiegelman explained the original impetus for *Maus*:

At first, the genesis of that first-three page "Maus" strip was that I was asked to take part in an “Underground Comic” that Robert Crumb was part of, and a few other Underground cartoonists who were based in San Francisco were part of. The only editorial premise was one used anthropomorphized creatures rather than people. At first I wanted to do comic strips about black oppression in America using cats and mice. As I started I realized that this was a ridiculous thought in that I just didn’t know enough about the situation to be anything other than a liberal wimp with good intentions, but not enough underlying knowledge about the situation to do uhm [sic] any meaningful work. I realized that my own background included material of oppression which could be more directly applied.\(^9\)

Echoing the comments of Judy Chicago, Spiegelman adds, “The rhetoric of the genocide that the Nazis used had to do with the extermination of vermin; it wasn’t murdering people, it was squashing parasites, lice, rats.”\(^10\)

In his essay, “The Burden of Complicity” philosopher Tom Regan wrote:

> Among the members of the human family we recognize the moral imperative of respect. Every human is a somebody, not a something. Morally disrespectful treatment occurs when those who stand at the
power end of a power relationship treat the less powerful as if they were mere objects. The rapist does this to the victim of rape. The child molester to the child molested. The master to the slave. In each and all such cases humans who have power exploit those who lack it.11

Sue Coe’s web site is appropriately called “Graphic Witness.” Coe has researched and illustrated subjects such as slaughterhouses, factory farming, the subject of containment, the cruelty towards animals in entertainment, AIDS, prisons, apartheid and war – ugly things. Things we prefer to turn away from, and worse, ignore. Coe puts these images out into the world for all to see and to be imprinted by. She witnesses and records through her art. Those recordings go beyond her personal experience to collectively become our experience.

The intolerable treatment of animals raised for food and the slaughtering of those animals were the subjects for Coe’s work, Dead Meat, published in 1995 after six years of documenting her experiences. How does an artist convey the terror in innocent animals’ eyes before death, the sound of chain saws on still breathing bodies, the odor of blood and the jobs of the workers who wade in that blood and flesh every day? How does one stand there as fellow humans compound the horror by adding to the misery of these animals who have no federal laws to protect them? How does an artist convey the sordid reality? Coe viewed first hand slaughterhouses in the United States (that she was allowed access) and documented that journey with her sketchbook and interviews of the workers and the managers of those facilities, those “killing floors.” Apparently, an artist’s sketchbook did not appear threatening, as in one New York State slaughterhouse, the head slaughterer pointed the bolt pistol at Coe and said, “This is to kill artists, women and animals.” 12

Coe’s motivation for her work is perhaps best summarized by her reaction to a passing cattle train made during a visit to Colorado, “The suffering of these animals is mute. For the defenseless, the gentle, the wounded, the ones who cannot speak, life consists of indescribable suffering.”13

Tom Regan’s preface to Coe’s book Dead Meat begins with an appropriate excerpt from Enemies, A Love Story by Isaac Bashevis Singer, “As often as Herman had witnessed the slaughter of animals and fish, he always had the same thought; in their behavior toward creatures, all men were Nazis. The smugness with which man could do with other species as he pleased exemplified the most extreme racist theories, the principle that might is right.”14

Coe describes the conflicts she felt while recording the atrocities and inhumanity of the slaughterhouse:

[... ]Every part of my being says to stop it, save them, which is impossible. I think of “art” and how I am going to draw it all. Will anything change when people see? This “art” thought comes so quickly after the failed rescue thought, as an attempt to comfort myself, like the idea of the “spirit” of the animal going on to another place. I feel sick and my legs are shaking—my hands too—I concentrate on acting “normal.” Various animals are killed. I look for a way out.”15
Coe further remarks, “The Holocaust keeps coming into my mind, which annoys the hell out of me. I see this reference in so many animal rights magazines. Is this the comforting measuring rod by which all horrors are evaluated? My annoyance is exacerbated by the fact the suffering I am witnessing now cannot exist on its own, it has to fall into the hierarchy of a ‘lesser animal suffering.’”

Tom Regan comments on animal desires and natural behavior in the preface to Dead Meat: “The desires for food and water, shelter and companionship, freedom of movement and avoidance of pain—these desires are shared by non-human animals and human beings. As for comprehension: like humans, many nonhuman animals understand the world in which they live and move. Otherwise, they could not survive.” And he further states, “So beneath the many differences there is sameness. Like us, these animals embody the mystery and wonder of consciousness. Like us, they are not only in the world, they are aware of it.”

Demonstrating courage, a sense of selflessness and the abandonment of speciesism, artists, writers, biologists and philosophers are incorporating ethical, and spiritual issues into their work due to the realization that it is our reconnection to Nature that is critical to all species’ survival. Echoing Jung and empowered by a posthumanist philosophy to allow Nature to heal and in turn, to heal us, it is a collective consciousness that is manifested by these Avatars of our times who are abandoning anthropocentrism, ignoring the concept of Other and embracing a reconnectedness to Nature.

Enhanced by technology, we have barricaded ourselves in reason to the point of stagnation and detachment. To conquer Nature with our intellect, we conquer our sprit and our very souls. We must become one with the Tao, that is to reharmonize with Nature. It is then that we will be more spiritual in order to be more natural and, in turn, more balanced.

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A MEETING OF THE ARTS, HUMANITIES, AND SCIENCE IN DIGITAL ARCHIVES

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I have been coming to this conference for years precisely because I see it as living proof of the link between the arts and humanities—and the sciences too. Since this year’s theme seems to focus on the future of these links, I would like to discuss what I see as a major thrust of that future, something that has come to be termed the “digital humanities,” but that, I would argue, involves much more, including the arts and sciences. The name seems to stem in part from an effort by the humanities to get on the technology bandwagon, which the arts and sciences seemed to have had a head start in integrating into their practice. I see digital scholarship as a way to link these three areas together in several respects. Here I will describe projects that connect plant collections, botanical illustration, and scientific writing in interesting and enlightening ways.

But before I do that, I will give a short introduction to the collection and study of plants. In order to identify and investigate plants, botanists need to examine them carefully, ideally using live material, however, this isn’t always available. The next best thing is a preserved specimen, usually a dried, pressed plant, which though perhaps not so aesthetically pleasing, does retain the basic characteristics upon which identification is ordinarily made. Such specimens are mounted on heavy white paper and stored in collections called herbaria. There are approximately 7.4 million of these at the New York Botanical Garden alone. Particularly important in such collections are the type specimens, those upon which the original published descriptions of species are based. Publication is an essential part of making a plant species name part of botanical science, and this means a library of such literature is as important as the herbarium itself. Also pivotal to botanical science are accurate illustrations, particularly to document subtle differences among species. In many cases, an illustration is superior to a photograph because an artist can emphasize crucial details, making them more apparent to the viewer, something a camera lens cannot do. It is not a coincidence that the rise of botanical science in the 16th century coincided with the first botanical gardens, accurate published botanical illustrations, and herbaria. Access to fresh and preserved material as well as illustrations and text were all necessary to the advancement of this highly visual science. In other words, from the beginning art, science, and the humanities were linked.

BOTANICA CAROLINIANA

I would now like to present a number of digital projects that connect plant specimens with texts and illustrations. The first one seems to me to be an exemplar for future work. It is “Botanica Caroliniana” (http://folio.furman.edu/projects/botanicacaroliniana/) dealing with research on historical botany and focusing on the Carolinas (McMillan et al., 2013). This is a collaboration among researchers at the South Carolina Botanical Garden at Clemson University and Furman University’s Department of Classics with assistance
from the Natural History Museum, London. One of the project’s productions is a website (http://folio.furman.edu/projects/botanicacaroliniana/Parallels.htm) providing an alignment of Mark Catesby’s herbarium specimens with his Natural History of the Carolinas, Florida and the Bahamas (1731-1743). After spending several years studying the natural history of these areas in the New World, Catesby returned to England, delivering many of his specimens to his patron, Hans Sloane whose collections later formed the basis of the British Museum. Catesby, a talented artist, then worked up his watercolor sketches into engravings for his publication. On the “Botanica Caroliniana” website, each illustration in this three-volume work is set next to the text describing it and the herbarium specimen of the plant pictured in it—a superb example of art, science, and history presented in an integrated format.

For the Catesby project, Patrick McMillan of the South Carolina Botanical Garden worked with Amy Blackwell, a researcher in plant and environmental science at Clemson, in scanning Catesby’s herbarium specimens that are in the Sloane Herbarium (SH). Christopher Blackwell, a professor of classics at Furman University, is involved on the technical side because of his expertise with software called CITE that allows portions of images to be isolated and “quoted.” He had participated in the Homer Multitext project on ancient Greek manuscripts for which CITE was developed: it can electronically focus on and copy small portions of text (Blackwell & Blackwell, 2011). This same technique works well in zeroing in on portions of herbarium specimens and can be helpful in directing students’ attention to a specific plant part. It is almost like sitting alongside an expert who is pointing out structures and providing a magnifying glass to study them more closely.

In a blog post on a specimen collected by John Lawson in Carolina in 1710, Amy Blackwell (2014) presents such a “citation,” a small plant fragment with a label pasted over it in Lawson’s hand. Attached to a sheet in the SH along with other plants, this specimen is what Lawson terms a spontaneous “trefoil,” a plant that grew without its seed being intentionally sown. This page is an example of Deborah Harkness’s (2007) claim that a sheet gains value and interest as it passes from one person to another. She chronicles a group of naturalists living in the Lime Street area of Elizabethan London who developed a significant body of botanical knowledge. She writes of their plant collections: “Every time a dried plant specimen changed hands it became infused with new cultural and intellectual currency as its provenance became richer, its associations greater” (p. 31). This theme runs throughout the history of plant collecting and is one reason why herbaria are such rich resources for historians and artists as well as for botanists. Obviously, these specimens gain further interest, develop a richer provenance, when they become part of a digital collection and then be cited as Blackwell does in her blog post.

HANS SLOANE

A look at the history of the British Museum (BM) is in order here to highlight just how significant the integration in “Botanica Caroliniana” is. As noted earlier, the BM was founded on the basis of the Hans Sloane collection, as stipulated in his will. His museum included not only his herbarium but his zoological and mineral collections, as well as his books, art, anthropological, and numenological collections. The museum was first housed in a Bloomsbury, London mansion, though some of it
remained in storage. Over time some items were deacquisitioned and others simply discarded because they had deteriorated beyond usefulness. This was particularly true of the zoological material. In the early 19th century, a new building for the museum rose on its original site. It housed collections and a library, with holdings increasing over time. By the mid-19th century, the natural history collections, including the herbarium, had grown so massive that plans were made to move that material to a separate location at some distance from the BM. The new building was called the British Museum (Natural History) in South Kensington. Eventually the split was made complete with the institution becoming the Natural History Museum, London (NHM).

In his book on the SH, James E. Dandy (1958) complained about the difficulty of studying the plant collection at the NHM when the letters and other manuscripts related to it were housed in the British Library (BL) at the BM. Material couldn’t leave either site, so there were many cross-town trips. Since Xeroxing was in the future, photographing manuscripts, even to simply match handwriting, became a major chore. This situation has become even worse since the BL moved to its own building in yet another area of London. Charlie Jarvis of the NHM has described working on the SH specimens of James Cunningham who traveled to China. The correspondence related to these plants is in the BL and the collection of plant illustrations Cunningham commissioned from Chinese artists are still back at the BM. For other projects, geographical separation of primary sources is often much greater and makes the availability of online integration of resources such as “Botanica Caroliniana” that much more powerful and useful for researchers—and also for students of history, science, and art.

The British Arts and Humanities Research Council are now funding a project called, Reconstructing Sloane (http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/science-facilities/cahr/sloane/index.html) with a similar integration goal for Hans Sloane material. The aim is to dig more deeply into aspects of Sloane’s vast collection and reconnect texts, images, and objects. Some of the latter have received little attention, such as the collection of seeds and other plant material kept not in books but in small boxes and bundles. These items can tell a great deal about what physicians and apothecaries of the day considered valuable plant material. Additionally, if items can be linked to other parts of the Sloane collection, such as correspondence or herbarium specimens, then they increase in historical value. It is on the web that connections among objects at the BM, BL, and NHM can be presented most easily and meaningfully.

OTHER PROJECTS

There are also more circumscribed but more organized online collections such as that devoted to the work of Nathaniel Wallich, Superintendent of the Calcutta Botanic Garden between 1817 and 1846. He undertook botanical expeditions, described new plant species, amassed a large herbarium with thousands of specimens, and commissioned Indian artists to paint beautiful botanical watercolors. He has created a website where Wallich’s notes, specimens, and publications are available along with the illustrations, making it possible for visitors to experience how these various resources interplay with each other and to get a
taste for how Wallich did his work (http://www.kew.org/science-conservation/collections/nathaniel-wallich). A user can call up several kinds of information for a particular species. Think of what would be involved in attempting to track down all these items that are stored separately. A similar project is the Missouri Botanical Garden’s portal for George Engelmann’s manuscripts, publications, and specimens (http://tropicos.org/Project/engelmann). He was scientific advisor to Henry Shaw, the garden’s founder.

There are several more massive projects involving the work of giants in 19th-century biology. Darwin’s writings, both published and unpublished, are all freely available on the web (http://darwin-online.org.uk/), as are those of Alfred Russel Wallace (http://wallace-online.org/) and Joseph Hooker (http://www.kew.org/science-conservation/collections/joseph-hooker). But these websites are so huge that they in some sense need to be tamed. One way this has been done, in the case of Darwin, is to draw on them for an online exhibition, “Endless Forms: Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts,” based on an exhibit held at the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge University (http://www.darwinendlessforms.org/gallerydarwin/). Another combination of real and virtual exhibitions that connect art, the humanities, and science is “The Botany of Empire in the Long Eighteenth Century” sponsored by Dumbarton Oakes Research Library (http://www.doaks.org/library-archives/library/library-exhibitions/botany-of-empire). It presents artwork that truly does represent both art and science.

This type of integration requires a great deal of work, and several collections are crying out for such treatment. There is Conrad Gessner’s 16th-century unpublished Historia plantarum that is available as two massive PDFs from the University Library of Erlagen-Nürnberg in Germany (http://digital.bib-bvb.de/view/bvbmets/viewer.0.jsp?folder_id=0&dvs=1412519693485~470&pid=30535016&locale=en&usePid1=true&usePid2=true). It is a difficult-to-find resource that deserves to be electronically joined with other primary resources such as Leonhardt Fuch’s and Brunfels herbsals, both available through the Biodiversity Library (http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/). Sachiko Kusukawa (2012) has built this relationship in book form, but a digital presentation has yet to be developed. The same type of problem exists with the website built for the botanical illustrations created by a team of South American artists in the late 18th and early 19th centuries under the direction of the Spanish botanist and expedition leader José Mutis (http://www.rib.csic.es/icones/mutis/paginas/): it isn’t linked to information about the plants. Daniela Bleichmar’s (2011) book is a great resource on this and other Spanish expeditions, but there is no comparable digital resource. In terms of United States expeditions, there are a number of websites dealing with the Lewis and Clark Expedition plant collection, but they would better serve interdisciplinary interests if they were integrated with each other.

BROAD CONNECTIONS

“Linnaeus Link” (http://www.linnaeusslink.org/) is an example of the kind of connections being made among what were disparate collections, often housed not in different parts of a city, as with the Sloane material, but in different parts of the
world. It aims to provide a catalog of Linnaean publications and manuscripts found in institutions in Sweden, Britain, the US, and a number of other countries. Many of these have already been scanned in separate projects, but they can now be accessed from one portal with a more sophisticated level of linkage. Still broader is “OpenUp!” (http://open-up.eu/), a European Union portal for natural history specimens that is now tied to “Europeana” (http://www.europeana.eu/), a vast collection of material from libraries, museums, and other institutions (Berendsohn & Guntsch, 2012). Inputting a plant name will give results that include photographs of the plant, as well as works of art and herbarium specimens featuring that species. Even if a user isn’t interested in the herbarium specimens, surfing through an image collection that includes them will give the casual viewer more exposure to such specimens than ever before.

The “JSTOR Global Plants” portal is more sophisticated though not as accessible since it requires a subscription to make all its features available. It is not designed for as broad a range of users as is “Europeana,” nor does it link to as wide an array of resources. Here the emphasis is more on depth than breadth. For a particular species, there are links to herbarium specimens, journal articles, and relevant letters and other manuscript materials as well as, in some cases, botanical illustrations. There are also links out to the species pages of plant systematics websites such as “Tropicos” and to resources in the “Biodiversity Heritage Library.” In addition, users can keep a record of the resources they have accessed for future reference. One particularly interesting feature for herbarium specimens is a measuring tool that allows the user to compare the size of the same structure on different sheets, and thus investigate variation in and among species.

ART AND SCIENCE VISUALIZATIONS

All these websites deal with visual material. In Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production, Johanna Drucker (2014) does an effective job of connecting pre-web visualizations, some from ancient manuscripts, to how information is presented on the web today. She argues that most information visualizations are acts of interpretation masquerading as presentation. She also makes a distinction between humanist and realist approaches to visualizations and sees an issue with images moving from science into the digital humanities. She considers scientific visualizations as Trojan horses—ways for assumptions about what constitutes information to be integrated into digital presentations: “Realist approaches depend above all upon the idea that phenomena are observer-independent and can be characterized as data. Data pass themselves off as mere descriptions of a priori conditions. Rendering observation as if it were the same as the phenomena observed collapses the critical distance between the phenomenal world and its interpretation, undoing the concept of interpretation on which humanities knowledge production is based (p. 125).”

Another issue is how working with text and images can influence how people think about information. In discussing a Welsh digitization project that involved participation by volunteer transcribers, Lorna Hughes (2014) argues that the greatest benefit may not be a vast number of transcribed documents, but rather the transformation of people’s experience by immersive interaction with digital library
collections and the development of a public that is encouraged to collaborate in producing new knowledge. Enriching digital content in this way can enable greater engagement with primary sources than was previously possible, democratizing the research process and encouraging better engagement with broader audiences.

Digital resources such as I have presented here definitely fit in with Julia Marshall’s (2014) vision of taking a step further in linking art and science education. In her discussion of transdisciplinarity, that is, learning through a fusion of disciplines, she argues that art integration into the curriculum flourishes at borders between disciplines. Her approach, which involves analysis of a transdisciplinary question through text and image, would be very useful in designing activities that combine exploration of digital plant collections with art and science assignments, such as studying and describing plant structures in both words and images. Such pairing of visual learning in art and science can foster the development of students’ personal visual language (Wilks, Cutcher & Wilks, 2012), and is an example of how art education can be pivotal in the development of expertise in other disciplines. I would argue that the kinds of online resources that include botanical information, history, and art, are wonderful harbingers of what could be available in the future of art and science collaborations.

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WHERE DO WE FIT IN?
ETHICS, THE ENVIRONMENT, THE ARTIST

Maureen Korp
Ottawa, Canada

With apologies to all. This conference is convened to address the question: “What should an art school be (whither or wither the arts and humanities)?” My presentation this afternoon, however, is not concerned with the shape of a particular art school curriculum. Instead, I want to argue for the cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural importance of the study of liberal arts—i.e., arts and humanities—in the education of all students. My argument is anecdotal, and based on three experiences.

AT THE AGRICULTURE SCHOOL

In 1998, quite unexpectedly, I was asked to teach a course on environmental ethics\(^1\) to students enrolled in the university’s Faculty of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. The semester had already begun. That week 45 Ag students had walked into their classroom to find no instructor. Someone had forgotten to hire someone. Clearly, this course did not rank high on anyone’s list of priorities.

My telephone rang. “Sure,” said I. “I can do it.”

Had I ever taught “environmental ethics” before? No. But I had just published *Sacred Art of the Earth*\(^1\) a study arguing the earth-centered ethic of much contemporary land art. How had I determined this? I’d asked the artists. Questionnaires and interviews. In all, 120 artists contributed to my study. Generous with their time, forthcoming with their answers. Well-known artists, too. The findings—both questionnaires and interviews—were consistent: as a group, the artists had felt numinous moments walking the land. Moreover, they wanted others to “see, really see” the earth in those terms, too. Their work, as environmental artists, I concluded, was ethically intended.

The students sitting in the Ag School’s environmental ethics class that year were all upper-level students. One day, I knew, some were likely to find themselves administering international agriculture aid programs. Wherever they went, they would confront problems stemming, in part, from socio-cultural differences in perception of the environment.\(^2\) Noted geographer Yi-Fu Tuan argues, what we see of the environment is rooted in our religious notions of “sacred place.”\(^3\) Other scientists agree.\(^4\)

As their instructor, I wanted my students to understand, to appreciate deeply, that whatever it is we point at and label “the environment,” *this* (pointing, naming) is itself an enculturated event—be it landscape, seascape, cityscape, God’s land, the Big Apple, whatever... The “virgin forest” is not unseen, it is not ever *terra incognita*.

In the first class meeting, we covered a lot of ground.
I handed out copies to all of the United Nations “World Charter for Nature.” Passed by the General Assembly in 1982, the Charter’s dicta are comprehensive. There are 24 in all, and they leave nothing out—war, poverty, genetic engineering… The Charter became a constant reference in class discussion.

My lectures were set up cross-culturally and comparatively, one topic at a time, four in all:

- What is a landscape; or, who-sees-what-when-where-why?
- Places for the dead;
- Places for the living; and,
- Lastly, sacred places.

Each topic asked the question: Where do we fit in?

Each week I loaded images of environmental art into my trusty Kodak 35mm carousel slide projector. I needed the work of artists for my lectures because… Artists are really good at making complex ideas comprehensible and visible to others.

Following each slide or film presentation, I broke the class into discussion groups of 6-8 students, presenting each group with a different question to be discussed in the next 7 or 8 minutes. Each group chose one of their cohort to present their findings. My role was to summarize, comment, synthesize.

The students liked small group work, and grew more confident week by week in their use of visual data as primary evidence for their arguments.

The students were also responsible for writing two field reports. The first field assignment was an exercise in observation skills. The students were instructed to keep sensory field data notes throughout a 48-hour period of silence. No talking for 48 consecutive hours.

“What do you mean by ‘sensory data?’” the students asked. “Good question,” I replied. “How many do you want to count? Not every culture limits sense data to five—seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting. (Not even us. Sixth sense? Sense of balance? Rhythm? Time?)” We agreed all would track the Aristotelian five, but be alert for other possibles, too.

For the second field report, the students designed and conducted sets of semi-structured interviews with two different groups of people—those who had lived all their lives in rural Quebec, and those who had emigrated as adults to the region from another country—in order to compare and contrast the answers obtained. The questions the students asked their informants concerned perceptions of the environment: e.g., the amount of snow, summer temperatures, numbers of songbirds, etc.
At the end of the year, I was sorry to wave goodbye to my School of Agriculture students. They had been a wonderful class. The students evaluated me quite highly, too, and the Ag School Dean was very pleased.

I have made use of those same techniques—48 hours of silence, interviews, visual analysis—here, there, and elsewhere—wherever I have landed, regardless of the Faculty in which I have landed, because the best classes are the one where the students are teaching me. Group work and field reports keep my eyes open, too.

GAIL BOURJEois: TO WARN OTHER CANADIANS

Twenty-five years ago, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. My daughter walked into the living room to find me weeping in front of the TV. "Mom, Mom, what’s the matter?!!" "Look," I replied, "Look! They’re dancing on the wall and no one is getting shot." I then explained what and why the wall. The Cold War was ending. It took a while for the import of all that to sink in everywhere.

In Canada, for example, the very secret “Diefenbunker” in the village of Carp, just outside of Ottawa, remain staffed 24/7 by the Department of National Defense for five more years. Not until 1994, would DND begin to think about decommissioning the place.

The Diefenbunker is mammoth. It is a bomb shelter carved deep, four stories deep, into the rock of the Canadian Shield. Built to house 535 people, mostly men, the structure was designed to be a nuclear bomb shelter, one sturdy enough to survive a 5-megaton nuclear blast. The shelter has 300 rooms. It was completed in 1961.

The government of Canada expected there would be war. Moreover, when the bomb went off, the government expected to be able to run away and climb down into its hidey-hole, then 30 days later, emerge and return to work. Peace, order, and good government. The Canadian way. Radiation? Fallout? All would be gone by then. If any remained...? Nothing that a good sweep and scrub could not clear.

“Mutually assured destruction” was the strategy of the day. Madness.

But, if the Cold War is over, of what use is the bunker?

Air raid siren at the entrance to the Diefenbunker: Canada’s Cold War Museum, Carp, Ontario
Carp’s secret bunker became a community museum in 1999, ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Its architecture and furnishings have not been changed. Pillows and sheets are still on the beds. Visitors enter through the bunker’s 378-foot blast tunnel. The temperature is always cold, distant footfall echoing in the tunnel and corridors.

Underground blast tunnel, Diefenbunker
In 2000, the museum’s opening was marked by a large, international exhibition of the work of 13 artists. There have been smaller exhibitions since. The vault intended to hold the gold of the Bank of Canada has become a gallery used, for example, to display temporary exhibitions ranging from children’s art to Hiroshima photographs.

In 2013, Gail Bourgeois began a six-month artist’s residency at the Diefenbunker. The first artist to hold a residency at the museum, Bourgeois knew how to investigate the site, how to read the documents in the library, how to listen to and look closely at the stories told. Artist Gail Bourgeois, 2014.

Gail Bourgeois is an American émigré, long resident in Canada, and a Canadian citizen. Her education at West Liberty State College, West Virginia and Concordia University (MFA) in Montreal had included a solid background in literature, as well as history. At the Diefenbunker, the artist had an uncommon opportunity to learn both site and story intimately. “To Warn Other Canadian” a series of 120 drawings, a fragmented frieze in situ at 20 different sites inside the bunker—is the outcome.

Gail Bourgeois. To Warn other Canadians. 2014. Detail. cafeteria wall.

Gail Bourgeois’ work unfolds site and story with an artist’s intuition of ancient precedent. The Parthenon’s interior frieze of the Panathenaic procession has been destroyed, but its storyline—the walk of a people seeking protection—continues right into our time. It is a storyline Bourgeois found echoes of in her work at the Diefenbunker.

The artist’s residency afforded Gail Bourgeois open access to the archives, files, library, and all of the rooms and corridors in the Diefenbunker. She gathered
materials for her work from two primary sources: declassified documents and photographs found in the museum archives and a series of pinhole camera exposures.¹¹

To construct the frieze fragments, Bourgeois layered Mylar sheets over declassified documents, archival photographs and imagery, graph paper, and prints. She then drew in direct response to the layered data, scanning layers to make 112 inkjet prints, each print protected and bordered with black tape. The prints were taped together to form fragmented storylines aligned in black-edged registers. They appear to have been part of the walls for the last 50 years. In some sense that is true. Things happened here. The walls have ears.

Gail Bourgeois. *Cold War Pieces: ViewMaster*, 2014. inkjet print on Fabriano paper, 28x20cm
The most important feature of the residency for the artist’s work, however, was permission to walk the rooms and corridors, over and over again, hour upon hour. Walking intensified the artist’s sense of spatial relatedness—room to room, ceiling to hallway—and, the knowledge of the tales told in these rooms. The architecture became a thing-in-and-of-itself, its volumetric forms poked and prodded by memory.

The artist marked the location of her work with a simple stencil posted nearby—the black silhouette of an air raid siren. There were no titles, captions, or explanatory texts on any wall to accompany the imagery. Visitors were given a map to find their way independently.

![Decontamination Room, level 400, Diefenbunker.](image)

The Decontamination Room, level 400, for example, is entered through a shower, its walls painted acrid yellow. A black air raid stencil turns the eye to a wall with figures in gas masks, HazMat suits, and children’s schoolroom posters—*Bert the Turtle, Duck and Cover.*
In the Health Centre, level 400, are four hospital beds, an isolation room, and an x-ray machine. One frieze includes Notes on Nuclear Warfare for Medical Officers by command of the War Office, 5th April 1952 and a young girl’s photograph. She is naked and runs screaming—the MyLai attack. This is what happens and what can be done next.

Down on level 300, the walls of the CBC Emergency Broadcast Studio have four collations of imagery—each a Cold War topical reference to the world outside, references familiar to those inside. Drawings of burnt bodies, black crows, and jesters are braided into newspaper stories of spies, trials, food shortages, and photographs of the bunker’s own blast tunnel. Would those outside have let others in? No.
Gail Bourgeois. *Cold War Pieces: Potsdam-6*, 2014. Inkjet print on Fabriano paper, 28x20cm

When war is done, we memorialize the dead. But if a war has not been fought in blood, what story is told? In this work, Gail Bourgeois collapsed time lines between what-happened-then, what-we-knew-when, and.....what is today. The work is a warning: *Duck and cover.* The warning is timely.

*September 21, 2014, the New York Times reported* “…a nationwide wave of atomic revitalization that includes plans for a new generation of weapon carriers.... Cost over the next 30 years will be upwards of a trillion dollars.*

**HANIFA ALIZADA: THROUGH THE EYES OF A WOMAN**

Afghan artist Hanifa Alizada of Kabul is a photographer. Six years ago, she was one of my first-year students at Beaconhouse National University (BNU), in Lahore,
Pakistan. Today, she is the first artist to have her work sent on tour by the World Bank. “Through the Eyes of a Woman” is a solo exhibition of Hanifa Alizada’s photography. Curated by Marina Galvani, it is part of a World Bank initiative entitled “One in Three,” a title denoting the numbers of women worldwide brutalized violently, or “one in three.” The exhibition program debuted this summer in Washington, accompanied by two theatre plays and two panel discussions, in addition to Hanifa Alizada’s photography.


According to the curator, “Hanifa’s works were the poetic and inspirational core of the exhibition.”
Hanifa Alizada. *A Monument*, 2012. black-and-white photograph, h.68in x 42in

Hanifa Alizada's fearful photograph entitled “A Monument” is the cover of the catalogue. It depicts, the artist writes: “...a woman’s suffering when her life is summarized in how a man wants her to live it.”

My student has generously credited her art history classes with me as a catalyst for the work. Nonsense. Hanifa Alizada is brave, tough, diligent, very smart, and VERY observant. She also had the good fortune at BNU to be one of Malcolm Hutcheson’s photography students.

Born in Ghazni, Afghanistan, in 1989, Hanifa Alizada is part of the Hazara people, a minority tribe in Afghanistan, who are mostly Shi’a Muslim. During the Taliban takeover, the family was particularly endangered by their faith and their ethnicity. In the artist’s study, “The Price of Breathing,” we see not only a reference to the Taliban’s efforts to destroy the Bamiyan Buddhas, we also see the necessity to witness, to remember.

Of this work, the artist writes:

From the day they removed the eyes of Buddha, the history of his people merged with the dust of tragedy and sorrow and its every pore is filled with war and crime, plunder and spoils, cruelty and brutality, instead of love, of compassion, of hope.
The family fled to Iran in 1997. Hanifa was 8. As refugees in Tehran, their lives were constrained, and schooling restricted. Afghan children could not attend schools past grade 7. The Hazara people are distinctive in any group. They claim descent from the Mongols.

Hanifa Alizada’s series entitled “Die to remain alive” presents cruelly the desire for round eyes, straight nose, for some way to look like others, to “pass” for one of them. Then, one would be safe.
Hanifa Alizada. *Die to remain alive, 2012*

Then again, one could just stay covered as we see in her photograph of a covered body. It is entitled “1400 Years of Sameness.”
In 2002, the family returned to Kabul. The Allied invasion of Afghanistan had cleared a narrow pathway. Hanifa Alizada graduated from Marefat High School in 2007 and was awarded a scholarship permitting her to attend BNU in Pakistan.

Hanifa Alizada arrived in Lahore in 2008, on her own, not knowing Urdu, finding Punjabi foods strange, and the weather.... hot! My introductory class in art history was a sharp awakening. Wrapped in her veilings, she sat front row centre. Came the first test, she failed. So did most of the class. Badly. Most with grades of less than 20. How come? The students had been taught to memorize answers, perfectly. They had no experience with tests for which the answers were not already known. Three weeks later, yet another test...and a better outcome. Many passed and passed well.

What had happened in between? My classroom practice of small group discussion, each group using visual evidence to make arguable points, had now become the
students’ own extra-curricular practice, too. Nightly in the women’s dorm, the students were debriefing one another, using their own notes for argument. Sitting down in study groups. Nightly. Moreover, several of the students said this was Hanifa’s idea.

What can be said about Leonardo’s painting of the “Mona Lisa” that Duchamp has not already said? In Hanifa Alizada’s interpretation, we can see how the relevance of those discussions with her peers. In her composition, we see only the delicate hands because, as Hanifa Alizada wrote of this work, “Hiding oneself is always a good way to remain safer.”

Hanifa Alizada. *Mona Liza*, 2011. black-and-white photography, h.18in x 12in

In the paired photograph of two individuals, entitled “Look at Yourself,” the man looks at the woman. She does not look at him. She looks down at her hands. The ring on one hand marks her status and separation clearly. In Afghanistan, women
own their jewelry. Is this status more important than looking at him? Does it matter? Not much. In Afghanistan, a woman’s “husband” is addressed as her “owner.”

Cruelly, we see the trade-offs presented by the status of marriage in “Real Life.”

Half the human race cannot see the other. Hanifa Alizada says the human body and “the gestures of the human body” are the subject matter of her work. “I am an Afghan. I am a Hazara. I am a girl. None of the above decreases my value as a human being.”
IN CONCLUSION

For both artists, their work arises from their own lived experiences: Gail Bourgeois is a child of the Cold War; Hanifa Alizada is a daughter of Afghanistan. In the work of both, we see far more than narrow self-expression. In a most unselfish way, each artist has taken singular experience and moved that point-of-view, that particularity, into the wide ambit of human history.

From the dawn of time, human history is one of gestures made in the dust for others to see. In the work of both Gail Bourgeois and Hanifa Alizada, we see people walking, people seeking protection from harm.

Knowing what others have seen provides the art student with example and conviction that her work matters, too. Knowing what others have seen provides all of us with a measure of our humanity. Art saves lives. In hard times, that truth cannot be said quietly, or set aside conveniently.

NOTES

1. Ethics and the Environment was a cross-listing shared by the Faculty of Arts with the Faculty of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at McGill University, Montreal. The chair pulled my application from a pile of applications leftover from an earlier full-time faculty search.
3. The study of cultural perceptions of the environment is an interdisciplinary field sometimes called “topophilia” (love of the earth) in recognition of the importance of geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s classic study by that name. See Yi-Fu Tuan, Topophilia: A study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1974). See also by the same author, Landscapes of Fear (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979) and Paul Shephard, The Cultivated Wilderness: or, What is a Landscape? (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1997).
4. This theme comes up throughout Yi-Fu Tuan’s work. See, for example, Yi-Fu Tuan, “Geopiety: A Theme in Man’s Attachment to Nature and to Place” in Geographies of the MInds: Essays in Historical Geography in Honor of John Kirkland Wright, David Lowenthal and Martyn J. Bowden, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 11-39.
5. In 1998, UNESCO convened a “Natural Sacred Sites” symposium (September 21-25, Paris), one of a series of meetings following the 1992 Rio de Janeiro “Earth Summit” (UN Conference on Environment and Development). I was among those invited to present papers on our research during the plenary sessions. Our project was to begin a discussion describing and analyzing “natural” sacred sites in order to see if such sites “can serve as indicator sites” for the rehabilitation of degraded environments.”
6. In addition to Yi-Fu Tuan’s work to structure our discussion, I outlined Ninian Smart’s “six dimensions of religions” template and James Livingston’s discussion of ethics as road maps for our work.
7. The importance of visual and spatial perception as a mode of knowing is, of course, not a new area of inquiry for philosophers, art historians, psychologists, and artists.
8. The exercise of 48 hours of silence is one I have adapted from an assigned exercise I did as a student, 1973, in a course in Primitive Art taught by Karen Thorsen, then a doctoral candidate in Folklore at the University of Pennsylvania.
9. The Kalingas, an indigenous people of the Philippines, count six; the first, and foremost for them is “talking” (Robert Lawless, email to MK, 3 July 1997); another group in India count 16, including “equilibrium” among the basic bodily senses (Axel Thiel, email to MK, 3 July 1997).
10. The “Diefenbunker” is named for Prime Minister John Diefenbaker whose government authorized its building. Construction began in 1959 and was completed in 1961.
11. The pinhole camera exposures were made by Maggie Knaus and Giuliano Pirani.
14. All quotes are taken from the catalogue Hanifa Alizada: Through the eyes of a Woman, Washington, D.C.
THE PLASTICITY OF IDEAS: PAINTING AS A LIBERAL ART

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One who has become all eyes does not see.
—Agnes Martin¹

In a review of the exhibition “See It Loud: Seven Post-War American Painters” last fall at the National Academy Museum in New York, Paul Resika was asked about the shared ethos of this particular group of artists. He answered: “We used to call it plasticity...plastic imagination, that’s the only way you can understand painting, without that you’re just talking about styles; plasticity is the great quality—movement, nothing flat, nothing dead.”


On a related note, John Keats once famously observed that “touch has a memory.” Today, many new art students will immediately admit to the frustrations of combining the elements of seeing, movement, memory, intentionality and vision and the process of balancing and juggling all of these elements simultaneously. If, however, we look at the idea of painting as a liberal art and how it might be taught, we may see that it is ultimately, not just a technique, but also a thinking process. Inspired by Gardner’s theories of multiple intelligences, this essay will outline six functions of growth and development in the process of painting.

THE SIX MODES, DIMENSIONS AND FUNCTIONS OF PAINTING:

Painter, let be the nervous scratches, the trick spontaneity, learn to see again.

-Denise Levertov²

MIMETIC: characterized by, exhibiting, or of the nature of imitation or mimicry; make-believe;

MIMESIS: close external resemblance, as if from simulation, imitation, or reproduction.
Primary examples of this mode are of course from the ancient era of Fayuum painting in Egypt, some of the most naturalistic and realistic paintings in history.

“Fayuum Period Funerary Portrait,” 100 BC – 300 AD.  


Other examples include all periods of realism, from trompe l’œil to photo-realism. Many American artists have practiced this, from John Frederick Peto to Chuck Close and Sylvia Plimack Mangold.

“Still Life,” John Frederick Peto, 1900.  


This also brings to mind the classic modern realist, Edward Hopper and his influence on many younger artists, including the early work of Altoon Sultan.
“Hodgkin’s House,” Edward Hopper, 1928


First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is.
Caterpillar
sheds its skin, finds a butterfly within.

- Donovan

SEMIOТИС: of or pertaining to signs; a general theory of signs and symbolism; to interpret as a sign; the doctrine of signs.

Gothic and Northern Renaissance paintings, beginning with the Master of Flemalle and the Netherlandish School, illustrate this through iconological meanings applied to almost every object included in a work of art. A single flower or a set of three, a candle either burning or extinguished, and even the color of a robe all signified a specific meaning.

“Central Panel of the Merode Altarpiece,”
The Master of Flemalle, 1422-1425.

“The Arnolfini Wedding,”
Jan van Eyck, 1434.

More recently, the entire body of surrealist work, from De Chirico and Morandi to Giacometti, Dali and Magritte, provides a totally modern and contemporary set of signs and symbols, but often with ambiguous meanings.

We should also note that the semiotic mode, from the beginning, is very much dependent on the mimetic mode. The objects and images depicted must be ‘believable’ in their own right, whilst also being ‘unbelievable’ and symbolic in their new context.

This horrible but superb painting ‘The Parable of the Blind’ shows a group of beggars leading each other diagonally downward across the canvas . . . where the picture and the composition ends . . . triumphant to disaster.

-William Carlos Williams

KINETIC: pertaining to motion; caused by motion; characterized by movement.

In this mode we are talking about movement in the design sense: the underlying structure of a painting that moves the eye of the observer around the painting.

In Renaissance painting, as well as Neo-Classical and Realist painting, this would include figures pointing off in the distance, or dead bodies lying at a certain angle in the foreground, or a shadow falling across a plane and landing at a specific point in the composition. This has been elegantly explained by Rudolph Arnheim through his “Structural Map” for a psychology of visual perception. The function of the horizon line, as well as the ascending and descending diagonals are some of the elements in this process. My own best personal example comes from those occasions when a slide is inserted into a lecture right and left reversed, and everyone sees or feels that something is wrong, but cannot immediately say what that is!


“The Raft of the Medusa” by Theodore Gericault and “The Blind Leading the Blind” by Pieter Breughel the Elder are two great examples. In fact, with the completion and first exhibition of “The Raft of the Medusa” the era of the great French painting machines had begun.


Important contemporary examples are a black and white Franz Kline action painting and one of Wayne Thiebaud’s views of San Francisco. Each in its own way playing with the directions implied by the ascending and descending diagonals.

For all of us . . . there is a blood memory that can speak to us. We carry thousands of years of that blood and its memory. How else to explain those instinctive gestures and thoughts that come to us, with little preparation or expectation.

-Martha Graham

**KINESTHETIC:** the sensation of movement or strain in muscles, tendons, and joints; muscle sense.

A paper at this very conference in 1992 titled “Rauschenberg’s Tightrope and Pollock’s Dance” by Sarah Gutwirth was my own first exposure to this idea. A second paper titled, “Interdisciplinary Cholera” presented by Dr. William Powers at the 1996 conference here, showed how sharp contrast is recorded by our brains, allowing an increased sense of expression and memory. This current paper is dedicated to these two colleagues and friends.
Returning to Indiana after these conferences I learned that the book on kinesthetics had been written by the great diving and swimming coaches at Indiana University: Doc Councilman and Hoby Billingsly. Divers, swimmers, ballet dancers, gymnasts and artists are all involved in this mode of intelligence.

Some of the best examples of this are in fact the photographers who have captured the movements of the choreographer Martha Graham: Barbara Morgan and Soichi Sunami. And, two little known pieces, one drawing and a painting done by the American sculptor David Smith.
“Page of Studies after Martha Graham,”
David Smith, drawing, 1935.

“1/14-52,” David Smith,
egg ink and tempera, 1952.

You will have to experiment and try things out for yourself and you
will not be sure of what you are doing. That’s all right, you are feeling
your way into the thing.

-Emily Carr

HAPTIC: sensing, feeling; understanding through touching and feeling; (in
psychology:
cutaneous sense data); to grasp, sense, perceive.

No one can teach perspective to a haptic: the artist who cannot sit still, the artist
who understands space, not by being removed from it, but by walking through it.
Feeling one’s way through space and around each and every object.

“The Artist On the Road to Tarascon,”
Vincent van Gogh, oil on canvas, 1888,
(Formerly in the collection of the Keiser-Fredrich
Museum, Magdaburg, destroyed during WWII)

“Van Gogh on the Way to Work”
Francis Bacon, 1957.
Certain painter’s painters come to mind: Vincent van Gogh, Francis Bacon, Alberto Giacometti, Chaim Soutine, Alice Neel and Grace Hartigan.


Mother,”
Giacometti, 1950.

Often, the first criticism raised regarding this work is along the lines of: “But they don’t know how to draw. The proportions are all off.” Later criticisms revolve around the idea that the “perspective lines do not line up.”


However, in this dimension of painting, space is plastic rather than illusionistic: it is felt, solid, has presence and weight. Forms sit in this space figuratively, if not literally.

The artist does his thinking in the very qualitative media he works in, and the terms lie so close to the object that he is producing that they merge directly into it.

- John Dewey

Art as Experience, 1934
**TACIT:** understood without being openly expressed; implied, implicit; unvoiced or unspoken; a meaning or understanding which is greater than the literal sum of the component parts.

This is the highest of these dimensions and the most difficult to describe. Howard Gardner notes, when writing about the arts, that one cannot prove quantitatively what is essentially a qualitative form of intelligence.

“Woman with a Water Pitcher,”
Johannes Vermeer, 1662.

“Composition No. II, with Red, Blue, Black and Yellow,” Piet Mondrian, 1929.

Within the field both descriptive and analytical writing combine to form a realm of thought regarding certain works of art. When this writing reaches a critical mass, agreed upon by authorities in the field, and over a longer period of time, it becomes the standard by which both established and more recently completed paintings are judged. The great Vermeer Exhibition at the National Gallery in Washington, DC, in the winter of 1995-1996 is the perfect example. Every periodical at the time featured essays from critics and artists alike, from contemporary realists to minimal and post-modern conceptualists. All of these writers agreed that the various modes of painting could be recognized in every one of Vermeer’s paintings.

“Natura morta,”
Giorgio Morandi, 1954.

In another example, how can we explain why the contemporary artist Sean Scully, who produces huge abstract walls of light, is so drawn to the intimate works of the Italian artist Giorgio Morandi? In both painters, intimacy and monumentality seem to co-exist beautifully. The tension produced by these two opposing qualities increases the power of both.

“How do we explain something that adds up to a great deal more than the literal sum of its parts? There are very small paintings, intimate ones that always seem monumental to the viewer: works by Vermeer, Giorgio Morandi, or Altoon Sultan. And then, there are larger works like whispers that beckon, such as Albers, Mondrian, Rothko, Samia Halaby and Sean Scully.

Near the end of his life, the painter Philip Guston chose an entire new direction for his work, seeming to reject everything he had created before. He got himself hated by many former friends, but not everyone. Younger poets and painters recognized this new figuration, not as a retreat back into a mimetic mode, but as a venture into
a new plastic arena. It did take time for many critics to fully understand this shift in his work, but it has now become recognized. The doors that he single handedly opened have allowed many younger artists to open even more modes of expression. The artists over the past several years, associated with both the New Image and Bad Painting movements have clearly benefited from Guston's work, as well as a new group of artists, mostly living and working in Brooklyn nowadays, including the work of Dane Patterson.

Henceforth a painting was a legible record of all the decisions, whether tentative or assured, that went into its conception and realization. The issue was not one of speed . . . but rather one of the immediacy and responsiveness of process, the simultaneity of thinking and making.

-Philip Guston

NOTES

2. Levertov, Denise; Collected Earlier Poems 1940-1960; New Directions Publishing Corporation; New York, New York; 1979; p. 130
3. Leitch, Donovan; "There is a Mountain," (Single Recording) CBS Studios; London, United Kingdom; 1967.
4. Williams, William Carlos; Pictures from Breughel; New Directions Publishing; New York, New York; 1963; p. 11.
8. Storr, Robert; Philip Guston; Abbeville Press; New York, New York; 1986; p. 25.

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THE HUMANITIES AND IMAGINATIVE INQUIRY: AESTHETIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND TRUTH

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I. INTRODUCTION

Heidegger clearly sees the marginalization of arts and poetry, which he considers “the same,” as already accelerated from within the technological worldview. In fact, as Heidegger sees it, poetry and art are themselves handed over to “standing reserve.” Their saving grace having been brutally corrupted: the greatest danger lies in our inability to retrieve them. The greatest danger is then a tragic loss of truth.

Heidegger, I believe, is right and the description of the technological ontology or worldview remains vivid to those who pay attention: for some, all of it could be lost because the ontology precludes transparent access to itself, which is part of what it means for any ontology to be a worldview. But if Heidegger is correct in his description of the technological world, we should expect ways of thinking that fall out from and then beyond “standing reserve”: the state of human reality where we challenge forth nature and the world as nothing but a resource. The technological worldview remains intact and has submerged knowledge and truth into what can be stored, measured, maintained and managed. Such a world cannot have any place for poetry and art unless they can also be transformed in the very same manner. Alternatively, they can be discarded as hobbies or recreations or where we send students to assemble an imagination for further outcomes. But the very idea that poetry and art could trump science, the applied sciences, or the humanities as a source of truth is, in our current culture, mostly unintelligible (which is worse than being a joke).

II. LEGAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The antithesis of “aesthetic consciousness” (which I will describe at the end of this essay) is, for this experimental investigation, “legal consciousness.” According to this truth generating process the whole is broken down into measurable parts, gradually reconstructed and then managed for a desired outcome. Legal consciousness is an overall cultural point of view, a cognitive stand that closely parallels its far more formal and dignified academic relative: “justified true belief.”

The eye-witness is at the center of this model of knowledge. Being “on the scene,” an actual observer, the eye-witness is then subject to cross-examination, cross-checking against other known facts, and so inevitably interrogated: in what sense is the eye-witness limited, hampered, prejudiced? Does the witness have a reason to lie, dissemble, or mislead? (It is often over-looked that we do need an overall context for the origin of systematic lying.) Does the witness really want to believe something she has claimed to witness? This process of checking, justifying, self-justifying, interrogating and finally accounting is not any sort of debilitating problem in and of itself: it is a required process in any kind of rational social order inhabited
by imperfectly rational beings. But it is a debilitating problem for human well-being if it strictly dominates in any context, even its own.

The following considerations may help in establishing the above claim. All the entities, events and properties of the accounting are narrowed down and fragmented into discreet parts with (assumed) causal relations: the value of the process only concerns the appropriate outcomes: knowledge of the parts in relation to what we need from the parts. On the other hand, the call for mercy is a call to re-focus to a totality of human existence, to the human circumstance that any accounting must take place within even as the totality is forgotten. Such a call for mercy does not ask for particular events to be re-created and for causal connections to be made. It asks for how any such accounting matters beyond its own narrow scope. Mercy is a categorical challenge to legal consciousness: it reminds us, immediately, of the wider background of human existence, the background out of which any human action ultimately makes sense or has value.

The process of legal consciousness undercuts the possibility of mercy. By fragmenting truth into propositions through demonstration/proofs and then isolating the accused or the target of inquiry, we lose sight of the idea that such radical isolation is incompatible with what makes up the broader human circumstance: in short, legal consciousness taken to an extreme undercuts its own possibility. At the point where we reach a call for mercy (for things or persons) we are looking for a vision of the whole which does not cancel verdicts or outcomes but transcends them and finally makes sense out of them. It is a call for the integration of reality.

These sorts of broad claims for a cultural ontology and epistemology are, of course, grossly hazardous. It is unclear how they can be adequately articulated and it is so equally unclear how they can be assessed. But the last points are vital: that they should be articulated in detail and then assessed is precisely the nature of legal consciousness that I am trying to articulate: here we can see, at the very least, a profound burden on consciousness. Anywhere and everywhere we demand things to come forward and justify themselves. This burden inevitably distorts the manner in which we understand things and ourselves and will finally, I think, analytically involve the exact opposite of what we intend in legal consciousness: lying, deleting, obfuscating, and any other mechanisms that fall out of managing truth for outcomes.

III. TOTALITY

Heidegger’s “standing reserve” under legal consciousness remains and can be further articulated according to the unruly burden it places on things and persons. As we endeavor to force things, persons and practices to come forward and justify themselves we threaten to destroy them in their unity with one another.

For example, the divorce case—no matter how essential to the well-being of the parties involved—cannot possibly handle the unity and meaning within the reality of any marriage (which then also expands immediately into the social world). If this is true it can help us explain how legal consciousness and the accounting of a
marriage can so easily become reckless and irresponsible and how it often ends as a threat to those who tell the truth and to those who lie: everything depends, finally, on how the truth or truthful propositions are “managed” and this just means that truth is fragmented, bent and used for an outcome. What is disclosed is always a possible embarrassment or disaster because the process denies the totality. Hence, abusive husbands are blameless, money is distributed in overtly unjust ways, children are alienated or forgotten. None of this is a critique of divorce or a plea for marriage: it is instead an instance of an ontology without any connection to what makes those institutions possible or valuable at all. What was valuable or worthless about the marriage is necessarily exiled even as positive, constructive or amiable outcomes prevail. What is gone or missed is the totality that cannot be articulated or seen piecemeal in instances of cruelty, neglect, failure or even generosity. The totality will not have a measure or a documentation; it can only be “known” as it is lived and comprehended through itself. As soon as it is cut up into discreet parts that are then managed into individual propositions that are then managed to show who is at fault and so forth it is no longer itself (even as someone might very well be blameworthy), it is no longer a totality. What follows from this is not that nothing true or false comes out of a dissection; what follows is that the dissection is deadly to the totality.

That the marriage can only be “known as it is lived and comprehended through itself” gets us beyond the hurried and impossible attempt to disassemble and recreate: what is beyond and also at the base is the human circumstance that makes marriage, divorce and all the facts of the case possible or even relevant (to anything). And this comes to the surface if and only if we break beyond the divorce trial to the story of the marriage; such a story is the imaginative enterprise to see everything as it necessarily hangs together to form and weave justifications, explanations and the deeper understanding that we call “comprehension.” This is how we first get to the idea that human existence has a meaning, that each part of our existence, each element of it, exists within and because of a completeness or totality. This story or narrative, as told correctly, demands a precision and discipline unknown to the antics and discretionary acts of trial: the discipline of aesthetic consciousness is severe.

Perhaps another, and even more vivid example, is the funeral as it presents us with the labor and ground within totality: our finitude. Sorrow and grief, profound and life changing emotions, as they are thoroughly felt, they beckon totality. We weep at the story of our lost friend or family member as we comprehend what made the anecdote or episode possible: the totality of a life and then the wider social world that made such a life possible. Mortality and finitude close the parameters and so allows for the imagination to work with actual discipline; such discipline necessarily eschews the management of truth. The same is true as we might weep at the sight of a single item that was made fully present within the totality of a finite existence. When we want an accounting of things and items, we are looking for the last will and testament, to the material fate of those items. As the thing is accounted for and itemized we are back to the power of propositions and isolated finalities; where there isn’t a story to be told, a funeral made up of mere anecdotes and episodes, we yearn for its ending, we look forward to some other episode and then release from the seriousness and gravity of human existence. There may be nothing more
unbearably superficial, more damaging to memory and identity, than a eulogy without a story.

When discussing “the story” as it stands within the broad category of art, we have no choice but to consider the nature of inter-subjectivity for the basic reason that this is what establishes both the need and the possibility of art. A story is only possible as it joins character to world in such a way that the two cannot be ontologically or epistemologically separated. That some character exists at all is a matter of comprehending his or her place within an ever expanding social world. When we read realist fiction, the tendency is always toward a more expansive explanation of actions according to the world that the characters inhabit and then according to their relations within that world. What we call “the meaning of human existence” is an emergent property from this expansion in explanation and the bottom level it includes finitude, mortality and contingency; at the highest levels it includes redemption, deliverance, comprehensive evil or deterioration and so forth. Explanation of behavior, which is very nearly synonymous with “plot” and other worn out terms, is organically contained in the revealed nature of events. Truth, within any story, emerges from the inseparability of characters from world and characters from other characters, so that agency is deeply enhanced or diminished by the resources of the world and other characters. There is no existing character that can carry the full responsibility of tragedy in great fiction and this is why we need stories so desperately: they reveal to us, in their totality, the truth of our intersubjectivity.

The denial of intersubjectivity is the destruction of art and, at the same time, the etiology of the worst evils. Arendt, in her banality of evil thesis, argues that Eichmann lacked “intention” and what she meant was that he was systematically denying humanity as political beings, as beings that require others to actually think in normative ways. In other words, Eichmann’s intent to genocide precluded the possibility of reflective thought. Likewise, in the relentless pursuit of legal consciousness, in what I called the “fragmentation and management of truth” we get- as a gross presupposition- a radical form of individuality and individual responsibility. And then, of course, we get the myriad of ways in which individuality and individual responsibility can be denied: we set the stage for lying, dissembling, clerical errors, deletions and “taking things out of context.” It is hard to miss how this is tied to the denial of art and it is hard to miss how this phenomenon circles around our horizons. Lone gunman, sick people or individuals, and so forth “get the blame” and the trials and the journalism (for the most part) more than happily take up this position, even as it looks to other sources of the violent behavior. The very notion that we might implicate the manner in which we have ceased to think, that we lack the resources for revealing the truth, is the first step towards creation, art and so the full weight of the totality. What follows from this is overt: to maintain the individuality of legal consciousness, the fragmentation of the agent from others and the world that he or she lives within, is both easy and tragically ignorant. Stories haunt us and stalk us, as they remind us of our denials and unrealized possibilities.

We can bring these points down from their high abstraction. Suppose we have located a character within a story as “motivated by cruelty.” In doing this, in isolating cruelty and the character, we have to keep track of the above mentioned totality:
cruelty—obviously enough—has an etiology and an object and at the simplest level of comprehending the cruelty we need to tie the singular motive statement to the totality. In other words, there is no such thing as “taking a character out of context” in a story. Cruelty in an accounting, within legal consciousness, is necessarily cut back to events as isolated incidents that somehow add up to a whole. Such a process is necessary for legal consciousness because it is always dealing with what has to be “managed” and “completed” (even as it cannot be). In this case, cruelty as a motive is reducible to the appearance of cruelty as a motive. Legal consciousness is ultimately the field of appearances as objects and appearances can never be adequately isolated from their likenesses. If this is true, it helps to explain how the trial, the accounting, or the assessment can turn into “sleight of hand,” how items on a ledger can be deleted, or how the gravity of circumstance can quickly become sloppy drama. It also explains the hopeless and irrelevant complaints against journalists or lawyers that they have taken an event, a conversation, or a statistic “out of context.” This complaint is finally irrelevant because this is what they do, this is the nature of legal consciousness: being out of context is a matter of never referencing the totality. And finally, without a reference to the totality within the wider culture, we might be able to explain how literature is currently being brought to light as a source of empathy.

IV. VISUAL ART, AESTHETIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND TRUTH

Aesthetic consciousness and practice in visual art, just as in the narrative of fiction, presupposes the unity of its object as its possibility. Plato makes this point even as he derides art: one cannot separate out any aspect of a painting and isolate it without, at the same time, keeping it related to the whole. In short, the whole cannot be reduced to a collection of parts: this is the condition for any aesthetics.

The condition for truth, in the form of disclosure, is the above unity in relation to the disburdenment of consciousness. In relatively direct Kantian terms: aesthetic consciousness disregards instrumentality in creation and so creates a “disinterested interest” in the useless outcome—the work of art. We cannot view art for the purpose of anything beyond the unity of its totality. Such practice in viewing is consistently fouled by our notion that looking at objects is in no way conditioned by how we consistently represent objects. For art to become before observation is for the object of representation to be spared from standing reserve and potential use. This is the profound disburdenment of consciousness.

Truth then comes to us through a “revelation” within the unity of representation. Heidegger’s example of Van Gogh’s painting of the peasant’s shoes is paradigmatic: we can speak of the truth of the shoes in their participation or aspect within a form of life. Here the shoes have a use but now in Heidegger’s sense of “dwelling”: we can see the unity of the peasant’s world from the things of that world. The shoes have immense connections and as such they beckon other things to appear in imagination and to appear without anxiety. We can truthfully say that without the unity, that without the form of life, the shoes make no sense. They have a meaning as they make us endeavor to view the whole. The poet can do the same thing with a few lines: beckon a whole world or entice things to reveal themselves: as Heidegger famously says, “language speaks.”
The truth of revelation, which is far from some supernatural happening and requires enormous diligence, is what allows things to be fully present. Insofar as we are no longer after them, pursuing them or endeavoring to capture them, we provide the context for their presence. If this is at least partially correct, art stands out as how we, as a culture, can truthfully “face up to things.” We know that in propositional truth and demonstration and then in the less disciplined aspects of legal consciousness we can obscure a thing as much as we reveal it: a true proposition, such as the precise number of BTU’s contained in a locust tree or the fact that artistic practice yields better critical thinkers, can hide or obfuscate the thing in question as it closes the domain of its reality. The disburdenment of consciousness as a release from fragmentation endeavors to hold together a picture of the thing in its world for the sake of holding together that picture: it is, more or less, the moral disposition.

V. CONCLUSION

On one level then we have Kantian type ideas: a unity or totality to human existence is an a priori condition for the possibility of art in the broadest sense. Such unity and totality, as emerging from intersubjectivity, makes it possible for us to see the world aesthetically. Any picture, painting, or representation of the world and human life presuppose connections that allow us to collect an imagination. On another level, there are empirical ideas working here: art is, broadly speaking, the same inquiry as ecology. The endeavor is always to see beneath appearances, to the connections behind appearances that make up those appearances. Art is then the collective endeavor against superficiality. But now we can say with some confidence that art helps to bring intersubjectivity into the world by making our connections present in ways that spare the things represented.

Totality is a term that I used mainly to flesh out a background that stops a sort of infinite regress of context. Finally, we reach a point where we are all in the same context. Art, I believe, is always reaching toward that totality even as it views some small sliver of the world. Van Gogh’s painting of the shoes has, in one sense, a very narrow context: a form of life from within nineteenth century European society. But the shoes, even in their narrow context, have immense connections.
CULTURAL AS A QUALITATIVE ONTOLOGY

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This paper is drawn from my most recent book: *Cultural Renewal: Restoring the liberal and fine arts* (Transaction Publishers, 2014), and from my recent article: “Culture as the Pursuit of a Qualitative Ontology,” published in Chinese in the *Journal of Nanjing University.*¹ That book and article address the problem of a global decline in the influence of the liberal and fine arts. Scholars from a wide variety of perspectives agree that the humanities are in a state of crisis. Enrollments have plummeted in past decades, and the civilizing influence of the liberal and fine arts is now in doubt.

At issue is why that decline has happened and whether something should or can be done about it. Various causes of that decline of interest and influence include claims of their obsolescence in the presence of modern natural and social science, of a public distracted by materialism and consumerism, and of a shift from intellectual to pragmatic curricula. However valuable these analyses (and subsequent proposed remedies) might be, they unfortunately neglect the root cause of the problem and therefore are inadequate. It is not that the liberal and fine arts are obsolete, neglected by a distracted public, or rightly or wrongly deemed irrelevant due to assumedly necessary curricular changes. It is that their importance is now tragically denied by the academy to which they are entrusted, and which is legitimatized by them.

It is here posited that the decline in interest and cultural influence of the liberal and fine arts is due to the acceptance by the academy of the reduction of Truth and Beauty to fact and aesthetics. The reduction of truth to fact is called scientism, and Postmodern scientism denies that art, philosophy, or religion provide knowledge of a non-violent reality. Most of the fine art produced over millennia around the world involves philosophical and religious beliefs, and Postmodern scientism denies that art, philosophy, and religion provide knowledge of reality. Relationalism (a concern for how we might get along) replaces the pursuit of meaning in reality and life. Therefore, the intellectual content of fine art is ignored, sociologized, or denied. The liberal arts no longer matter, and art and culture are reduced to entertainment, therapy, or propaganda.

This is particularly problematical to art history, since it denies the intrinsic meaning of most of the fine art produced over millennia around the world. Consequently, the art of Hinduism, Classicism, Confucianism, indeed of all wisdom affirming traditions around the world are viewed sociologically rather than a source of understanding of reality and life. Their content is sociologically described, while their truth claims are ignored. (see for example: John Baldessari’s painting: "Everything is Purged, 1966-68, an otherwise blank canvas with the written message: Everything is purged from this painting but art, no ideas have entered this work).
Whereas we once sought to understand the meaning of life, we now encounter the assumption that we must learn to cope with factual and thus meaningless existence (see for example, the work of playwrights Tom Stoppard and Samuel Beckett). Even worse, is the assumption that since brutal killing and dominance are facts of nature, then as a matter of natural and social science, violence is scientifically affirmed (leading to the wide-spread acceptance of eugenics). Alternatively, we can also try simply to seek pleasure, or to be nice. We can try to avoid mutual destruction via a sensitive tolerance or by practical calculation. What we no longer can do is strive to do what is splendid, what is numinous.

Attempting to do that which is splendid is the perennial and global cultural norm. Cultural traditions around the world perennially acknowledge that we should rise above the sordid facts of life, and thus escape violence and imperfection. Hindu, Buddhist, Classical, Christian, Jewish traditions (to name but a few) all hold that we are surrounded by the facts of life which inform us of natural, biological and social violence. But contra the often sordid facts of life, we need to rise to a realm of perfection. As cultured people we ought to rise to a higher standard than that which is permitted by factual knowledge or social practice.

The problem is that when truth is reduced to fact then qualitative standards no longer are grounded in reality. We can distinguish fact from non-fact, but all attempts to understand those facts, to understand reality and life, all attempts to rise above the often violent facts of life, are deemed emotional and relational rather than intellectual. Instead of seeking knowledge of what in reality is splendid in thought, word, or deed, some worry about how we can be nice to each other, while the less civilized worry about how they can win. It no longer matters whether the truth claims of cultural traditions are actually grounded in reality. All that matters is how they get along, or who will dominate. We can argue for relational tolerance and sensitivity, relational equality, or dominance. We cannot seek to realize what is ontologically profound.

So within the context of facts and aesthetics, how we judge the quality of that which we think, do, and make is problematic. For example, in 1961 Piero Manzoni presented as a work of art an object titled Artist’s Shit, no. 31. Later artists such as Andres Serrano are currently obsessed with the same theme. The point of course is that in a world of facts, there is no qualitative distinction between fine art and shit. And we cannot seek solace in the notion that the artist is nobly contesting this dismal situation. Indeed, the association of art with human waste has significant precedents. In particular are Marcel Duchamp’s scatological works, and his work titled Fountain (1917) in which he presents a deconstructed urinal as a work of art.

The vexing cultural and intellectual problem then is that when truth is considered synonymous with fact, then violence is normalized, and qualitative distinctions are deemed a matter of subjective preference. Culture and the intellectual content of works of art are then viewed as trivial or oppressive meta-narratives. All attempts to actually understand reality and life, all cultural meta-narratives, are then deemed a matter of aesthetic taste. As such, they are beyond rational analysis because they are either recognized as trivial, or as beyond critique. Instead of attempting to understand reality, we focus on how we interact; ontology is replaced by

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relationalism. Within that context we can choose to be either tolerant of all meta-narratives—which trivializes their content, or we can brutally choose to be authentic to our own.

In neither case does the content of that which we think, do, and make warrant intellectual and qualitative analysis.

When meta-narratives are equated with trivial or oppressive fictions (as Foucault would have it) a dangerous sociopathic tendency is legitimatized. When meta-narratives are viewed as expressions of authenticity (e.g. Heidegger), a dangerously destructive authoritarianism results. In either case, all wisdom seeking traditions around the world are viewed as trivial or oppressive lies, which prompt a violent response. This is evidenced by Andre Serrano’s Piss Christ, or Duchamp’s description of his Fountain as a “Buddha of the Bathroom.” Neither the trivializers nor the authentic can brook dissent. A self-righteous cultural deconstructionism obtains.

To claim to be tolerant of Christian, Buddhist, Classical, Confucianist, or other wisdom seeking traditions by viewing their intellectual content as a matter of opinion is a comedy; to view them as mere social expressions of power is a tragedy. In either case we are reduced to living in a technologically advanced barbaric state which is the subject of Harry Redner’s recent book: Beyond Civilization (2013).

To live beyond civilization might strike the imagination of some as new and exciting. But it might also be viewed as a return to barbarism. Of course, to judge the quality of such a change is beyond the grasp of the modernist-postmodernist tradition. But if qualitative distinctions elude us now, they have also sporadically eluded people in the past. And if we live in a mannerist age today, history tells us that we can expect a cultural renewal tomorrow.

That cultural renewal hinges on our escaping the dismal choice of trivializing and brutalizing knowledge, of subjectivism and fundamentalism. To do so requires a reconsideration of what science is. Science is the realm of knowing; it is a pursuit of knowledge of reality. But when science is limited to facts and experience the type of knowledge we can obtain is limited. The so-called social sciences today separate science from fine art by claiming that whereas social science provides knowledge of human behavior, the arts are the realm of subjective expression. Different cultures are thus deemed merely to be different modes of observed behavior, which admit no qualitative distinctions. Accordingly, the American Anthropological Association has long insisted that not even cannibalism can be condemned. By limiting knowledge to factual information, the social sciences that require we view the world as a violent banality. Of course, there are practicing social scientists today who try to live civilized lives, but as Hume and others argue: within a factual context, society is a war of all against all. Culture is then at best the pursuit of practical strategies for survival.

So the great weaknesses of current social science are its inability to affirm qualitative standards by which civilization can be distinguished from barbarism, and its inability to escape the often brutal facts of life. Since the scientific facts of nature and human
nature include violent actions and practices, social science cannot avoid or reject violent narratives of reality and life. So while the social sciences today claim superiority over the liberal and fine arts by providing knowledge of reality, that knowledge is barbaric by its inability to deny ontological brutality. The historical association of social science with eugenics, colonialism, and doctrines of racial superiority are indisputable and dismal.

Alternatively, there is the deontological paradigm of Kantian Modernism. Aspiring to restore culture, Kantian Modernists and Deweyan Progressives argue for a more idealistic paradigm. For them, culture and art have little to do with science, but a lot to do with a principled relationalism. Culture is the pluralistic pursuit of coherent lifestyles informed by a rationalistic good will. We live in a factual world which is constructed by our minds and experiences (that constructivist vision is seen in the West in the art of Paul Cezanne and in the East, in that of Tung Chi-ch’ang).

A great weakness of that principled relationalism is that it trivializes the substantive content of all cultural traditions, while relying upon a rationalistic good will to keep peace. To claim that culture is ultimately grounded in good will dedicated to fairness neglects the vexing problem of determining what is actually good or fair (it is important to note that the atrocities of Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and Pol Pot were all dedicated to a twisted vision of goodness). It is to the point to note that Kant’s claim that knowledge of goodness is available to all rational beings also informed Kant’s assertion that not all people were fully rational or human. Kant concluded that Africans and Asians were not fully human; today some argue that newborn children and the handicapped can rightly be euthanized. I will leave you to judge whether that is fair or not.

Within the paradigm of Postmodernism science and art are recombined, presenting a vision of society deeply grounded in a struggle for authenticity. To live by experiential facts and processes (Dewey), results in an empty existentialism. An existential dialectical struggle informed by race, gender, economic class, and an untrammeled individualism is no civilized alternative. This vision attempts to reconnect culture and art with factual experience, but doing so results in a violent ontology. A master-slave dialectic obtains, which can never be resolved. When the slave overthrows the master, the slave simply becomes a new oppressive master. Even granted that closure can be achieved by the realization of an equality of condition, within a fact based context there is no distinction between equality and banality, or banality and evil.

To the point: When qualitative knowledge is denied, then two critical consequences result: the material realization of what is true and good is denied, and the violent facts of nature and human behavior are affirmed. All qualitative and non-violent aspirations in thought, word, and deed are then trivialized or denied. That volitional and experiential reductionism denies knowledge or Truth as the object of our minds and denies culture as the pursuit of non-violent ontological Perfection. The liberal and fine arts wither.

In contrast is the realm of culture which affirms the liberal and fine arts. That realm is not limited to the often violent facts of life, nor is it hampered by a banal and or
violent relationalism. For example, this is evidenced by Chinese landscape paintings (e.g. Li Ch’eng) which are devoid of natural and social calamities and which evidence a discernible path through the landscape. There is no natural or social violence depicted in Sung Dynasty Neo-Confucian landscape paintings because evil is a departure from Dao, from the ontologically good. Those paintings are understood to be analogical. From their point of view nature is properly the concrete embodiment of the Dao, of Truth or ontological perfection. This is evidenced in the West for example by John Kensett whose Luminist paintings direct the heart and mind to an ontological harmony.

Regardless of our occupations, what we do marks the degree to which we are cultured. When individuals are deficiently cultured they wreak havoc on themselves and others; when cultured, society becomes splendid. To be cultured is to realize some degree of non-violent Perfection, to better understand what and how a civilized person ought to act. But uncultured people seek perfection also. Therein lies the problem. That which we know, do, and make is necessarily informed by a desire to do so more perfectly. By pursuing perfections of various kinds, the Modernist Kantian trivializes that quest. Postmodernism pursues an immanentized perfectionism grounded in race, gender, economic class or the individual. The historical consequences of seeking perfection in terms of race, gender, economic class, or a willful individualism has produced horrors in the 20th century. Dewey’s notion of art as experience offers no relief.

Civilized or noble behavior is grounded in a consciousness freely committed to the realization of perfection that is neither trivial nor brutal. It is wisdom and beauty seeking traditions that seek Perfection that is both immanent and transcendent. It is a search with civilizing consequences, but without closure. Thus is affirmed the pursuit of a qualitative and intelligible ontology, which is essential to the vitality of the liberal and fine arts and of civilization itself. Rather than going beyond civilization, let us transcend barbarism. Let us renew the liberal and fine arts via a cosmopolitan pursuit of wisdom and beauty. After all, it is the civilized way of doing things.

NOTES

1. 文化：对本体论之品质的追寻, 潘义年 (“Culture as the Pursuit of a Qualitative Ontology,” *Arthur Pontynen*, *Journal of Nanjing University*, no. 2, 2014)