The Domains of Aesthetics and Perception Theories. A Review relevant to Practice-based Doctoral Theses in the Visual Arts

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Abstract

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Every doctoral thesis requires contextualisation within its specific discipline's theoretical bases. For a visual arts practice-based thesis, the relevant bases include those of aesthetics and visual perception. This article reviews a Western history of the domain of visual aesthetic theory, addressing both the *Analytical* philosophical efforts to define art, and the *Continental* approaches which construe art as social construction. It then reviews a third, normative stance which foregrounds cognitive value before definition or sociological context; an *Aesthetic Cognitivis*t position, art practice as a means of acquiring and sharing experiential knowledge and understanding. Contemporary global concerns about the environment are addressed in detail under the heading *Ecological Aesthetics*. *Somaesthetics* is also recognised as a burgeoning field, in the Introduction.

Aesthetic theories are related to visual perception theories as an aid to fulfilling the scholarly requirements for a practice-based thesis.

Keywords

Analytical aesthetics; Continental theory; Aesthetic cognitivism; Ecological aesthetics; Visual perception theories, Scholarly requirements; Doctoral theses.

Contents

Preface

> Good art theory must smell of the studio, although its language should differ from the household talk of painters and sculptors.
> (Arnheim 1974:4)

This article is intended to support doctoral candidates in the visual arts engaged in practice-based research, and others whose theses or reports require a contextualisation of the theoretical bases of perception and communication, adapted to their specific practices. *Practice-based* is described as research through which an artefact itself is the basis of the contribution to knowledge. If the research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, then it is deemed *practice-led*. Both these versions of doctoral research have been subject to scrutiny since the early 1990s. The genesis of the debate is traced by Christopher Frayling (1993;1997) who advocated the necessity for "general scholarly requirements" (Frayling 1997:14) evidenced in the written component of doctoral theses. This article provides a review of those scholarly requirements which serve to contextualise visual arts research practices. The implication is that such theoretical contextualisation will satisfy examiners of practice-based and practice-led doctoral theses.

Issue	**Positivism**	**Post-positivism**	**Critical Theory *et al.***	**Constructivism**	**Participatory**
Ontology	Naive realism - "real" reality but apprehendible.	Critical realism – "real" reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendible.	Historical realism – virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time.	Relativism - local and specific co-constructed realities.	Participative reality - subjective-objective reality, co-created by mind and given cosmos.
Epistemology	Dualist/objectivist; findings true.	Modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true.	Transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings.	Transactional/ subjectivist; co-created findings.	Critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos; extended epistemology of experiential, propositional, and practical knowing; co-created findings.
Methodology	Experimental/manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods.	Modified experimental/manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods.	Dialogic/dialectical	Hermeneutical/ dialectical	Political participation in collaborative action inquiry; primacy of the practical; use of language grounded in shared experiential context.

Figure 1 Paradigms of Research (Denzin, Lincoln *et al.* 2023:78 Table 4.3)

All doctors must demonstrate a working knowledge of the anatomy of their domain; the doctoral candidate is advised not only to demonstrate a familiarity with the anatomy of research in the form of a review of the available paradigms of research (Fig. 1) and their appropriate criteria of assessment (Denzin, Lincoln *et al.* 2023: 89 Table 4.5), but also to assure examiners that the 'general scholarly requirements' are met by demonstrating a grasp of the domain in which they propose an original contribution to knowledge and understanding, the main criterion of doctoral thesis validation. This would include discussion of the domains of aesthetics and perception theories relevant to the specific practice undertaken. The ongoing debate is reviewed in Riley (2019). Further assurance for examiners can be instilled by including discussion of those themes relevant to the thesis which continue to be contentious in the Western domain of aesthetics: for example, notions of *beauty, taste*, the *sublime, genius*, *expression, intention, form* and *function*, are all subject to scrutiny and should be elaborated. What is generally known as the 'aesthetic attitude', a frame of mind summed up in Immanuel Kant's (1790:41) concept of *"disinterestedness",* paying attention to the perceptual experience without any interest in the subject's functionality, should also be scrutinised, as does George Dickie (1964). Heinrich Wölfflin (in Wiesing 2016: 88-9) regards formal aesthetics *as* a theory of perception. He distinguishes between *aesthetics,* the theory of art, and *aisthetics,* the theory of the senses, arguing that art can be a means of studying the structures of perception. Therefore, a discussion of visual perception theories is also strongly recommended in recognition of the fundamental conception of aesthetics as essentially concerned with perception – perceptual capacities, perceptual constructions and perceptual experiences.

Note that the article deals mainly with aesthetics from a Western perspective, but with the important addition of the burgeoning global interest in ecological aesthetics. Historically the key concern of Western thought has been that of aesthetic judgement, under the influence of philosophy of language. Aesthetic traditions beyond the West are not so concerned with judgements, and more with "…the way our emotions unfold, the way our perception is altered, and the way aesthetic engagement interacts with social engagement" (Nanay 2019:54). Doctoral candidates are advised to include in their thesis clarification of their approach.

[Fiona Candlin (2000) reviews questions of academic legitimacy, Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds (2018) review thirty-five years of research supervision experience, Mike Bottery *et al.* (2023) advise on thesis construction, Sunil Manghani (2021) offers practical steps to pursuing a practice-based doctorate, Craig Vear (2022) edits the most recent publication on that topic. Susan Feagin (2007) edits a review of non-Western theories of aesthetics].

Introduction

Barnett Newman got it wrong. The American painter's famous quip (see Ho 2002) about aesthetics being as irrelevant to artists as ornithology is to birds would have been more relevant, (but still erroneous in conflating the cultural with the natural!), had he denigrated the philosophy of art. Aesthetics *is* relevant to artists, since it is all about the attention given to sensory experiences. Its roots are in the Greek *aesthetikos,* from *aestheta:* things perceptible by the senses, and *aesthesthai:* perceive (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). The term was first coined in German by Alexander Baumgarten in his Master's thesis of 1735, later used as the title of his two-volume *Aesthetica* (1750) aiming to span the gap between sensation and reason, to specify an emphasis on subjective sense activity stimulated by the specialised human production of material objects classified as 'art'. Kant (1790), in his 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgement', part 1 of the *Critique of Judgement,* is regarded as being the first who "gave philosophical aesthetics a significance

pertaining to philosophy as such" (Figal 2015:28). However, Kant's central concern was not with visual arts practices; he viewed aesthetic value in the context of "the disinterested contemplation of an object for its own sake on whose value there is universal agreement." (Berleant 2021: 21):

> …taste in the beautiful may be said to be the one and only disinterested and *free* delight; for with it, no interest, whether of sense or reason, extorts approval.
> (Kant 1790: 41)

The adjective *aesthetic* first appeared in English in the nineteenth century, alluding to the 'beautiful', and predominantly related to a subjective visual sense-response, distinct from any social or cultural interpretation, as the basis for identifying 'art'. In 1859 William Hamilton (1870:124) defined its noun form, *aesthetics*, as "the Philosophy of Taste, the theory of the Fine Arts, the science of the Beautiful, etc." Since then, his *et cetera* have expanded to include all the complexities of the domain we study today. For a contemporary review of its usage, see Terry Diffey (1995).

The triangle of parameters *Producer in Context(s) - Object in Context(s) - Viewer in Context(s)* is offered here, to envisage this complex domain within which the various themes deemed to be of concern to aesthetics are contextualised: every construction of an aesthetic position adopts one of the three parameters as primary, and its context(s) – philosophical, sociological, psychological – used to distinguish its relationship in contrast with the other positions.

This article reviews the domain of aesthetics under the generally recognised headings of *Analytical* theory and *Continental* theory, together with, importantly for a practice-based doctorate, *Aesthetic Cognitivism,* the basis for the argument that art practices can be valid sources of shareable understandings and new experiential knowledge. Perception theories relevant to the aesthetic cognitivist position include the Gestalt school (Arnheim 1974), the ecological approach (Gibson 1979), the

computational approach (Marr 1982) and the neuroaesthetic approach (Zeki 1999; Skov & Vartanian 2017).

As well as reviewing those three identified sub-headings of the aesthetic domain, the article also recognises themes addressing *somaesthetics*, relating to the body, and the more recent concerns about aesthetics related to environment, under the heading *Ecological Aesthetics.*

Richard Shusterman (2012) first coined the term *somaesthetics* in 1996, relating to explorations of bodily movements and reactions to various stimuli, internal or external. In 2007 the New York Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Live/Work: Performance into Drawing* presented a historical review of performance-related drawing activities, and over the past decade this particular area of practice has flourished (Foá *et al.* 2020; www.drawtoperform.com), Madelaine Lohrum Strancari's event *You Are It*, the winner of the 2020 *Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize* being a recent example (Fig.2)

Figure 2 Madelaine Lohrum Strancari 2020 *You Are It.* Performance.

Performative practices, as with any other arts practice, may inform research leading to original contributions to knowledge only when they are subject to critical inquiry within a recognised paradigm of research and evaluated using appropriate criteria of assessment.

Ronald Hepburn's (1966) *Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty* is credited with raising awareness of environmental aesthetics, and ever since the *Limits to Growth* report (Meadows, Meadows *et al.* 1972), the irreconcilable conflict between economic growth and ecological stability has driven arts research addressing themes relating to climate change. Ted Toadvine (2010) reviews the emergence of ecological aesthetics; Samantha Clark (2010) coordinates strands of interest in environmental aesthetics which are inspiring visual art practices and research. Arnold Berleant (2023) identifies critical themes in aesthetics related to the concept of environment.

Origins & Development of the 'Art Question'

The original meaning of 'art' in English referred to any kind of skill. From the late seventeenth century it became applied to the specific skills of painting, drawing, engraving and sculpture, and by the late nineteenth century the distinction between artist and artisan (referring to skilled manual work without intellectual or imaginative purposes) had become established (Williams 1976:32-3).

Plato (375BC) had defined painting, sculpture and poetry in Book 10 of his *Republic* as *mimesis*, imitation, a position which led him to advocate the banishment of painters and poets from his Republic on the following grounds:

> 1 Poetic *mimesis,* like the kind found in painting, is the imitation of the appearance of things, and so its products are twice removed from truth.
> 2 Therefore poetic *mimesis* corrupts the soul, weakening the rational impulse's control over the person's other drives and desires.
> 3 It should therefore be banned from the good city.

A more pithy rejection of mimesis is attributed (apocryphally) to Virginia Woolf: “Art is not a copy of the real world. One of the damn things is enough!”

Western philosophers since Plato have persisted in the quest for a philosophical definition, despite his rather harsh edict.

Writing in the late 18th century, Kant was the first to treat aesthetics as a distinctive topic within the general philosophical system, whilst disagreeing with Baumgarten’s usage, preferring the original Greek sense referring to conditions of sensory perception. He argued that aesthetic judgements are judgements of *taste*, defined as “…the faculty of judging an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion *apart from any interest.* The object of such a delight is called *beautiful*.” (Kant 1790:42). Although this position appears to acknowledge the subjectivity of judgement, Kant set out to establish a limit at which the subjective aspect of experience curtails what we can learn and share about the objective world. In the *Critique of Judgment,* he proposed that:

> It would… be ridiculous if anyone who plumed himself on his taste were to think of justifying himself by saying: ‘This object…is beautiful *for me’*. For if it merely pleases *him*, he must not call it *beautiful*… but when he declares something to be beautiful, he expects the same delight from others. He judges not merely for himself, but for everyone.
> (Kant 1790:44)

Since Kant, the specific discipline of *empirical aesthetics* has been developed to understand our aesthetic judgements more objectively through the application of psychological measurement techniques, dating back to the origins of visual psychophysics in the late nineteenth century (Fechner 1876) emphasising the relationships between characteristics of stimuli and the characteristics of the context within which we perceive the stimuli; an approach which is still generating much discussion (Seeley 2016; Chatterjee and Cardillo 2022; Chamberlain 2022). On this

basis, aesthetic judgements are deemed to lie between objective cognitive judgements and subjective perceptual judgements. (The implications of this premise related to contemporary criteria of assessment of quality is examined later in this article.) The over-riding assumption of Western thinking has been that aesthetics is to do with *judgement*, at least since Scottish philosopher David Hume (1757), who argued that art's value was related to its degree of 'agreeableness', the pleasure obtained from its contemplation. It's not a far step from relating the notion of agreeableness to the still-contentious theme of *beauty*, to Kant's connection between art and beauty, to locating aesthetic judgement halfway between a logical assessment and a subjective opinion. This *Idealist* position, the belief that philosophy is about understanding abstract ideas, can still be influential, despite the criticism of Walter Bruce Gallie (1948:302), who argued that all definitional theories were:

> …vitiated through and through by the 'essentialist fallacy': they presuppose, that is, that whenever we are in a position to define a substance or activity we must know its essence or ultimate nature – and know this by methods that are entirely different from those used in the experimental and mathematical sciences or in our commonsense judgements about minds and material things.

[Monroe C. Beardsley's (1996) *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present* reviews this early period].

The French philosopher Jacques Rancière (2009:14) claimed that the modern concept of art with which we live today first emerged "…two centuries ago… The discontent and resentment that it elicits today still revolves around these two relations:…Aesthetics is held responsible both for the 'anything goes' aspect of art and…fallacious promises of…social revolution". He was referring to the age of revolution in Europe: The French Revolution of 1789 and the Industrial Revolution with origins in England and Wales. But for some decades earlier, the French school of aesthetics had been dominant, with Jean-Baptiste Du Bos (1719) proposing that

the ‘fine arts’, encompassing the material practices of painting, sculpture, music and poetry, imitate nature and, *pace* Plato, are therefore beautiful and the source of pleasure. Charles Batteux (1745) popularised the term ‘fine arts’, the imitation of nature for the pleasure of viewers remaining the single thematic principle of their evaluation.

The period of Romanticism (c1760 – c1850) saw an emphasis upon the non-rational, when subjective individualism prevailed, as a reaction against the rationality of the Enlightenment. In this period, Batteux’s proposition that the ‘fine arts’ all share some underlying *function* in common was influential, effectively separating them from the sciences and, problematically even today, from those skill-based material-manipulative activities identified as crafts. From its earlier meaning as a description of a theory of sensory experiences, aesthetics became a way of describing the response to ‘art’, by this time expanded from its earlier association with manual skills, to embrace ‘imaginative’ skill. What emerged in a burgeoning capitalist economy as the ‘consumer’, (a rôle necessary to the system of commodity production through which manufactured products are prepared for, and positioned in, the market), emerged in its cultural theory as ‘aesthetics’ and ‘the aesthetic response’. Art became a categorically separate body of objects, ideologically separated from commodity production and instead described as a ‘creative’ process, with aesthetic theory acting as the means of its separation. Terry Eagleton (1983:21) sums up: “Art was extricated from the material practices, social relations and ideological meanings in which it is always caught up, and raised to the status of a solitary fetish.”

Bernard Bolzano (1849) towards the end of the Romantic period distinguished between the fine arts accessed through the senses, and what he called the arts of

“pure thought”, anticipating by over a hundred years the theme of conceptual art, by questioning “…whether the artwork is defined by its conceptual or material form.” (Graham 2021:6).

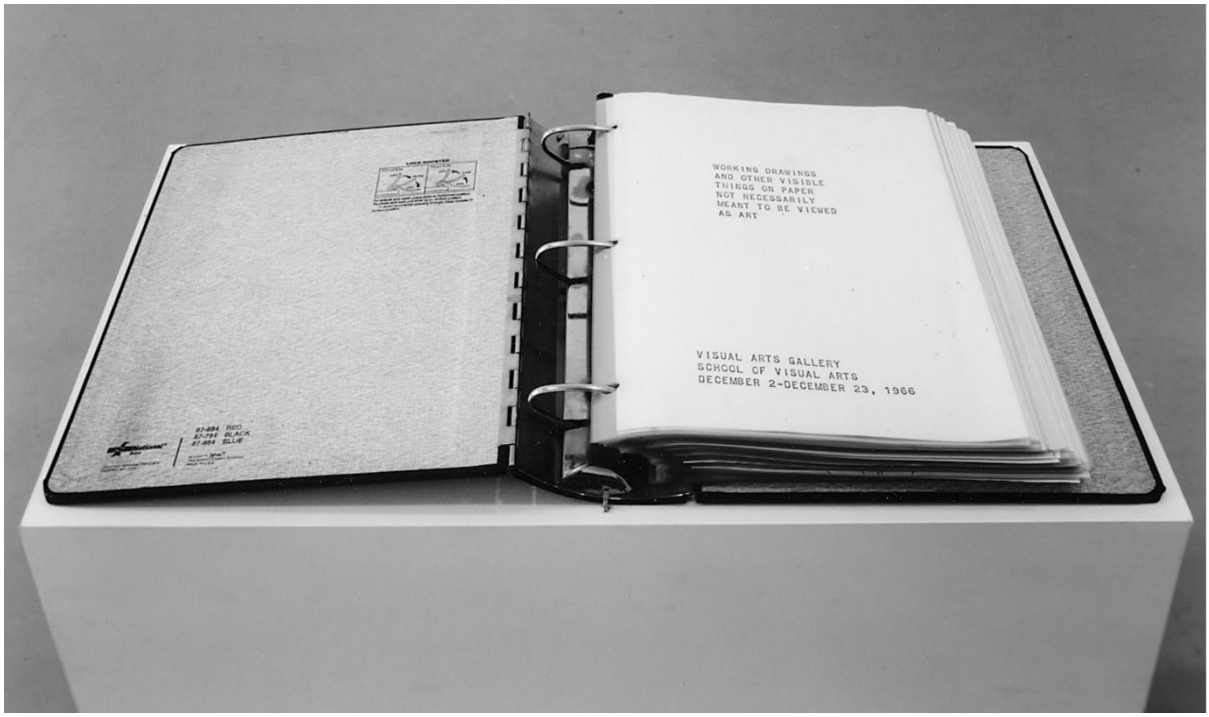

Figure 3 Mel Bochner 1966 *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art.*

An early example of such an approach was Mel Bochner’s 1966 *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art,* (Fig. 3) influential upon the *Art-Language* group formed at Coventry College of Art in 1967, heralding the advent of conceptual art in the UK.

[Nigel Warburton’s 2003 *The Art Question* offers a concise introduction to the field. The Romantic period is covered by Thora Brylowe’s 2018 *Romantic Art in Practice.* Stephen Davies and Robert Stecker (2009) review twentieth century Anglo-American Analytical Aesthetics].

In the early twentieth century, the Russian linguist and literary theorist Roman Jakobson, instrumental in setting up the Moscow Linguistic Circle 1915, had moved to Czechoslovakia in 1920 and became involved with the Prague Linguistic Circle inaugurated 1926. He represents a transition from Russian Formalism which, as the

name implies, had focused upon the specific formal properties of an artefact to define the aesthetic. Jakobson moved towards a more structuralist approach summed up in Prague Circle member Jan Mukarovsky's (1936) *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts,* where he argued that *any* material object could be interpreted as an aesthetic object, depending upon its position within its contextual structure.

Mukarovsky challenged the evasive trait of bourgeois aesthetic theory which served to mystify 'art' as a kind of 'creation', a word connotative of ineffable intuition not far removed from its original connotation of divine intervention, separated from its own material processes and especially from the production of commodities (in effect a division of labour, Eagleton's *solitary fetish)*. Instead, Mukarovsky proposed an alternative: a sociological understanding of the aesthetic as a *function* of the artefact interacting within the social context in which meanings and judgements are made: its background of place, time or the person evaluating it:

> …an active capacity for the aesthetic function is not a real property of an object, even if the object has been deliberately composed with the aesthetic function in mind. Rather, the aesthetic function manifests itself only under certain conditions, i.e. in a certain social context.
> (Mukarovsky 1936:3)

He thus marked a clear distinction from the Formalist premise of the *aesthetic* as the sensory response to a property of the artefact itself.

At around the same time, the American pragmatist John Dewey (1934: 8), was arguing:

> There must…be historic reasons for the rise of the compartmental conception of fine art…Most European museums are memorials of the rise of nationalism and imperialism…devoted in part to exhibiting the loot gathered in conquest of other nations… They testify to the connection between the modern segregation of art and nationalism and militarism.

> The growth of capitalism has been a powerful influence in the development of the museum as the proper home for works of art, and in the promotion of the idea that they are apart from the common life. The *nouveaux riches,* who are an important by-product of the capitalist system, have felt especially bound to surround themselves with works of fine art which, being rare, are also costly. Generally speaking, the typical collector is the typical capitalist.

Both Dewey and Mukarovsky preceded – anticipated - Arthur C. Danto's (1964) more widely referenced article theorising such social context as the 'Artworld'.

Mukarovsky was an early advocate of 'semasiology', better known today as semiotics, the science of signs first codified by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916).

> Everything in the work of art, and in its relation to the outside world…can be discussed in terms of sign and meaning; in this sense, esthetics can be regarded as a part of modern science of signs, semasiology.
> (Mukarovsky in Erlich 1965:159)

Later, Mukarovsky's singular 'function' of the aesthetic, was expanded by Welsh cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1977:154-5) to a "series of situations" within "the full social material process itself". From this spectrum of possible situations, various combinations may emerge, some featuring the 'ideological', work intended to communicate social, religious or political meanings and values, others featuring work intended to encourage contemplation of properties and their combinations in material form, for which he retained the term 'aesthetic'. However, any one of the intentions involved in these situations may, in Williams's (1977:155) terms, be "dominant, associated, or subordinate". Williams exhorts us to embrace this range of intentions and effects, and to construe the 'aesthetic' not as a separate abstract dimension of form or as a separate abstract function, but as one component in his series of situations. Arnold Berleant (2021: 28) holds a similar position, advocating an "aesthetics of engagement" derived from Dewey's (1934) pragmatism which sought to dissolve the dichotomy between the artworld and everyday life.

Once humans are understood to be participants in their environment, such environment becomes a contextual experience. Aesthetics concentrates on the *sensible* aspects of that experience. (Berleant (2023: 48).

This can be construed as a connection between art and Williams's series of situations, encompassing the widest range of normal (non-artistic) human activities and the non-traditional materials and processes now employed in much contemporary art. Berleant (2021:28) proposes "…integrating aesthetic experience into a perceptual field that combine(s) the creative, appreciative, objective (i.e. focused), and performative functions in…aesthetic engagement". He elaborates "Over the past half century, trends in the arts and their experience have moved more emphatically away from discrete objects and disinterested contemplation, fulfilling the transition to an aesthetic of active engagement of artist, appreciator, object and performer in an experiential aesthetic field." His concept of 'aesthetic field' had first been proposed in Berleant (1970), its four principal components explained in Berleant (2023: 26): the observer, or 'appreciator'; the object of appreciation (not necessarily an object, but the point of the observer's focused attention); the activity that brings the object into the viewer's experience; and the factor that activates the situation, which Berleant identifies as the active engagement of the observer's attention.

Both Williams and Berleant are advocating a re-assessment of Kant's 'disinterestedness', as did George Dickie (1964) in *The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude.* According to Berleant (2004: 15), this re-assessment of Kant can be traced back to Friedrich Nietzche, writing in 1887 (with an expression of mild exasperation?):

> Kant had thought he was doing an honour to art when, among the predicates of beauty, he gave prominence to those which flatter the intellect, i.e.,

> impersonality and universality…Kant, like all philosophers, instead of viewing the aesthetic issue from the side of the artist, envisaged art and beauty solely from the 'spectator's' point of view, and so, without himself realising it, he smuggled the 'spectator' into the concept of beauty…(We) have got from these philosophers of beauty definitions which, like Kant's famous definition of beauty, are marred by a complete lack of aesthetic sensibility. "That is beautiful", Kant proclaims, "which gives us disinterested pleasure." Disinterestedness!
> (Nietzche (1956: 238)

In general, the history of sociologically-constructed aesthetics adumbrated here may be construed as a resistance against a market-dominated economic system, arguing that not all human activities are utilitarian, not all material production need result in commodities. Alternatives exist: we may manipulate materials in order to refresh or challenge our perceptions of their social value; to construe novel cognitive understandings of our relationships between each other, between ourselves and our environment, or between constructions of realities. But note this irony: the effort to distinguish an aesthetic dimension of production within an established capitalist system by labelling it as a 'creative' process (with its abiding connotation of intuition, if not divinity), has led, almost inevitably, "to new kinds of privileged instrumentality and specialized commodity" (Williams 1977:151), most recently exemplified by the record-breaking selling-price in May 2022 of a screenprinted image derived from a photograph, produced in multiple copies by technicians supervised by Andy Warhol in 1964. (Fig. 3):

Christie's auctioneer claps after ending the auction of Shot Sage Blue Marilyn by Andy Warhol, which sold for $170m plus fees. Photograph: Sarah Yenesel/EPA

Figure 3 Christie's auction-house, New York, May 2022.

Williams' 'specialized commodity' is most cynically revealed through the pre-planned automated shredding of Banksy's *Girl with a Balloon* the moment Sotheby's auction hammer dropped at 1.37 million dollars (Fig. 4), immediately increasing its re-sale estimated price, confirming investment value as the sole criterion of worth in an unfettered capitalist system where aesthetics as social engagement has no relevance.

Figure 4 Shredding of Banksy's *Girl with a Balloon* in progress, Sotheby's auction-house, London, October 2018.

Artforms related to their Social Structures

Already we can see the concept labelled visual 'art' in English-speaking cultures (or its equivalent in other languages) has been a complex one historically, stimulating much discussion. Cultures without an equivalent term in their languages for categorising eligible material objects, for example Australian Aborigines, do produce socially-valued artefacts bearing hand-made marks – indexical signs, both iconic and symbolic in the Peircean sense – culturally meaningful objects which are incorporated in performative community ceremonies, not insulated from everyday life in art galleries (although this has been their fate under European curatorship), but as a visual means of affirmation and education of values, artefacts integral with other dimensions of cultural cohesiveness in a co-actional social structure with no emphasis upon individuality (Fig. 5). In such cultures, the social function of those artefacts is to facilitate the celebration, sharing and passing on of socio-cultural

interrelationships; in the Australian Aborigine case, the whole ecological system: the land, all the living species occupying the land, and the spirits of those beings related to the land and its formations. This function could be described as *invocational,* in the sense of calling upon knowledge acquired in a previous state of existence, made visible, amenable to sharing, bonding, educating upcoming generations.

"Our art centres are happy and safe environments." Senior APY women artists at work at Amata, central Australia. Photograph: Rohan Thomson/Supplied

Figure 5 Australian Aborigine group practice

Western material artefacts too, can fulfil this function, but the multi-valency of the concept 'art' as understood in various social structures (Fig. 6) has meant that other functional priorities have evolved; for example, *evocational* art, produced within an *inter-actional* social structure in which complex division of labour, social differentiation and individualism motivated a need to 'call up' spiritual support; *provocational* art, motivated not by any religious or spiritual source, but by an *intra-actional* social structure in which subjects construct their social being directly in and through the process of relating to others, a *Dadaist* urge to disrupt – to 'call out' – the

conventions of representation; *revocational* art, the product of a *multi-actional* social structure, challenging, 'calling back' conventions and introducing a postmodern plurality of approaches and an eclecticism of styles; and *convocational* art, typified by the recent spate of relational art activities in which artists and curators 'call together' participants in a co-operational attempt to resolve perceived social fissures in a fractured social structure.

	Palaeolithic Pre – 10,000BP	**Renaissance** 14C – 17C	**Modernist** 18C – mid 20C	**Post-Modernist** Mid-late 20C	**Alter-Modernist** Late 20C
Social Structure	**Co-actional:** Non-individual, collective group	**Inter-actional:** Individual identity, but inter-dependent	**Intra-actional:** Identity construed relative to others	**Multi-actional:** Pluralist identities	**Re-actional:** Fractured identities
Relationship with Nature	**Embedded:** Hunter/Gatherers, Ecological balance	**Agrarian:** Urbanisation, Early signs of ecological disjunction	**Industrial Production:** Degree of ecological disjunction caused by assumption of 'constant growth' economy	**Post-industrial:** High degree of ecological disjunction	**Awareness of ecological imbalance;** Concept of 'circular economy'
Artform	**Invocational:** Sign and referent are one	**Evocational:** Sign conjures up referent	**Provocational:** Process of signification is challenged	**Revocational:** Conventions of communication challenged	**Convocational:** Artist as convenor, viewers as active participants
Degree of Abstraction	**Very low:** *Pareidolia* function as driver of image-making	**Low:** Perceptual realism prioritised	**High:** Visual elements abstracted from object	**Eclectic mix:** Abstraction and perceptual realism	**'Relational' aesthetics:** Visual representation not prioritised
Perceptual mode	**Haptic values:** Textural qualities	**Distal values:** Illusions of mass and spatial depth	**Proximal values:** Abstraction of pattern qualities; expression of emotion	**Plurality** of perceptual modes	**No mode prioritised:** Viewer becomes participant

Figure 6 *Artforms and Social Structures*

These alternatives have been discussed in detail elsewhere (Witkin 1995; Riley 2004, 2013), their very existence testimony to the fluidity of the term 'art' in Western European culture. Even more recently, the tendency of artists to forsake material production in favour of efforts to contrive interventions in socio-political contexts, involving negotiations with public authorities for access and permissions, has distorted the function of art into what might be described as *negotiational* aesthetics. Christo and Jeanne-Claude Javachef (Fig. 7) were consummate negotiators with

various levels of legislative and planning authorities in order to realise their environmental interventions:

Figure 7 Christo and Jeanne-Claude Javachef 1975 *Pont-Neuf Bridge, Paris.*

Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art: Four Approaches

We should recognise that the position of 'art' as a separate category of objects is the construction of a particular type of society:

> 'Art' is a kind of production which has to be seen as separate from the dominant bourgeois productive norm: the making of commodities. Art and thinking about art have to separate themselves…from the social processes within which they are still contained. Aesthetic theory is the main instrument of this evasion.
> (Williams 1977:153-4)

The two main components of Raymond Williams' instrument of 'evasion' employed to divert attention from the reality of the commodification of art in a Western context are the 'Analytical' and 'Continental' factions of aesthetic theory, with their categorically-mismatched labels; the latter so named by the British philosopher Bertrand Russell

(1945:643). In answer to the to the question ‘what is art?’, the Analytical tradition works within a *philosophical* context, attempting to arrive at water-tight definitions of the various themes constituting the concept itself; whilst the Continental approach takes a *sociological* stance, recognising art as a historical phenomenon, a social construction. Sociological positions are identified under a variety of labels: structuralism, deconstructionism, postmodernism, altermodernism, all familiar strategies for the negotiation of meaning in this strand of aesthetics discourse.
The third approach, ‘Aesthetic Cognitivism’, values art as a means of acquiring and sharing understanding, knowledge of our world, not simply as a prompt to pleasure or expression of emotion, and as such employs *psychological* theories, particularly those addressing visual perception. Fourthly, ‘Ecological Aesthetics’, an approach which is engaging a global interest since awareness of detrimental effects on environment, caused by human disruptions to the ecological balance, has increased.
The past seventy years or so have seen publications elaborating each side of the divide between the two most established camps, Analytical and Continental. Both the philosophical and sociological approaches are discussed in detail below, before we examine the third option, the Aesthetic Cognitivist approach, in order to establish a standard, a *norm* from which to assess value, quality, with applications in a practice-based research context, and the fourth approach, Ecological Aesthetics, highlighting contemporary global concerns.

Approach 1: Anglo-American Analytical Aesthetics

> Aesthetics… is as ‘fringey’ as it gets, at least within contemporary analytic philosophy.
> (Nanay 2016:2)
> *Taste* is the faculty of judging of an object…by an *entirely disinterested* satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called *beautiful.*
> (Kant 1790)

Pioneer: Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

The Analytical tradition in philosophy was formed in the ahistorical essentialism of Kant's (1790) aesthetics, relying upon the logic of language and the scientific method applied to questions about meaning and truth, "seeking a definition of art in terms of necessary and sufficient properties, or seeking to determine its social function" (Graham 1997:173). This position was based on a belief that philosophical problems are timeless, not constructs of history and culture. Kant's notion of the aesthetic is both narrower and wider than contemporary thinking: specifically concerned with the definitions of *beauty* and the *sublime*, and more broadly referring to the original Greek *aesthesis*, that which is experienced through the senses. Aesthetic judgement was related to sensory pleasure, a subjectivity directed to the search for understanding the world and our position in it.

[An anthology of articles by the key figures in the Analytical tradition is provided by P. Lamarque and S.H. Olsen (2004). Gernot Böhme (2010) reviews the changing concept of beauty. Stephen Davies and Robert Stecker (2009) review twentieth century Anglo-American Analytical Aesthetics. For a succinct review of the analytical tradition from Plato to the present, see Anna Christina Ribeiro (2015)]

From the late nineteenth century, the advent of photography released the fine arts from the prime function of mimetic representation, leading to a widening of the possibilities for the understanding of aesthetics beyond mimesis. Stephen Davies (1991) identified three sub-classes of the theoretical position which attempts to define what art is, with which George Dickie (2001:2) concurs: *functional* definitions*,* *procedural* definitions, and *historical* definitions. Robert Stecker (2017:120-121) too identifies the functionalist category, but includes a subset which recognises 'family resemblances', a concept discussed below, adapted from Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) describing those properties that artworks are deemed to have in common. Stecker also presents a category comprising *historical- functional* relationships,

related to Davies's separate *procedural* and *historical* categories of definition, referring to the contexts within which artworks exist, categories first theorised in the last forty years of the 20th century.

Functionalist theories framing the attempts to define art are classed as philosophical in approach; Proceduralist and Historicist approaches may be classed halfway between the philosophical and the sociological (Graham 1997:156)

***Approach 1.1 Functionalist** theories in the Analytical tradition*

In the present context the term *functionalist* relates to those attempts to define an artwork in terms of its functioning as either an arrangement of conditions intended to be capable of affording an aesthetic experience valuable for its marked aesthetic character, or, belonging to a class or type of arrangement that is typically intended to have this capacity (Davies 2013). Frank Sibley (1959) is credited as a founder of analytical aesthetics, influenced by his Oxford tutor Gilbert Ryle in the context of the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mind, and by exchanges with his American contemporary Monroe Beardsley. Sibley identified language as the problematic means of dividing aesthetic themes from non-aesthetic, and in his attempt to objectify aesthetic value, was an early advocate of the relationship between aesthetics and perception: "It is of importance, first, that broadly speaking, aesthetics is a matter of perception…To suppose indeed that one can make aesthetic judgments without aesthetic perception…is to misunderstand aesthetic judgment" (Sibley 1965:137). Nick Zangwill (2007) offers an explanation which places the emphasis on the generation of aesthetic properties, rather than the aesthetic experience. The artist's insight of aesthetic properties allows them to generate these through the organisation of non-aesthetic properties.

Functionalist theories have all attempted to define art, variants of this position include:

Approach 1.1.1 Kant argued that art is essentially representational, its main function to instil pleasure through the contemplation of the beautiful, and to facilitate communication. (Hick 2017:21): beauty is not just a property of the object but is bound up in our shared reaction. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1986) builds upon Kant's conception of the beautiful by suggesting a connection between art and play. For Gadamer, play is structured, not a mere diversion: like play, art challenges the viewer to discern meaning, not through language but through "…a creative free play of images whereby a self-representation is realised" (Graham 1997:16). Another philosopher who has explored the idea of art as play is Kendall Walton in his 1990 book *Mimesis as Make-Believe.* Works of art can provide benefits without the costs normally associated with the experiences represented;

> Make-believe provides the experience…for free. The divergence between fictionality and truth spares the pain and suffering we would have to expect in the real world. We realize some of the benefits of hard experience without having to endure it.
> (Walton 1990:68)

Approach 1.1.2 Lambert Wiesing (2016:7) identifies the roots of Formalist aesthetics in the school of Johann Herbart (1776-1841) and his student Robert Zimmermann (1865) who formulated the concept 'formal aesthetics'.

> The history of formal aesthetics is a history of the investigation of the visibility of the image. All formal aestheticians share the view that an image is an object, an artefact whose diverse effects are achieved solely by covering a surface with visible forms. These visible forms on the surface of the image are the exclusive theme of formalist aesthetics.
> (Wiesing 2016:6)

For Herbart, beauty is an attribute of the form itself, a Formalist view in direct opposition to Idealism, the position in which beauty is bound up with the meaning,

the actual content of the work in question, summed up by Hegel (1835:111) "…the beautiful is characterised as the pure appearance of the Idea to sense."

Zimmermann's own student Alois Riegl developed aesthetics on the model of formal logic, assuming the aesthetic object appears "…directly to sense perception as a self-contained unity" (Riegl 1901:61) indicating, as Wiesing (2016:54) argues, a phenomenological understanding of relations since he takes the direct visibility of relationships between the visual elements on the surface of the image as being equally accessible as the recognition of the depicted scene and/or figures in the overall composition. (A *phenomenon* is defined in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary as "an immediate object of perception, as distinguished from substance or a thing in itself".) Such a phenomenological reduction excludes the social, biographical and historical contexts of the image, an early version of Edmund Husserl's *epoché,* the 'bracketing out' of the 'natural attitude' (Husserl 1913: 56). Wiesing (2016:161) reminds us that even before Husserl, Conrad Fiedler (1887:153) had recognised that "… seeing as such can come into its own only when every relationship to any objectivity that is in any sense perceptible has disappeared from it."

These roots of Formalism are implicit in the relational logic of the pictorial surface elaborated by Heinrich Wölfflin in his 1915 book *Principles of Art History.* There is also a distinct parallel with Viktor Shklovsky's (1917) technique of *ostranenie,* usually translated as 'estrangement', describing the function of art as making the familiar strange (Chernavin and Yampolskaya 2018). Shklovsky's work provided the theoretical basis for the Russian Formalists.

Wiesing (2016:15-16) distinguishes formalist aesthetics from the 'aesthetics of reception', which deals with the effect that the object under scrutiny has on the

viewer, and ‘analytic aesthetics’, concerned only with the language used to describe and evaluate objects.

As well as the Russian Formalists focussing upon the material works themselves rather than their biographical, historical, or cultural contexts, English art critic and curator Clive Bell (1914) argued that a work’s *significant form* functions to elicit aesthetic emotion in the viewer. Significant form for Bell is limited to painting, and refers to such combinations of visual elements which provoke aesthetic emotion in viewers sensitive enough to empathise. He regarded other kinds of content, such as narrative or symbolic, as secondary in importance. So, for Bell, William Powell Frith’s 1862 *The Railway Station,* for example, (Fig. 8) is not art since “…line and colour are used to recount anecdotes…they are not used to provoke aesthetic emotion” (Bell 1914:18), whereas Piero della Francesca’s 1460 *The Flagellation* (Fig. 9) is deemed to be art, because: “…lines and colours combined in a particular way…stir our aesthetic emotions” (Bell 1914:14-15).

Figure 8 William Powell Frith 1862 *The Railway Station.* Oil on canvas, 54x114cms. Royal Holloway, Univ. of London.

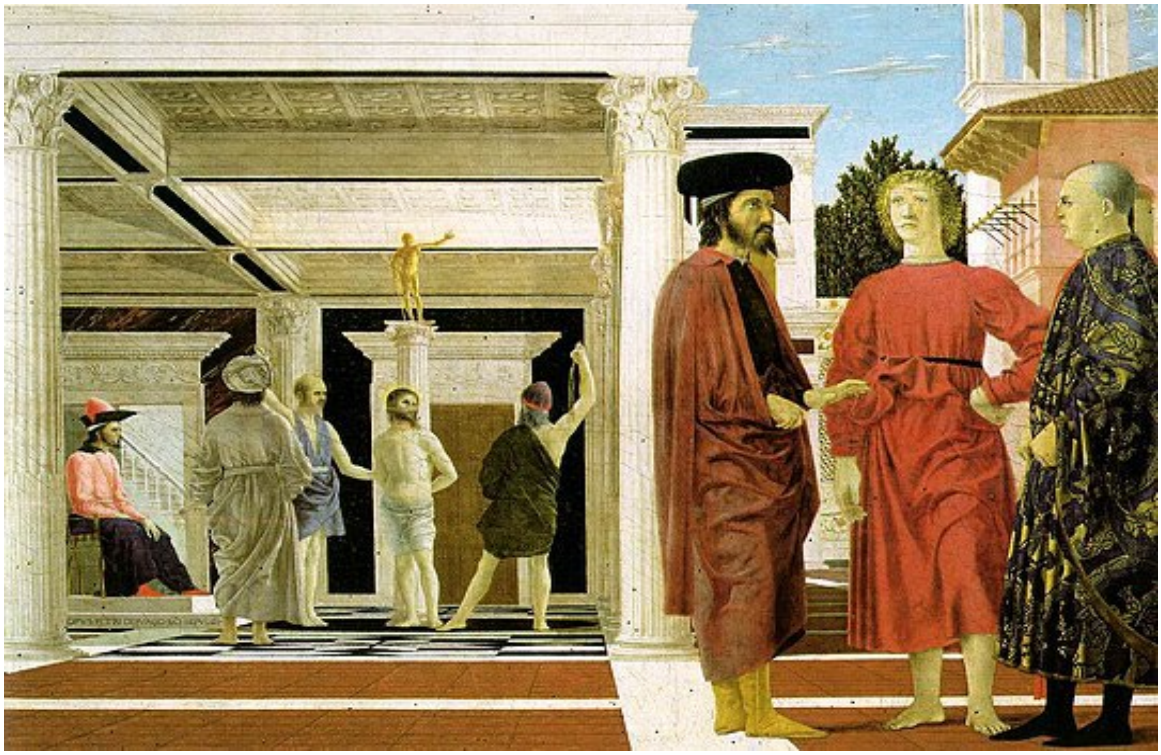

Figure 9 Piero della Francesca 1468-70 *The Flaggellation.* Oil & tempera on panel, 58.4x81.5cms. Palazzo Ducale, Urbino.

As an extension to the formalist theme, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) proposed that complex patterns of overlapping resemblances – *family resemblances* – between objects under consideration might allow them to be classified as 'art' objects, rather in the way that a class of disparate activities (think chess and football, for example) might be recognised and defined as 'games'**:**

> We see a complicated network of similarities over-lapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities of detail.
> I can think of no better expression to characterise these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way, - And I shall say: 'games' form a family. (Wittgenstein in Mandelbaum 1965:219)

Even though individual examples do not exhibit exactly the same qualities, sometimes overall similarities *(for example, both chess and football are played on designated surfaces),* sometimes similarities of detail *(both sets of 'players' are allowed to intermingle),* allow a recognition of resemblance. Berys Gaut (in Kieran

2006:115-126) recommends what is termed the ‘cluster’ theory as an improvement over Wittgenstein’s, whilst denying the possibility that art might be defined. He argues that the only condition necessary for a work to be art is that the object or event is the “product of an action” (Giovannelli 2021: 322). An artefact becomes art when it possesses features comprised in what Gaut calls one of several ‘clusters’ of jointly sufficient features, such as aesthetic properties, being expressive, or being intellectually challenging, amongst others. This so-called ‘cluster theory of art’ is strongly criticised by Stephen Davies (2004), on the grounds that whilst denying the possibility of defining art, the theory sets out to identify ten features as sample criteria for art, none of which is necessary for art.

An extension of the strictly Formalist position is offered by Bence Nanay (2016: 100) who introduces the concept of “semi-formalism”:

> The concept of semi-formal properties is a much more inclusive one than that of formal properties. Whatever counts as formal properties will automatically count as semi-formal properties, but, importantly, many other properties will also count as semi-formal.

Nanay is discussed in more detail below, under the section *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception.*

Approach 1.1.3 The most commonly-held understanding of the function of art is the expression of emotion, hence *expressivism.* Oxford philosopher Robin G. Collingwood (1938: 219) regarded visual art as the expression of emotion; art exists within the artist: “…the artist proper is a person who, grappling with the problem of expressing a certain emotion, says, ‘I want to get this clear’…Nothing will serve as a substitute.”

For Collingwood, visual art proper is the imaginative expression of emotion:

> Until a man *(sic*) has expressed his emotion, he does not yet know what emotion it is. The act of expressing it is therefore an exploration of his own emotions. He is trying to find out what these emotions are.

(Collingwood 1938)

Francis Bacon's 1970 triptych *Three Studies of the Male Back* (Fig. 10) exemplifies this relation between intention and surprise.

> You see, one has an intention, but what really happens comes about in working – that's the reason it's so hard to talk about it – it actually does come about in the working. And the way it works is really by the things that happen. In working you are really following this kind of cloud of sensation in yourself, but you don't know what it really is. And it's called instinct. And one's instinct, whether it's right or wrong, fixes on certain things that have happened in the activity of applying the paint to the canvas.
> (Bacon in Sylvester 1993:148-9)

Figure 10 Francis Bacon 1970 *Three Studies of the Male Back.* Oil on canvas, 3 panels, each 198x147.5cms. Kunsthaus, Zurich.

Although widely regarded as an expressivist, Collingwood actually repudiated the commonly held expressivist position. He distinguishes between two important elements, expression and imagination: it is imagination that enables the artist to transform emotion into expression, and such imaginative transformation is a process of self-discovery, hence, for Collingwood, the value of art is self-knowledge. He regards philosophy of art, the critical investigation of the true value of art, with distain:

> The cliques of artists and writers consist for the most part of a racket selling amusement to people who at all costs must be prevented from thinking themselves vulgar, and a conspiracy to call it not amusement but art.
> (Collingwood 1938:90)

Slightly earlier, Benedetto Croce (1902) also held the expressivism position, arguing that art is the expression of intuition, but confusingly, locates art within the viewer's mental state, rather than the artist's (Hick 2017:138). Before either of these, the two positions can be seen combined by Leo Tolstoy (1897):

> Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man (*sic*) consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them.
> (Tolstoy 1995:511)

However, this position diminishes art's potential for adding to our understanding, and is open to Gordon Graham's (1997:46) scathing assessment of expressivism: "…an unintelligible wallowing in emotional turbulence." John Hospers (1955:147) identified and criticised what is known as the 'genetic fallacy': assessing the merits of an artwork by referring to its psychological causes in the maker's biography:

> …it seems much too plain that the merits of a work of art must be judged by what we find in the work of art, quite regardless of the conditions under which the work of art came into being.

Approach 1.1.4 American philosopher Monroe Beardsley (1958) defines the art object as an arrangement of materials intentionally designed to instil aesthetic experiences in a viewer; the *intentional* condition is utilised to distinguish from any aesthetic experience stimulated by things in nature. Beardsley (1983:58) argues that art functions to produce the capacity *enabling* aesthetic experience, deemed valuable in itself; "An artwork is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy the aesthetic interest". Beardsley was following Dewey's (1934) argument mentioned earlier, in favour of a continuity between art and everyday life.

We have noted that in cultures with no word for art, the artefacts produced are completely integrated within the context of the social life. In the West, Dewey argued, as cultural artefacts become disconnected from the context of their material production their mystery increases, leading to the emphasis upon subjective self-expression we recognise in Western cultures, and a concomitant desire for definition. For example, Richard Anderson (1990: 240) proposes an open, cross-culturally applicable definition: “Art is culturally significant meaning, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium.” But Dewey rejects the possibility of defining art, since no definition can reveal any inward, absolute essence. Art only became separated from people’s lives after the rise of imperialism, requiring the establishment of museums in which to protect “loot” (Dewey 1934:8; Leddy 2021:166) within a capitalist system with its need to stimulate a desire to acquire; art objects became items for sale in a world market, their acquisition perceived as a matter of subjective self-expression, symbols of social status. Dewey believed that only a radical social change, allowing more worker participation in the production and distribution of products, would improve the quality of experience in the lives of workers, giving them more aesthetic satisfaction in their work.

Together with W.K. Wimsatt Jr., Beardsley had exposed both the ‘intentional fallacy’ (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946) – the interpretation of an artwork based upon the maker’s intention, and the ‘affective fallacy’ Wimsatt and Beardsley 1949) - the assumption that an evaluation of a work could be based upon the affective response of viewers.

Criticism of Functionalist Theories

Philosophical aesthetics as inspired by Kant faces three main difficulties:

1 Defining a characteristic, one property of art, but which all artworks must share.

2 If one characteristic is identified, is it embedded in the work itself, in the attitude we bring to the work, or some combination of both?

3 The concept of art is not any absolute 'form', but socially determined, and therefore limited in its general application.

All these Functionalist theories identify a single property, a function of art, and assert that it is this property that qualifies something as art. Objections to them include:

1 It is difficult to identify any single function that is served by all artworks.

2 Functionalism tends to be conservative, excluding some philosophically stimulating works, even those widely accepted as challenging what was thought valuable, foundational in preceding works.

3 The Functionalist definition does not include works with social, ritual or educational functions, such as those found in non-Western cultures.

A more succinct, if terse refutation of the efforts to pin down art is offered by Professor Myrdene Anderson of Purdue University, who opined in a recent Zoom conference (24 November 2021) that "…nothing interesting can be defined…" An insight worth pondering…

Approach 1.2 Procedural theories related to the Analytical tradition

Following Paul Ziff's (1953) article *The Task of Defining a Work of Art,* in which he argued that 'artwork' itself is not a fixed concept, Morris Weitz's (1956) *The Role of Theory in Aesthetics,* the most referenced essay on aesthetics in the twentieth century (Hick 2017:35), asserted that all the above theories in Section 1.1 fail:

> Aesthetic theory – all of it - is wrong in principle in thinking that a correct theory is possible because it radically misconstrues the logic of the concept of art. Its main contention that 'art' is amenable to real or any kind of true definition is false.
> (Weitz 1956: 27-8)

A definition of art is logically impossible, argued Weitz (1956: 32) since any definition "…forecloses on the very conditions of creativity in the arts." Because artists often react against dominant conceptions of art, deliberately presenting works which go beyond any current definition, any definition is likely to fail with the next artistic revolution: after all, it is argued, art's *raison d'être* is to challenge the stasis of definition, to disrupt complacency of vision, to 'make the familiar strange' as Russian theorist Viktor Shklovsky's earlier (1917) identification of the social function of art as *ostraneniye* put it.

Weitz's criticism became the stimulus for an alternative to the Functionalist position: rather than seeking some perceptible property of the art object, or defining its function, it was the relations and procedures between certain objects, people, contexts that became more relevant…

Whilst his teacher Suzanne K. Langer (1953:53) had identified art as "the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling", Arthur C. Danto (1964) adopted a more sociological approach, following Mukarovsky in seeking a definition within the cultural context of such forms rather than the philosophical notions that had been used to focus upon the object itself in Functionalist theories. "To see something as art, requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld" (Danto 1964:580). Within such an artworld context, replicas of *Brillo* boxes (Fig. 11) may be construed as art… when selected by a recognised curator and displayed in a recognised art gallery space.

> Of course without the theory, one is unlikely to see (Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*) as art, and in order to see (them) as part of the Artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as a considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting. (They) could not have been art fifty years ago.
> (Danto 1964:33)

Noel Carroll (1993:80) has articulated Danto's position – with Danto's approval:

> X is a work of art if and only if:
> a) X has a subject,
> b) about which X projects an attitude or point of view,
> c) by means of rhetorical (usually metaphorical) ellipsis,
> d) which ellipsis requires audience participation to fill in what is missing (interpretation),
> e) where both work and the interpretation require an art-historical context.

Figure 11 Andy Warhol 1964 *Brillo Boxes.* Philadelphia Museum of Art.

In 1969, following the lead of Danto's 'artworld' argument, George Dickie began formulating a theory of art by construing the places, people and procedures that together made up the artworld, as a cultural institution. By 1984 his later formulation of this *Institutional* theory of art had been published:

> An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of an artwork.
> A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.
> A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them.
> The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems.

> An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public.
> (Dickie 1984:80).

This was revised in 2001: “A work of art in the classificatory sense is an *evaluable* artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.” (Dickie 2001:107). Criticism of circularity in his argument is refuted by Dickie, who claims it is an accurate reflection of art’s inflected nature.

Criticism of Proceduralist Theories

Proceduralism is criticised on the grounds:

1 Not all artworks are institutionalised to the extent that that their status as art may be confirmed.

2 It is not clear what distinguishes the social practice of artmaking from the products of similar cultural practices.

3 Proceduralism does not recognise/acknowledge artworks of those outside the accepted network known as the artworld.

Once the relation between works themselves and the institutional context is construed not in terms of any ‘artworld’, but in terms of their historical provenance, then the major alternative to the institutional theory emerges: the historical definition.

Approach 1.3 Historical theories related to the Analytical tradition

Jerrold Levinson (1979) agreed with Dickie about the relationship any object has with its contexts being the factor which makes it art. He is also in agreement with Weitz, about the relationship any object bears to pre-existing art being an indicator of art. This position holds that art is not created in a vacuum; new art depends upon its creator’s intention that it be treated as previous art has been regarded:

> …an artwork is a thing that has been seriously intended for regard-as-a-work-of-art, i.e., regard in any way pre-existing artworks are or were correctly regarded.
> (Levinson 1989:21)

This confirms Levinson's (1979:232) view, "…art is necessarily backward-looking…a fact that the definition of art must recognise."

Levinson deftly combines two proposals: that art is the result of the maker's intention, and that works of art are related to the past and the present practices of artists and viewers. His theory can thus be described as an *intentional-historical* definition. Another stipulation Levinson imposes upon the definition of art is that the artist must have a proprietary right over the material: you can't declare just anything as a work of art, as Dickie allows. But this limitation poses problems for the discussion/classification of much conceptual art. Consider, for example, Richard Long's 1967 photograph, recording *A Line Made by Walking, England* (Fig. 12). Long did not have any proprietary right over the field in which he trampled the grass before photographing it, therefore, according to Levinson, there is no art content. Dickie, of course, would disagree.

Figure 12 Richard Long 1967 *A Line Made by Walking.*

Robert Stecker (1997) combines the historical with the functional in his *historical-functionalist* theory, on the assumption that both the forms and functions of art evolve over time.

Nicolas J. Bullot and Rolf Reber (2013:123) suggest a *"psycho-historical framework for the science of art appreciation."* They argue that "Though equally relevant to a scientific inquiry into art appreciation, psychological and historical approaches to art developed independently and lack a common core of theoretical principles" (Bullot and Reber 2013:123). Their proposals attracted critical comments from Anjan Chatterjee, Stephen Davies, Jerrold Levinson, among many others, all accessible as open peer commentary attached to the published article.

Criticism of Historicist Theories

Stephen Davies (2013) draws attention to a difficulty with historical definitions he calls "the artworld relativity problem": theories of this kind make art relative to a continuous tradition, an artworld; but there are many cultures, all of which produce artworks in their own artworlds, and so the focussing upon a narrow, Western context ignores other possibilities.

On the very last page of his book *The Art Question,* which concentrates on the Analytical tradition, Nigel Warburton (2003:133) concedes that it is "probably not answerable" within that tradition. He recommends that those philosophers attempting a definitive answer should be left to their own devices. (A little more optimistically, he suggests we turn back to the works themselves, advice I would endorse, together with *assessing their cognitive value in their social contexts,* discussed below*.)*

Another criticism of efforts to define art points out that the Artworld as a concept is incomplete, we need to acknowledge there are many artworlds, not just the narrow Western version which emerged in eighteenth-century Europe. (Shiner 2001)

The review of philosophical aesthetics, the Analytical tradition, ends here with the observation that its Kantian ahistoricism (except for Levinson and Stecker) is the main source of objection which prompted the sociological positions discussed next. The Analytical position implicitly supposes that 'art' entails some object, category or attitude as essence, divorced from any cultural context or historical development. The sociologist Janet Wolff (1988:14) exposes this misunderstanding:

> The social history of art shows, first, that it is accidental that certain types of artefact are constituted as 'art' (purely for non-functional purposes and as distinct, say, from crafts). Secondly, it forces us to question distinctions traditionally made between art and non-art…for it is clear that there is nothing in the nature of the work or of the activity which distinguishes it from other work and activities with which it may have a good deal in common.

The sociological approach takes the view that what is regarded as art at any one time is the outcome of social influences, not of the nature of the objects themselves. (Graham 1997: 154)

Approach 2: 'Continental' Theories

> After the dynasty of philosophers follows – through a gesture of symbolic violence – the reign of the sociologists.
> (Geldorf 1997:30)

Pioneer: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)

The general approach known as 'Continental' theory, with its focus on the social, political, and ideological contexts of art, can be understood as a series of critical responses to the Analytical approach, in particular to the Enlightenment's championing of scientific rationality. Critics of the Enlightenment raised questions for which the scientific method had no answers; questions related to aesthetics as a sociological construction. Hegel's (1835) response to Kant's ahistoricism signalled the emergence of an alternative to analytic theory that can be seen to anticipate the

sociological approach, recognising that Batteux's fine arts (painting, sculpture, music and poetry) were no longer aligned with any utilitarian function, or with their traditional invocational and evocational roles in religious contexts. But once this freedom was recognised, the question was raised whether art is a serious business, in comparison with Science and Religion. In response, Hegel (1835:31) claimed that our impulse to recognise ourselves in all that is presented externally is the original function of art:

> (Man)…has the impulse, in whatever is directly given to him (*sic*) in whatever is present to him externally, to produce himself and therein equally to recognise himself. This aim he achieves by altering external things whereon he impresses the seal of his inner being and in which he now finds again his own characteristics. Man does this in order, as a free subject, to strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness and to enjoy in the shape of things only an external realization of himself.

This impulse has developed as our social structures have evolved, to the point at which the production and reception of artworks has become an essentially communicative phenomenon, a means of articulating, expressing and communicating the shared need to locate our humanity within the wider context of our existence. For Hegel, art seeks to articulate the possibilities of our powers to construct a way of life. As Theodore Gracyk (2012:54) puts it: "Any particular artwork is a product of its historical position within a society at a particular stage of development".

[Clive Cazeaux's (2011) *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* covers the main contributors to Continental aesthetics.]

The approach known as Continental, sociologically-informed alternatives to the philosophical approaches of the Analytical tradition discussed in the previous Section, does not seek any definition of art, but instead advocates the analysis of works, recognising that a range of works, produced within the economic, political and

ideological relationships of their time, will either correlate with the conventionalised perceptions of their society, or challenge, probe those perceptions. For example, Pierre Bourdieu's 1979 book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* presents a sociological case arguing that the authority to designate artefacts as art, to express judgements of taste about artworks, is the preserve of the ruling elites who fabricated the socio-cultural ideology in the first place, in order to exert power over the oppressed, to legitimise their hegemony. Of all the approaches embraced within the term 'Continental' philosophy, including the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, existentialism and hermeneutics, (West 2010), this article focusses upon those most directly relevant to aesthetics in general, and a practice-based research project in particular.

Approach 2.1 Structuralism and Semiotics

> To search for the antecedents of a given phenomenon deflects attention from what gives it meaning and importance, namely its place and function within a system.
> (Culler, in Saussure 1916: xi)

Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916) study of language made a distinction between the *diachronic* (the study of the antecedents of language and how they evolve over time) and the *synchronic* (how it functions as a system at a particular time). His advocacy of the synchronic over the diachronic is the key to understanding structuralist analysis of artworks in their contemporary context. From this structuralist viewpoint, the human subject is no longer the central theme. Instead, aesthetic meaning comes from an analysis of *structure:* how its semiotic elements – Saussure's *signs*, made up of a physical presence, the *signifier,* which triggers the *signified,* a culture-specific mental concept representing something in the world, the *referent*, - are selected from their *paradigms,* the sets of all available similar signs; and how those selections are

combined according to the rules or conventions of the code (the system of signs) to form a *syntagm,* the structure of the work itself. Such structures, or works, are then analysed in terms of their differences to other works in the same paradigm: *meaning comes from difference.*

The most useful application of semiotic analysis to painting, sculpture and architecture is Michael O'Toole's (2011) *The Language of Displayed Art.* He argues that the visual arts, like other systems of signs through which we make meaning, can be interpreted through "three distinct but related dimensions" (O'Toole 2011:1): the *Representational* function, dealing with the subject-matter represented; the *Compositional* function dealing with the producer's selection and combination of the visual elements: line, tone, shape, texture and colour; and the *Modal,* or Interpersonal function, dealing with how those compositional choices affect the mood and attitude of viewers towards the subject-matter represented. O'Toole's practical adaptation of Michael A.K. Halliday's (1978) systemic-functional theory of language may be seen as useful to the *aesthetic cognitivist* approach, elaborated below, since it reveals insights and understandings concerning the means of constructing visual representations of experiences, and affords the sharing of those insights:

> It is my contention…that semiotics…can assist us in the search for a language through which our perceptions of a work of art can be shared. I believe that we should start with the impact the particular work has on us as we view it in the gallery…but this semiotic approach will also allow us to relate the nature of this impact to the scene portrayed, the social, intellectual and economic world within which the artist and their patrons worked, or our own, and to incorporate ways of talking about composition, technique, and the material qualities of the work.
> (O'Toole 2011: 10)

O'Toole's (2011:129) version of a semiotic approach – a *social semiotic* - does not exclude the contexts of the artist's life and social milieu, their economic circumstances and psychological makeup, or the broader social, political, and

cultural history of the artist's period, but leaves them for later consideration when their relevance has been proved by formal aspects of the work itself.

Approach 2.2 Phenomenology of Perception

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) applied Edmund Husserl's phenomenology (see Moran 2005: 274-283 for full Husserl bibliography) to the visual arts and synthesised the insights of Gestalt theory as "a spontaneous organisation of the sensory field" in which there are "only organisations, more or less stable, more or less articulated" (Merleau-Ponty 1933:79). He frequently referred to Paul Cezanne's painting as illustration, for example, whilst he argued that Renaissance perspective was invented for what painters of the day regarded as their goal: capturing the appearance of objects related to the eye in a way informed by an objectivist notion of the world, Cezanne by contrast "did not want to separate the stable things which we see and the shifting way in which they appear; he wanted to depict matter as it takes on form." (Merleau-Ponty 1948:13).

Phenomenology is the study of essences. In Husserlian terms It 'brackets out' (*epoche*) all scientific constructions of experiences in favour of a return "back to the things themselves" (Merleau-Ponty 1945: lxxi). In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty identifies the four themes of the phenomenological method, which can be related to the domain of aesthetics: the foregrounding of description over scientific explanation; the phenomenological reduction; the eidetic reduction; and intentionality. The phenomenological method sets aside scientific explanations of phenomena, arguing that since the world exists before any reflective judgement, we should avoid reconstructing experiences through the activity of consciousness. Phenomenological reduction is the attempt to recognise our direct engagement with the world. The eidetic reduction (to an essential essence, a mental

image with vivid detail, as if actually visible) 'brackets out' the distortions produced by our theories about the nature of the world. Intentionality is traditionally understood as the recognition that all consciousness is directed towards something; Merleau-Ponty distinguishes the intentionality of judgements from the kind of intentionality that is directed towards the natural and pre-predictive unity of the world and ourselves.

> Phenomenology is as painstaking as the work of…Cezanne – through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state, (Merleau-Ponty 1945: lxxxv)

Paul Crowther (2017) has applied Merleau-Ponty's insights specifically recognising the essence of material artefacts themselves and the tacit knowledge informing their making as the source of meaning, rather than any emphasis on their sociological contexts. As such he indicates an alternative theoretical framework for practice-based research theses, one which 'brackets out' any historical acknowledgements, a move which many examiners of research theses might deem controversial: alongside this potential problem, there is an argument that any dependence upon a phenomenological position might need to address:

> Shaken by the War (1914-18), students were turning towards philosophy of life and existentialism. Husserl's response was to develop a philosophical 'system' (as he acknowledged in 1921, in the Foreword to his revised Sixth Investigation, *Logical Investigations 6* Vol. 2: 177)), an all-encompassing phenomenological philosophy that would answer the cognitive and spiritual need of humanity.
> (Moran 2005:35)

From any period of uncertainty springs a need for certainty – from outward chaos to inward order. Husserl was intent on developing a new philosophical method which would bring some certainty to a culture in crisis: he proposed a self-sufficient, inward-directed consciousness in which objects were regarded not as things in themselves, but posited – *intended* – by consciousness. This main aim of

phenomenology can be construed as the aim of philosophy in general: to understand the relationship between thought and the world we think about. Following the history of philosophy from Plato, to Hegel and Marx, who all considered the problem in terms of dialectics – form/matter; thought/sensation; history/eternity – phenomenology investigates a similar dualism: consciousness/object.

For Husserl, a sense of certainty would be derived from reducing – bracketing out – everything beyond our immediate experience: a reduction to the contents of our consciousness alone, his notion of *phenomenological reduction,* summed up in the phrase 'back to the things themselves'. All realities become pure phenomena – appearances in the mind.

But this raises the question about language: for Husserl, phenomena exist without language; language is merely a name-giving to meanings already in existence. How meanings can be articulated without language is a pertinent question which Husserl doesn't answer. We commonly talk about language by saying that it 'expresses' meaning, as if the meanings were already existing, but since the 'linguistic turn', beginning with Saussure and embracing developments in literary theory (Halliday 2005), we understand that language actually *produces* meaning…

> …the view formulated by Whorf, following on from Sapir, and also…by Hjelmslev and by Firth. In this view language does not passively *reflect* reality; language actively *creates* reality. It is the grammar - but now in the sense of lexicogrammar, the grammar plus the vocabulary, with no real distinction between the two – that shapes experience and transforms our perceptions into meanings. The categories and concepts of our material existence are not 'given' to us prior to their expression in language. Rather, they are **construed** by language, at the intersection of the material with the symbolic.
> (Halliday 1990: 145)

Language is *semogenic,* capable of producing meaning. Husserl doesn't recognise this, instead he imagines language as purely expressive of consciousness; but such solitary introspective expressions could not be shared. There can be no such thing

as a personal language (not even a visual one, despite the opinion of some uninformed art school tutors!)

> This idea of a meaningless solitary utterance untainted by the external world is a peculiarly fitting image of phenomenology…For all its claims to have retrieved the living world of human action and experience from the arid clutches of traditional philosophy, phenomenology begins and ends as a head without a world.
> (Eagleton 1983: 61)

Approach 2.3 Deconstruction Theory

> Deconstruction breaks down the dialectical oppositions beloved of classical structuralism to reveal what they have repressed.
> (David Lodge, in Papadakis 1988)

One of Saussure's main insights allows us to recognise that the *sign* is separate from its *referent*. From this insight, the notion of meanings being negotiated from within a structured system such as an artwork – the theory which developed as *Structuralism* – was realised. Jacques Derrida (1967, 1967a) took this further to reveal the innate arbitrariness of the relationship between the *signifier* (the physical presence of the sign) and the *signified* (the mental concept triggered by the signifier). This is the basis for *Deconstruction* theory, a label virtually synonymous with *Post-Structuralism*, which has been the theoretical basis underpinning a Post-Modernist approach to understanding art.

Deconstruction as a method of analysing culturally-produced artworks recognises that since any visual work (drawing, painting, film etc.) is produced by selecting elements (*signs*) from those available sets (*paradigms*) and combining those elements into s*yntagms* according to the rules, or *conventions* of the *code*, then there are alternative selections available in the paradigms that have been deferred, yet all remain available; Derrida puts this as: 'there is no outside-text', (the correct translation of 'Il n'y a pas de hors-texte', *not* the common mistranslation 'there is

nothing outside the text'). These deferrals float in the background, present but absent. (Such an apparently oxymoronic statement – foregrounding both terms of an opposition, when under normal circumstances one term is favoured over its opposite – is itself a demonstration of the power of Deconstruction to expose that which is normally repressed.)

Derrida's invented term *diffèrance*, its sense suspended between the two verbs *to differ* and *to defer*, illustrates through its own ambiguity the point of the Deconstructionist approach: to deconstruct apparently stable syntagms in order to re-construct the web of available meanings from which preferred readings are made.

There is no signifier that carries meaning which is not shot through with the echoes of other signifiers. For example CAT means what it means because it is not BAT, CAR or COT. These deferred signifiers thrust themselves into our consciousness as soon as we recognise the differential nature of all sign-systems; the meaning attached to any particular sign depends upon its signifier differing from (whilst being associated with) all other signifiers in the paradigm.

Out of this play of signifiers, this spillage of meanings that Roland Barthes (1975: v-vi) termed *jouissance*, certain meanings are elevated by the dominant ideology to a privileged position, and these soon assume that status of natural truth.

Thus the self-contained *artwork* that early Structuralism recognised as the product of an enclosed system of signs becomes the open-ended, multi-dimensional *text* of the Post-Structuralists. All visual texts (paintings, drawings etc.) become complexities with depths of multiple meanings – one of which may be 'preferred' as being compatible with the dominant ideology (the tacitly accepted set of social, political,

cultural values), but all of which are potentially available, even though normally deferred, repressed or ignored:

To deconstruct artwork that is deemed to be authoritative in some capacity is to reveal the ambiguities, the inherent contradictions, the alternative constructions of aesthetic meanings that the work obscures, denies in favour of its own authority.

To deconstruct a text is to dismantle the syntagm and to re-align each significant element back within the paradigm from which it was selected. By doing so, the alternative selections and combinations of signs that were deferred, for whatever reason, become available to scrutiny, become available for a random, *eclectic* process of selection and combination, affording a *pluralist* approach to the negotiation of meaning(s). This is the basis of a Post-modern practice.

In this sense, any work under consideration for the status of art may be deconstructed by the inquisitive viewer. Thus, revealing as cultural the conventions that have become naturalised, the viewer is free to play within the artwork, the visual *text*, the *texture* of the work, but also the *context* of the work, the *intertextuality* of the work, in a truly Post-structuralist manner, identifying the ideological motives, and the aesthetic conventions that govern the preferred reading. In this way, all works are seen to be political, their form, and thus their aesthetic validity, produced by conscious or unconscious choices made according to some dominant ideological position of which the artist-maker may or may not be aware.

Approach 2.4 Relational Aesthetics: Altermodernism

Jacques Rancière rejects the labels ‘Modernist’ and ‘Postmodernist’ because they are deemed to be historicist, categorising into particular time periods and movements tensions which are actually, he argues, inherent in the “aesthetic regime

of art". (Rancière 2009:36), As mentioned earlier, he claims that this concept of art, with which we live today, first emerged some two hundred years ago, at a time of revolutions: French, and Industrial. In his book *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, Rancière (2009:49) adapts the Brechtian neologism *Verfremdungseffekt*, explained as an "estrangement effect", similar to Viktor Shklovsky's (1917) earlier *ostraneniye*, or 'making strange'. Rancière's (2009:52) adaptation, *distantiation,* identifies a period in time when "…humorous distantiation takes the place of provocative shock". In other words, the period of what I have described elsewhere (Riley 2013) as *revocational* art, following on from the Modernist era of *provocational* art. Rancière (2009:53) goes on to identify four major "figures" or sub-classes of shift from "…yesterday's dialectical provocations to the new figures of…artistic *dispositifs…"* which he labels *Play*; *Inventory; Encounter* and *Mystery,* and here the recent writing of an influential contemporary curator/theorist to whom Rancière alludes, albeit only in a footnote, becomes relevant: Nicolas Bourriaud was cited by Rancière as the main theoretician of *Relational Aesthetics*, the title of Bourriaud's book first published in English, 2002. Relational art is the third of Rancière's sub-categories of contemporary art practice, elaborated under his sub-class *Encounter* as activities to which the artist/curator invites visitors in order for them to encounter, to participate within, to relate to some sort of event. Rirkrit Tiravanija, for example, appropriated a recognised artworld space in 1990, the Paula Allen Gallery in New York City, and arranged camping stoves, water urns and sachets of Thai soup powder which visitors were invited to prepare as they engaged with the artist. Figure 13 illustrates a repeat performance from 2021:

Tiravanija (center), 60, photographed in the former location of the gallery Gavin Brown's Enterprise in Harlem, Manhattan, on Nov. 22, 2021.
Flora Hanitijo

Figure 13 Rirkrit Tiravanija 2021 *Pad Thai* event.

Such activities, championed by Bourriaud's curatorial practice as a typical example of the contemporary social situation after post-Modernism, one he has labelled *Altermodernism,* no longer attempts to respond to the excesses of commodity culture and the fragmentary nature of a post-modern social structure, but rather attempts to address the lack of social coherence in a social structure formed by a post-industrial, service economy. As Rancière (2009:56-7) puts it:

> Relational art…aims no longer to create objects, but situations and encounters. In so doing, however, it relies on a simplistic opposition between objects and situations, effecting a short-circuit where the point is to carry out a transformation of those problematic spaces that once contrasted conceptual art with art objects/commodities. The former distance taken with respect to goods is inverted and a proposition made about a new proximity between individuals, about building new forms of social relations. Art no longer tries to respond to an excess of commodities and signs but rather to a lack of bonds.

George Baker (2004:50), introducing a series of articles on relational art published in the journal *October,* had earlier related such artforms to the contemporary social structure:

> …Bourriaud's project amounts to a theory of advanced art in the era of a putatively new service economy, a context within which, it is claimed, art abandons its prior (industrial) object forms and shifts to the immaterial form of services, a proliferation of event-based manipulations directly shaping the sphere of "inter-human relations".

Bourriaud (2002:36) himself is more succinct, though perhaps a little cruder in translation: "Through little services rendered, the artist fills in the cracks in the social bond." He explains his term Altermodernism as a collectively-produced open-ended flux of social activities and events that resists fixed interpretation or closure, typical of an Internet culture, in which the global realm of human interactions becomes the arena for art practice, rather than any notion of private, individually-based response. More recently, (across the continental divide in the United States!) Berleant (2023:8-17) in his chapter *The Transformation of Aesthetics,* revives the insights of Dewey's (1934) *Art as Experience* to re-construe a series of key moments in European art history (from Impressionism to Conceptual Art), not as the traditional sequence of transformations of attitudes towards the art object, but as a sequence of ways of seeing: "…a shift from object-based art to experience-based art" (Berleant 2023: 10). The viewer no longer a passive spectator, but a participant, an active co-creator in the sense defined as relational aesthetics.

Criticism of Continental theories

Simon Critchley (1997) provides a historical and cultural analysis of the emergence of Continental philosophy, assesses its anti-scientism and some stereotypical representations of the Analytical/Continental divide.

Approach 3: Aesthetic Cognitivism

> According to the dominant view, cognitive progress is the growth of knowledge, the acquisition of new justified or reliably generated true beliefs. The inadequacy of the dominant view stems from its indifference to the fact that cognitive progress often consists in reconfiguration – in reorganizing a domain so that hitherto overlooked or underemphasized features, patterns, opportunities, and resources come to light. Epistemological theories that restrict their purview to justified or reliably generated true beliefs seem blind to such progress.
> (Elgin 2002:1)

Pioneer: Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)

A contemporary rival to Hegel, Arthur Schopenhauer (1819) believed that art held a distinctive value – a norm – within our consciousness, and argued that the proper objective of any artwork should allow us to see and understand something about our experience; an essentially cognitivist position, making Schopenhauer one of the first philosophers to offer "…a normative theory of art along cognitivist lines." (Graham 1997:175). His original contribution was to construe aesthetic experience as valuable not only for affording us knowledge of the world, but also because of a (rather pessimistic!) view that it soothes our awareness of the painful aspects of our lives deriving from our drive – our will – to avoid suffering boredom!

This third position, one which lends itself to practice-based research, is a *cognitivist* approach**,** making use of aspects of psychological and neurobiological theories related to visual perception, seeking to identify and explain art's *value* in terms of facilitating new understandings and knowledge rather than to define what art is, to construe it in terms of sociological structures, or reverting to notions of individual *genius* which ignore the fact that human consciousness as realised through art is always conditioned by material relations. Bradley Murray (2007:199) suggests the common belief that art is the product of individual *genius* – attributed to Kant - is a distortion of his actual meaning: "…the need to employ the *concept* of a productive faculty of genius in order to make pure judgements of taste concerning artworks."

The common association of art production with ‘uniqueness’ and ‘genius’ emerged historically alongside capitalism as a means of boosting perceived market value, and is so ingrained that the argument that arts practices can be the source of understanding and knowledge on a par with the sciences is rarely articulated within art school studios, although it has featured in relevant journals (Frayling 1993; Riley 2019; Zhang & Jia, forthcoming).

Claude Levi-Strauss (1964:127) had even placed art on a par with science as a means to knowledge, describing it:

> …if not as a superior form of knowledge, at any rate as the most fundamental form of knowledge, and the only one that we all have in common; knowledge in the scientific sense is merely the sharpened edge of this other knowledge.

[Aesthetic cognitivism is reviewed in Elena Fell and Ioanna Kopsiafti (2019) *The Cognitive Basis of Aesthetics.* John Young (2001) reviews art as knowledge, Christoph Baumberger (2013) provides a defence of aesthetic cognitivism. Marcus Pearce, Dahlia Zaidel et al. (2016) address neuroaesthetics. Rebecca Chamberlain (2022a) reviews the development of the field of neuroaesthetics.]

Key figures of the aesthetic cognitivist position include:

Nelson Goodman and Catherine Z. Elgin

American philosophers Nelson Goodman and Catherine Z. Elgin (1988:3-4) argued for an aesthetic cognitivism:

> Epistemology once sought certainty through derivation from incontrovertible basic statements…nothing else qualified as knowledge…Maps, diagrams, pictures…could serve the process of knowledge only as auxiliary aids. The justification for so narrowing the scope of epistemology came from the quest for certainty…Since by now…the quest for certainty has been abandoned. We want to sketch an alternative epistemology…as we conceive it, comprehend(ing) understanding or cognition in all of its modes – including perception, depiction…as well as description.

Since then Elgin (2002, 2002a, 2017) has consolidated the case, showing how art may reconfigure those constructed realities regarded as immutable:

> Ordinarily, cognitive advancement is construed as the growth of knowledge. It is accomplished by the acquisition of new (justified or reliably generated) true beliefs…More significant advances in understanding are apt to involve reassessment…Understanding comes not through passively absorbing new information, but through incorporating it into a system of thought that is not, as it stands, quite ready to receive it.
> (Elgin 2002a:14-16)

Perception is selective, and malleable. What we perceive is influenced by our experiences, and the contexts of those experiences. An aesthetics that recognises this can nurture our facility not only for modifying what we see but how we share those modified perceptions in material form, thus affording new understanding. Elgin (2002a:22) specifies metaphor and exemplification as means of bringing new approaches to aesthetic cognition; the full range of rhetorical tropes is equally amenable for application in visual work.

An early indication of the shift in construing aesthetics from the philosophical, analytical approach in the Anglo-American tradition, to psychological explanations, and from those to an aesthetic cognitivist position, is evident in the writings of Goodman (1976, 1978) with his premises: 1) that access to our constructions of reality is by means of systems of symbols; 2) that art (i.e. the range of material objects and activities encompassed by that term) has a cognitive, educative, transformative force; art has the power to intervene, to confirm or challenge the ideological assumptions upon which the socio-political structure rests, within which the very notion of art exists, with the potential to probe – and to reconfigure - the possibilities of preconceived realities.

Informed by a cognitivist, relativist stance, Goodman argues that Art equates with Science and ordinary experience, all employing symbol systems in the social construction of realities:

> …the arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of

> advancement of the understanding, and thus that the philosophy of art should be conceived as an integral part of metaphysics and epistemology. (Goodman 1978:102)

According to social cognitive theory, the world is constructed in relation to existing observed and experienced models. The explorative nature of constructivist understandings allows for fresh interpretations and recreations of these frameworks. As Gracyk (2012:49) puts it:

> Examining the same object or event, two people who employ different symbol systems will apply distinct conceptual frames of reference to it. As a result, they will engage with different realities. In sum, symbols make worlds.

Specifically, when we apply a symbol system to a situation where there are no established rules for its literal application, we are in the realm of metaphor, and art becomes especially potent when metaphor is used to reveal new possibilities of relationships.

This stance argues that art, like mathematics and science, deals with ideal possibilities, but while maths deals with the formally possible, and science with the hypothetically possible, art can reveal alternative constructions of reality, can reveal ideological constructions as cultural (as opposed to natural), leading to new perceptions, understandings, knowledge of the world in which we live.

> Art…does not, and does not purport to deliver literal, descriptive truths. It seeks, rather, to challenge, to dis-orient, to disrupt, to explore, and thereby to reveal what more regimented approaches lack the resources to attempt. (Elgin 2002:12)

Berys Gaut

Gaut (2003:436-7) explains that aesthetic cognitivism “is best thought of as a conjunction of two claims: first, that art can give us (non-trivial) knowledge, and second, that the capacity of art to give us (non-trivial) knowledge (partly) determines its value *qua* art i.e. its aesthetic value.” This view embraces a range of different

kinds of knowledge: “propositional knowledge, know-how (skills), phenomenological knowledge (what it is like to experience something), conceptual knowledge, and knowledge of values” (Gaut 2006:115). ‘Value’ can be understood in terms of a contribution to human understanding, (Baumberger 2013:1)

Gordon Graham (1997:172) too, advocated a theoretical position which sets out a distinction between what is art and not-art in terms of cognitive value, thus avoiding the problems inherent in both the philosophical and sociological attempts to define art.

Hans and Shulamith Kreitler:

In their book *Psychology of the Arts,* Hans and Shulamith Kreitler (1972:13) explain that art provides favourable conditions for the satisfaction of the basic human motive to expand and elaborate cognitive orientation, as basic as the tendencies to react to stimuli or to maintain a level of homeostasis. The main parameters of cognitive orientation are: beliefs about the world, about one’s person, about social norms, and about goals and wishes. These provide avenues of approach to four main aspects of reality represented in artworks and often discussed by both aestheticians and artists: common reality, archaeological reality, normative reality and prophetic reality. Common reality refers to the set of events perceived in the same way by most people; archaeological reality is the reality of the repressed, forgotten – that which defies rational consensus. Normative reality relates to art which represents rules – norms – of social behaviour, and prophetic reality refers to work which anticipates the future (Kreitler and Kreitler 1972:333).

Anjan Chatterjee: Neuroaesthetics

Aesthetics has long been associated with the fields of philosophy, art history and criticism, but more recently, Chatterjee, a neurologist based at the Penn Center for

Neuroaesthetics, University of Pennsylvania, has introduced research investigating how empirical aesthetics and neuroscience can contribute to testable hypotheses about art's rôle in promoting understanding and knowledge. (Chatterjee and Cardillo, 2022; Christensen, Cardillo and Chatterjee, 2022). Oshin Vartanian and Chatterjee (2022) propose an 'aesthetic triad', through which aesthetic experience may be viewed as the interaction between three systems in the brain: sensory-motor, emotion-valuation, and knowledge-meaning.

William P. Seeley (2015:20) proposes a model for a "cognitive neuroscience of art" relating the fields of empirical aesthetics and philosophy of art, in the attempt to resolve "two standard philosophical objections to empirical aesthetics". The first of these objections is to the position which defines all artworks as a means of engendering an aesthetic experience. This position entails that if any work doesn't engender an aesthetic experience, it isn't an artwork; the logic of this, Seeley argues, means that there could be no failed artworks. Seeley's (2015:24) second objection: "Some philosophers have argued that questions about artistic appreciation, evaluative questions about whether a work fits the conventions governing artistic practice, and if so whether it has been done well or poorly, are the critical questions that ground an understanding of art. This seems like too strong a position"

Criticism of Aesthetic Cognitivist theories

John Gibson (2008) provides a review of criticisms of the aesthetic cognitivist position.

Approach 4: Ecological Aesthetics

To recap, Baumgarten had defined aesthetics as a science of sensory awareness focussed on beauty. Kant too had argued that aesthetic awareness relied upon sensory perception (but with an attitude of 'disinterestedness'). Since then, thinking

about perception has evolved, along with thinking about the relationship betweeen observer and their surroundings,: American visual psychologist James J. Gibson (1979) proposed *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception,* adapting the word 'ecology' coined by German biologist Ernst Haeckel in his 1866 publication *General Morphology of Organisms,* derived from the Greek *oikos,* or 'household' (from which our word 'economy' is also derived). Ecology, as defined by Haeckel, studies the relationship of an organism both to its organic as well as its inorganic environment. Whether we narrow the meaning of (the notoriously flexible!) 'aesthetic' to relate only to the beauty of objects in isolation, or we expand it to include all sensory experiences, the term's potential to embrace both, in the study of all environmental concerns where they interact with human experience and activity, is ripe for exploration. Indeed, Berleant (2023:47) even claims that "…the aesthetic should not only be our starting point but is also our ultimate end as the fundamental understanding of direct perceptual experience."

This is where contemporary writers cognisant with Chinese philosophies take the lead in combining the three factors, environment, aesthetics and ecology. The East's long-established philosophical appreciation of living in harmony with Nature, as embodied in Daoism for example, is in parallel with the West's (relatively recent) science-based understanding. Today, an ecological outlook engages both cultures, so that *ecological aesthetics* becomes the harmonising concept. Berleant's influence is acknowledged, for example in Xiangzhan Cheng's (2021) *Environmental Aesthetics and Ecological Aesthetics: Arnold Berleant's Impact on Ecological Aesthetics in China,* whilst the earlier writings of Jusuck Koh (1982) and Fanren Zeng (2003; 2005) are having a strong influence on Western (as well as Eastern) cultural production.

Koh identifies three principles of ecological aesthetics, helpful in understanding both Western and Oriental art: *inclusive unity*, explained as the integration of subject and object, of human and environment; *dynamic balance*, the equilibrium between organic and inorganic forms; and *complementarity*, the principle that "overcomes the dualities that pervade our thinking about nature and the world" (Berleant 2023:61). Cheng (2013) proposes four points about ecological aesthetics: 1) a denial of any opposition between humans and environment, 2) any ecological aesthetic appreciation should be predicated on ecological ethics, 3) ecological knowledge is a pre-requisite for ecological aesthetic appreciation, a point in direct opposition to the Kantian attitude of disinterestedness, but one which resonates with the stance of aesthetic cognitivism, and 4) that ecological aesthetic appreciation is dependent upon principles of bio-diversity and ecosystem health.

Criticism of Ecological Aesthetics

Arnold Berleant (2023: 56-7) poses *Some Questions for Ecological Aesthetics.*

Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception

> …my aim is not to urge an empirical turn in aesthetics, but to urge a turn in aesthetics towards philosophy of perception.
> (Nanay 2014:112)

Bence Nanay is a Hungarian philosopher working at the University of Antwerp and Cambridge University. His aim, quoted above and elaborated in his 2016 book *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception,* should resonate with practice-based doctoral researchers structuring their theses, since practice itself involves the coordination of hands and eyes, in the service of judgements of quality. Nanay (2016:92) advocates a "semi-formalist" approach to evaluating aesthetically relevant properties of an artwork, by which he means attending to the perceivable formal properties of a picture's surface together with the "constitutive properties": those

determined by, or given expression by, the social context of the work's production, or the psychology of its maker. (Thus he integrates to some extent the Formalist aspect of the Analytic tradition, and the sociological aspects of the Continental tradition.)

Figure 14 Vincent van Gogh 1889 (L) *Cypresses.* (R) detail of brushwork. Oil on canvas, 93.4x74cms. Metropolitan Museum, NYC.

An example of a *constitutive property* is the brush-strokes of a painter being influenced by a close study of, (for example), Van Gogh's brush-strokes (Fig. 14): the painter's marks would make up a semi-formalist property of the painting because they are constitutive – they are determined by the study of Van Gogh's work. In semiotic terms, they are indexical signs of the painter's research. In contrast, if the brush-strokes were made after the painter had visited the location where Van Gogh had worked, then the property of 'being influenced' by Van Gogh is *not* a semi-formal one (Nanay 2016:112). Another example of a constitutive property is the direction of the eye-gazes discerned in a painting depicting characters' interaction; lines of sight not formally inscribed upon the surface, but a semi-formal property since they depend constitutively on the formal arrangement of the figures in the composition.

These examples illustrate Nanay's argument of how the art-historical context can be relevant to the aesthetic evaluation of work. Thus the concept of semi-formal properties is a much more inclusive one than that of formal properties, embracing as it does aspects of the sociological context in which the work is produced.

Whilst all the formal properties that Clive Bell would recognise are automatically included in Nanay's semi-formal set, there are others that he identifies through a revision of Richard Wollheim's (1980, 1998) model of 'twofoldness', discussed in the Section below. Nanay (2016:48-59) presents a "threefoldness model", extending Wollheim's twofoldness, comprising the picture's surface (which Nanay labels 'A') and the three-dimensional subject-matter encoded visually upon that surface, (which Nanay labels 'B'). He adds 'C', the three-dimensional object itself, the referent of B. Like Wollheim, he argues that both A and B are perceptually represented. However, adding a third fold, C, is relevant to the question about the aesthetic appreciation of pictures. The relation between A and B has received most attention, but attending to the relation between B and C is important, Nanay argues, not only for establishing the accuracy of the picture, but also for appreciating the degree of naturalism.

Visual Perception Theories Relevant to Aesthetics

Richard Shusterman (2012a) credits German philosophers Wolfgang Welsch (1997) and Gernot Böhme (2001) with the revival of the conception of aesthetics as centrally concerned with perception. Perception, in this present context, is not limited to the sensory stimulation of our sense organs: it embraces our state of *attention.* Traditionally in vision science the distinction between *focused* and diffused, or *distributed* attention referred to ways of attending to objects within the visual field (Eriksen and Hoffman 1972). A similar distinction can be made when attending to the *properties* of those objects, such as colour, texture, size, shape, in a focused or

distributed manner. So there are four combinations through which we can exercise our attention:

> 1 Distributed attention with regard to objects; focused with regard to properties.
> 2 Distributed attention with regard to objects; distributed with regard to properties.
> 3 Focused attention with regard to objects; focused with regard to properties.
> 4 Focused attention with regard to objects; distributed with regard to properties.

Nanay (2016:23-4) identifies the fourth, attending to one object only but to a number of its different properties, as *aesthetic attention.* In terms of a pedagogy of drawing, such flexibility of attention has been construed as a variety of 'levels of perception', most recently in Riley and Darlington (2022).

Before reviewing the range of visual perception theories, it is relevant to revisit the notion of 'creativity', and to challenge its connotations that were mentioned earlier. As early as 1950, in the Reith Lectures, John Z. Young (1951, in Williams 1965:32) proposed "The brain of each one of us does literally create his or her own world." We have to learn to see; we do not simply record what is in front of us, like a camera, we see what we have learned.

> The artist is an observer whose brain works in new ways, making it possible for him (*sic*) to convey information to others about matters that were not a subject for communication before. *It is by search for means of communication that we sharpen our powers of observation*. The discoveries of the artist and scientist are exactly alike in this respect.
> (Young, J.Z. 1951 in Williams 1965:44. My italics)

The Russian-American artist Ben Shahn (1957:108) put it more succinctly: "Intuition in art is actually the result of prolonged tuition". Tuition in seeing, *via* modes of attention, is most directly and economically achieved through the pedagogy of drawing. Creativity in this context is simply acquired learning, applied in the production of innovative work.

Gestalt theory has been applied to the understanding of cognitive aesthetics by Rudolph Arnheim, (1974: 6) "…vision is not a mechanical recording of elements but rather the apprehension of significant structural patterns." Richard Wollheim (1998) answers his own question 'why is drawing interesting?', introducing the notion of 'seeing-in' and theorising the relationship between seeing the surface of a picture at the same time as seeing what is represented upon that surface. James Jerome Gibson's (1979) ecological approach to an understanding of visual perception, and David Marr's (1982) computational theory of visual perception are both highly relevant to any survey of aesthetics. Semir Zeki (1999) has articulated a neurobiological theory of aesthetics, based upon the premise that the pre-eminent function of the visual brain is the acquisition of knowledge in the cause of survival by the extraction of information from the arrays of light arriving at the eyes. He proposes that our compulsion to produce art has a function similar to that of the visual brain. All these approaches engage with psychological and neurobiological theories, rather than philosophical or sociological.

[For a comprehensive review of visual perception theories: Stephen E. Palmer (1999) *Vision Science*.]

Rudolph Arnheim: The Gestalt Approach

> We owe a significant debt to the Gestalt psychologists in general, and to Rudolph Arnheim in particular, for developing the German tradition of holistic perception incorporating the viewer as an active participant.
> (Cupchik 2007:8)

The school of Gestalt psychology emerged early in the twentieth century in Austria and Germany, and emphasises that we perceive whole patterns – a *gestalt* – not the individual components: hence the phrase 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'. Its principles; *proximity, similarity, figure/ground, continuity, closure,* and *connection,* are described in Kurt Koffka's 1935 *Principles of Gestalt Psychology.*

Arnheim applied Gestalt principles in order to transform percepts into concepts which inform us about how we structure, order our world, in the belief that visual art helps us to see beneath the surface of our world, to reveal basic structural principles. He theorised that viewers of artworks are active participants in balancing the formal components with the overall whole composition: complex visual patterns exist in a hierarchy of structural levels which are explored by viewers, producing tensions between structure and expression, resolved as meanings relevant to the work's context.

Richard Wollheim: Visual Delight

The English philosopher Richard Wollheim (1980,1998) offered an elaboration of the aesthetic cognitivist position, by shifting attention to the psychology of perception and the understanding of pictorial representation. What may be termed a 'perceptualist' approach to making sense of art which affords more opportunity for applying theory directly to practice. Wollheim introduced the idea that observing a marked surface involves seeing the surface itself – a *configurational* aspect, and simultaneously seeing what the marked surface represents – a *recognitional* aspect. His term for this duality of perception is 'twofoldness', a single experience with two aspects. The fluctuation between these two aspects is, according to Wollheim, the cause of *visual delight* experienced by the viewer (Riley 2008). Although he never elaborated on how the visual awareness of depth occurs, there are three possibilities: a visual illusion comparable to viewing the scene; an imaginative experience of the scene; a visual resemblance of the scene. Wollheim rejected all three (Budd 2021:250).

James Jerome Gibson: The Ecological Approach

A fourth explanation comes courtesy of Gibson (1979:310-11) who applied the

mathematical theory of ‘invariance under transformation’ to identify four kinds of invariants which underlie transformations of the structure of the array of light rays arriving at the eyes:

> Invariants of optical structure under changing illumination.
> Invariants of optical structure under change of the point of observation.
> Invariants across the sampling of the ambient optic array.
> Local invariants of the ambient optic array under local disturbances of its structure.

Wollheim’s configurational aspect can be correlated with Gibson’s invariants in the arrays of light structured by the surfaces’ qualities before reaching the eyes. For example, the direct perception of edges within the scene as ‘contrast-boundaries’ between surfaces of different colour and tone, and the noticing of the pattern of vertices (resembling ‘T’ or ‘Y’) as one surface occludes two others, can be nurtured as a result of looking directly, without language imposing labels on the visual field. Such constructions of perception refresh and inform constructions of aesthetic value, particularly those related to our symbiotic relationship with our environment. An ecology in which environmental properties invite particular human behaviours; properties identified earlier by social psychologist Kurt Lewin as *Aufforderungscharakter*, or ‘invitation character’, adapted by Gibson (1979:138) to his term ‘affordances’.

David Marr: The Computational Approach

The computational approach to understanding visual perception as developed by Marr (1982) at M.I.T. involves mathematical analysis of how variations of light intensity in a 2-D image can provide information about the structure of surfaces and objects in 3-D space. There is a parallel in this inquiry with Gibson’s ecological approach, the difference being that Gibson believed we have evolved so as to directly pick up the information contained within the arrays of light arriving at the

eyes, and Marr theorised an information-processing paradigm, akin to the computer, with three levels of processing: the computational level, mapping input stimuli to output information; the algorithmic level, more specific than the computational, encoding input as a representation and processing that into output representation; and thirdly, the implementational level, specifying how an algorithm is embodied as a physical process within a physical system – our body, (Palmer 1999).

Semir Zeki: An Exploration of Art and the Brain

Neurobiologist Semir Zeki (1999:4) who invented the term *neuro-aesthetics,* an aesthetics that is biologically based, explains the function of vision: “We see in order to be able to acquire knowledge about the world”. A fitting justification for research through practice in the visual arts, since Zeki (1999:5) finds: “…germs of a general and unifying theory that links the functions of the visual brain to the aims of art, and that encompasses the views of philosophers such as Plato, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Heidegger…” According to Zeki (1999:5) the only knowledge worth acquiring is that concerning the enduring properties of the world; consequently, the brain is only interested in the constant, permanent properties of objects, their edges and surfaces, those characteristics which enable the brain to categorise objects. Zeki’s ‘enduring properties’ equate with James J. Gibson’s identification of *invariants.*

A Summary of Aesthetic Theories related to Viewers’ Perceptual Engagement

We have seen that making sense of art-objects has been attempted through various approaches: the material and formal properties of the work itself; the psychological attributes of the maker and/or the viewer; the properties of the cultural context or the environmental context in which they interact. Each of the three groups summarised here isolates certain links in that complex system *maker*/*viewer/artwork/context*, so as to construct its own argument. There are implications of all these positions for the practising artist to consider in their production processes and their research thesis.

Before deciding to support or utilise one of the formulations of aesthetics, the practice-based research student is advised to examine the appropriate theory of visual perception. The complexities of the relationships between theories of

aesthetics and theories of visual perception are here condensed to a manageable trio:

Viewer-as-Responder Theory
Theory that emphasises the external effect that the artwork produces in the passive viewer. This group of theorists, known as *behaviourists*, argue that since we can never know how other people experience the world, we should only examine their behaviour – how their behavioural responses correlate with variations in the stimulus (i.e. the artwork) presented to their view.

Viewer-as Contributor Theory
Theory that emphasises the internal, mental activity of the viewer, focussing upon what mental contributions they bring to the artwork so as to make sense of it in terms of their previous experiences.
This group of theorists is divided into two sub-divisions:

Nativists, who argue that mental faculties for processing the received data are innate. Gestalt theory of perception.

Empiricists, who argue that the incoming data is mentally processed according to previous knowledge acquired through cultural learning or personal experience of the world. Computational and neurobiological theories of perception.

Direct Theory
Theory which emphasises the formal, material properties of the artwork itself. Attention is focussed upon the artwork itself as the prime source of meaning. The ecological theory of perception.

Let's look at the three groups in more detail:

VIEWER – AS – RESPONDER THEORY
Since the early 1920's at least (Watson 1924), psychologists interested in behaviour have emphasised the role of the response of the passive viewer in the presence of an artwork, together with the associated behaviours that the response induces. All such spectator-effect theories pre-suppose that it is through perceiving the artwork that the viewer is caused to respond or behave in certain specific ways. If theorists can ascertain which types of visual stimuli cause what types of behaviour, then they are able to determine whether an artwork has the properties necessary to induce the requisite behaviour; or they can examine behaviour which occurs in the presence of the artwork. Art theorists who subscribe to this theory believe that the nature of art lies in the effect it produces upon the viewer. (Langer 1953).

VIEWER – AS – CONTRIBUTOR THEORY
The art theorists and critics linked with this group emphasise the role of mental associations that the viewer makes with the artwork. The significance or meaning of the artwork is determined:

a) in *nativist* terms by the contribution made by faculties innate in the brain, described in detail by the Gestaltists in their *Principles of Perceptual Organisation* (Wertheimer 1923).

b) In *empiricist* terms by what 'cultural baggage' the viewer brings to the artwork such as learned knowledge and previous experience (Gombrich 1960).
In this way, empiricist theory (which proposes that all human knowledge is gained through experience exclusively) is able to explain why people respond to the same artwork in different ways: viewers make their individual meanings through their individual experiences. This group of art theorists has therefore also to be concerned with what codes of interpretation are used by different individuals, different cultures, at different times.

This theoretical base embraces both empiricism and Gestalt theory and has become the basis of theoretical studies in Schools of Art throughout the Western world almost by default, since there appears to be a positive correlation between the amount of cultural knowledge a person acquires through such learning, and the ability to read artworks on culturally-based levels of meaning. (Arnheim 1974).

DIRECT THEORY

James J. Gibson (1979) focuses attention on the *structure of the stimulus*, the complex environment with which the viewer interacts, and he asserts that our visual perception system has evolved so as to directly pick up information necessary to make sense of what we see. This information consists of invariant features within the structure of the array of light arriving at our eyes reflected from the surfaces and edges of our material world. These invariants are noticed over changes in the reflected light brought about by movement within the environment, or by movement of the viewer.
Translated into terms of aesthetics, this position emphasises the artwork as a culturally produced artefact within a material environmental context. The role of the viewer either as responder or contributor is suppressed. Instead, the main concern is to analyse what is present in the work itself. Most often this concern is focussed through discussion about the formal composition of the materials present in the art-object.

CRITIQUES OF THE THREE GROUPS OF THEORIES

Critique of the Viewer-as-Responder Theory

The notion that the meaning of an artwork is embedded in the effect it produces upon the viewer is attractive to those who want art criticism to be no more than a personal means of expressing subjective feelings about art. But this position cannot reveal anything either about the wider possible meanings of the artwork itself, or indeed anything new about the viewer to themselves.
More disturbing is the assumption on the part of theorists that since they are in a position to correlate properties of the artwork with behaviour patterns in the viewer, they alone are in a position to judge an artwork's success. This assumption can lead to judgement of behaviour, and ultimately the way is open for this kind of art criticism to become an instrument of social manipulation. For example, behavioural responses which are deemed appropriate to the maintaining of the *status quo* may be encouraged: those artworks which produce the approved response being epitomised as 'good art'.
As an example, the success of advertisement imagery relies heavily on its ability to tap the required response in consumers, and *all* advertisements are specifically

designed to induce a behaviour pattern which results in the consumer buying the lifestyle or emotional feeling associated with the product or service depicted.
Note also that although the image is mentioned as being the source of behavioural response, the composition in itself is not regarded as valuable except as a cause of behaviour. Under the influence of this theory, the image's significance and value is determined wholly by the effect it induces in members of a commodity-oriented society.

Critique of Viewer-as-Contributor Theories
These theories emphasise not the characteristics of the artefact, not the behaviour of the viewer, but their mental processes of cognition, or understanding.
They hardly discuss the limits of interpretation acceptable between viewers, or the criteria by which an interpretation is validated. By neglecting the characteristics of the artwork-as-object, they allow for too much latitude in the interpretive processes.

Critique of Direct Theories
This group of theorists asks: 'in what does the significance of the art-object lie?' They answer by citing formal, material properties of the work and its surroundings that make it significant, meaningful. This raises the real problem of how to assess which properties or sets of properties of an artwork and its context are significant. Artworks are regarded as systems of cultural signs, and the analysis of sign-systems – semiotic analysis – is regarded as a most fruitful means to resolving this problem. (O'Toole 2011)
However, there is some vagueness within the ecological theory of perception about exactly what invariant features of light structure carry information: formalist theories of art and art criticism can differ on what basic properties of artworks should be analysed to produce meaning. Yet the effort to clarify these areas can in itself reveal rich layers of meaning. The search to identify the sets of formal elements which yield significant form to the viewer is the valid endeavour of this group.

Suggested Criteria for the Assessment of Aesthetic Quality

Aesthetics into Practice: Between Intellectual Understanding and Sensual Experience

> Given that the purpose of education is to develop the mind and promote understanding, and if it is true that art is one form of this understanding, the study of art has a proper place in education.
> (Graham 1997:46)

The cognitive function fulfilled by art – the viewer's desire for widening their cognitive orientation through experiencing new constructions of reality – serves as the source for the unique kind of knowledge which is not merely known but also experienced: experienced through an innate *intelligence of seeing* (Riley 2001, 2017) essential for

those involved in the making of art, and most directly and economically nurtured through the pedagogy and practice of drawing (Riley 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2021, 2022). The concept ‘intelligence of seeing’ can be understood as a cultural superstructure built upon two of the natural, basic human activities crucial to survival since Palaeolithic times: firstly, the perceiving of our environment and our individual positions within it, and secondly the social need to share – communicate – those perceptual experiences in a visual form, as demonstrated by the early cave drawings. A first indicator of an intelligence of seeing would be evidence of a versatility of vision which transcends those fundamental functions: a versatility informed by an awareness of how to ‘change channels’, as it were, so as to extract different levels of information - haptic, distal, proximal -from the scene observed. A second indicator would be evidence of an ability to communicate through drawing practices a range of drawn equivalences for the perceptual experiences, relevant to the aims of the work: to convey the response of the maker as well as the positioning of viewers, in terms of their mood and attitude towards the subject matter represented in the work.

We might recall here Kant’s suggestion that aesthetic judgements may be construed as somewhere between objective, cognitive judgements and subjective, sensory ones (Schellekens 2021:95). Hegel ‘s (1835) sociological approach, an elaboration of a *normative* philosophy of art in which aesthetic judgements lie between objective cognitive judgements and subjective perceptual judgements, provides a strategy for avoiding the renowned difficulties in defining art *per se* by construing art as what he referred to as a ‘determination’. The difference between a definition and a determination is explained by Stephen Bungay (1987: 25):

> A determination is not a definition because a definition excludes possible examples delimiting the object at the outset. A determination is a theory, a

> framework of universal explanation, which then must demonstrate its own explanatory power through its differences and its instantiation.

Within such a framework of universal explanation, Hegel identifies a place for art: halfway between intellectual understanding and sensual experience. For Hegel (in Preziosi 1998: 97) "…the content of art is the Idea, while its form is the configuration of sensuous material."

More recently, Berleant (2023: 16), has attempted to resolve the oppositions identified by Kant and Hegel:

> …it is clear that there is a sharp dislocation between the practices of many contemporary artists, their creations, and the experience and behavior of the art public and the strictures of aesthetic theory, especially as it had been formulated by Kant. That theory is grounded in a separation between the subjectivity of aesthetic experience and the objectivity of the art object, in a separation between beauty and utility, and in the sequestering of the arts and natural beauty in museums and privileged views and away from the ordinary course of human life activities. While such a theory may be thought to honor the special aesthetic forcefulness of the noblest artistic creations, it does so at the cost of severely restricting the scope of aesthetic appreciation, and this belies the prevalence of aesthetic value in human cultures. Is it possible to have a theoretical frame that retains the validity of the powerful experience of great art and awesome natural scenes while, at the same time, recognizing and accounting for the fact that aesthetic interests pervade every domain of human experience?
> I believe that this is indeed possible…by enlarging the scope and understanding of aesthetics. First, we need to overcome the fragmentation…between the appreciator of art and the art object, between beauty and utility, and between cognitive and non-cognitive experience. We need… a unifying concept that can admit connections, mutual influences and reciprocity without sacrificing the aesthetic. Such a concept may be found in the idea of an *aesthetic field…*For it embraces the four functional constituents present in all arts: the objective, the appreciative, the creative, and the performative, none of which is independent of the others.

The artefact, 2-D or 3-D, considered in its aesthetic contexts (philosophical, sociological, psychological), what Berleant calls its *aesthetic field,* discussed earlier, should be scrutinized for its potential for embodying transformative rhetorical tropes, poetic devices facilitating aspects of human experience, amenable enough to sustain a range of alternative interpretations resonant at both individual and social levels of

negotiation, and at the same time affording a balance between the two criteria for assessing value offered here, derived from three sources: Kant's stance that aesthetic judgement is somewhere between the cognitive and the sensory, Hegel's 'halfway between intellectual understanding and sensual experience', and Wollheim's 'twofoldness'; three sources embraced by Berleant's concept of the 'aesthetic field'.

The criteria are *perceptual intrigue* and *conceptual intrigue*, where perceptual intrigue refers to the product of the tension between, for example, the textural qualities of a drawing's surface and the illusions of depth produced by the marks made on that surface, and conceptual intrigue refers to how a drawing can afford viewers fresh insights which stimulate new understandings of the theme or concept to which it alludes; the degree to which the maker's facility for employing rhetorical tropes in order to transcend whatever prosaic subject-matter might be represented in the work, so as to make available meanings at a more profound level about our experiences of life, and the human condition in general. The degree of balance between these two criteria may be used as an indication of quality.

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