# SEEING-AS AND READING-IN:

# AN INQUIRY INTO IMAGINATION AND MEANING IN AESTHETICS

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# ABSTRACT

Words and pictures both bear meanings, but they cannot be substituted for one another. When we discuss the meanings of visual and literary works of art we often stumble upon this problem. Underlying our compulsion to "translate" the meaning of visual art into words or "capture" the meaning of literary works with something other than words, there is, however, an even greater issue. It is this foundational issue that this dissertation strives to unearth: the degree to which seeing and reading share in a common ground that provides the foundation for the conception of meaning. The difference between seeing and reading cannot be accurately characterized as the difference between passive reception of meaning, in the case of seeing, and active construction of meaning, in the case of reading. On the contrary, both seeing and reading involve *active collaboration* with a world that *causes* us to grasp both perceptual and linguistic meaning. Meaning, therefore, is in the world waiting to be discovered in sensory and linguistic forms. Artists discover meaning when they set out to create a work of art and audiences discover meaning when they subsequently see or read artworks. The meaning of a work of art, therefore, lies within the artwork itself, but reflects the intentions and imagination of the artist who created it and evokes the co-creative participation of the audience who re-discovers it.

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# PREFACE

In this dissertation I will draw from the Philosophy of Perception, Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Language to form an integrated theory of making and getting meaning that bridges the gap between seeing and reading. In the process of researching four connected sub-topics: (1) Creativity, (2) Intentionality, (3) Imagination, and (4) The Seeing/Reading Dichotomy-Continuum, I hope to reach a conclusion that reinstates the commonsensical claim that the artist/author, along with the sensitive perceiver, at once brings about and discovers objective but new meanings in works of art. The goal of this dissertation, therefore, can be characterized as an exercise in aesthetic empowerment: laying claim to the objective yet creative access to semantic content presented in both literary and visual works of art.

My intention is not to reduce visual art to a language, painting to writing, or vice versa. Blue may make us feel sad, but the ability of the word "sad" to stand for sadness cannot be equated with the ability of the color blue to evoke a similar sentiment. Rather, I seek to empower the viewer of visual art with the same feeling of exploration and entitlement that the reader of a literary work enjoys in claiming to understand the meaning of a given work of art. I wish to accomplish this without losing sight of the observer-dependence and openness of the objective meanings that are made with and gotten from texts and paintings.

The temptation to equate the various arts with natural language is a byproduct of the admission that the arts are masterful in conveying meaning. Language functions by conventionally tying signs to semantic contents (or meanings). In the case of spoken

language or the auditory-based arts (e.g., music) this connection pertains to linking particular sounds with meanings. In the visual arts, however, this connection ties together visual signs with semantic contents, a process that requires the act of reading. If, therefore, the visual arts can properly be considered a language in their own right, they must possess the ability to be read in addition to being simply seen. The focus of this dissertation, therefore, will take up the question of whether or not the visual arts lend themselves to being read in any sense analogous to the literary arts.

Philosophical investigations into the act of seeing are rarely conducted in conjunction with investigations into the act of reading. This is because the aesthetically oriented questions regarding seeing or, more specifically, seeing works of art, rarely coincide with the semantically oriented questions regarding reading, or more specifically, reading literary works of art. This dissertation, by contrast, proposes to examine the close relationship between the act of "Seeing-as," which lies at the heart of visual aesthetic interpretation and the act of "Reading-in," which renders active literary interpretation possible. Conducted by way of an investigation into the extremely close connection between seeing and reading as applied to the visual and literary arts, this dissertation will also assess the claim that visual art can be thought of as a language in its own right.

"Seeing-as" is a technical term first coined by Wittgenstein in part two of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein introduced the term to distinguish interpretation-based seeing from pure perception-based seeing. Settling on the evidence that all seeing involves an act of interpretation, he concluded that all seeing is ultimately a form of seeing-as. The term "Reading-in," by contrast, stems from colloquial use.

"Reading-in" is used to describe instances where the meaning attributed to a particular thing or event is not, strictly speaking, tied to the thing or event, but rather attributed to it by the viewer. In this way, reading-in is synonymous with "seeing-as" insofar as both terms deal with the attributions of interpretive meanings. It also remains to be seen whether a strict distinction can be drawn between literal and metaphorical applications of these terms. For example, take Wittgenstein's famous duck-rabbit: an image that can alternatively be seen-as a duck or seen-as a rabbit. Is this evocation of seeing-as more literal than another imaginable scenario where blue is seen-as sad? Often in literature the emotional makeup of a character can be read-in via a consideration of his or her actions. Would it be accurate to consider this occurrence of reading-in more literal in nature than an instance where the reading-in of a novel is used to furnish an assessment of the mental state of its author?

Although interpretation between words and images, depiction and description, illustration and writing, story-telling and picture-drawing have existed in many cultures from the earliest of times, some works of modern visual art have launched an explicit interrogation into language and the written word. Incorporation of the written word—or something like the written word—into the purely visual realm (in conjunction with the older literary practice of incorporating illustrations, decorations, and other visual art elements into readable texts) has had the effect of blurring the boundaries between words and images to the brink of dissolution. In the words of Simon Morley, "Words have replaced images, or words have become images. . . But what, we might ask, do these words mean?"[1] The significance of this equivocation lies in the exposure of unfounded

[1] Simon Morley, *Writing on the Wall: Word and Image in Modern Art*, (Hong Kong: University of

assumptions underlying a rigid distinction between seeing and reading. The effect of this critique throws new light on the connections between the expressive media of the visual and the literary arts, and between the interpretive practices of seeing or interpreting a painting or sculpture and understanding or reading a text.

Seeing intersects with reading with the realist admission that there is an act of construction behind every perception and interpretation behind every reading. Meaning is *read* into the world when we *see* things that are not merely the products of our perceptual abilities, but rather reflect linguistic concepts. Objectivity in the world is discovered through the perceptual process that re-constructs the world in terms of what James Gibson calls "affordances" or "action-potentials." *Objectives* thereby lend themselves to *objectivity*, as intention-driven perceptual activity comes to disclose the reality of an external world made of tasks. Likewise, the meanings artists bring into the world through the introduction of works of art are "objective" in these two senses of the word: *out there*, as well as, to be *drawn out*.

Knowing the world through active vision, exploratory touch, and attentive hearing is synonymous with grasping the affordances of the world correctly. In creating artworks, artists co-create future possibilities—"meanings-to-be"—with an unknown audience. With the implicit partnership of an audience (whom it may concern), the activity of the artist is directed toward creating a work that betrays certain affordances for meaningful readings. The viewer/reader, in turn, contributes to this co-creative process by reading these qualities into the work. Both of these acts are constructive, but the outcome of this co-creative endeavor yields the discovery of aesthetic qualities "already"

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California Press, 2003), p. 208.

in the world. In this way, the artist and viewer/interpreter are partners in a collective creative act, an object-orientated activity that bears collaborative, *objective* fruits. In other words, through the constructive act of seeing meaningful aesthetic properties, the discovery of meaning finds an objective foothold in the affordances of artistic works that lend themselves to particular readings.

This attempt to reconcile Realism and Constructivism may sound audacious. It may eventually not even be defensible. This dissertation will, nevertheless, be written with the self-critical optimism that the three parts of my investigation

- The status of the "obscure" object of the artist's creative intention,
- The role of artistic intention in the public reception of an artwork,
- The differences and continuities between seeing and reading,

will come together to yield such a middle path between construction and discovery with regard to the meaning that is seen or read in a text or painting; no matter whether it explicitly uses words, word-like signs, or neither, just lines or brush-strokes.

# CHAPTER 1
# CREATIVITY, INTENTIONALITY, AND IMAGINATION

## 1.0 Introduction

As an abstract noun, "creativity" is multiply ambiguous. The origin of this ambiguity in the use and meaning of "creativity" can be traced back to different conceptions of an artist's intentionality and imagination. Unfortunately such simple questions as, "In what sense does the painter wish to create something that was not there before?", "Before writing a poem does a poet have to first imagine the content she wishes to create?" and "Can she imagine without remembering the elements which her imagination re-arranges?" land us in a whole series of conceptual tangles with regard to the process, performance, and production of the work of art. Vaguely aware of these conceptual muddles, we often hold up creativity as *the* distinguishing quality marking off works of art from ordinary objects. Without conducting a rigorous investigation into intentionality and imagination, however, this claim—like any other aesthetic theory where creativity plays a part—cannot be properly evaluated, let alone defended.

In the process of unraveling the uses of "creativity" in aesthetics it may also prove useful to momentarily digress to consider some of the other applications and connotations the term has acquired. For instance, while being called highly creative would be a compliment to a film maker, the same characterization would be damning to an accountant. In professions that are supposed to maintain a strict correspondence to the

facts, “creativity” signals a departure from the norm, a fudging of the facts, dishonesty, or even corruption. These two connotations of the word “creative,” however, derive from the same core conception of what it means to be creative. Disambiguating an aesthetic understanding of creativity from other uses of the term, therefore, can bring to the fore the roles of intentionality and imagination in the creative act.

This chapter will specify how the different ways of accounting for artistic creativity carry implications for the intentionality and imagination of the artist as well as the ontological status of the work of art. The goal of this chapter is to determine how different Western conceptions of creativity bear on the nature and locus of the creative act, the ontological status of the creative product that is the work of art, as well as the role of intentionality and the imagination in creating a work of art. Providing answers to the above will help us determine the proper connection between creativity and meaning in a work of art and, in particular, how the relation between the artist and the artistic creation contributes to the meaning and interpretation of a work of art.

## 1.1 Creativity

What happens when an artist sets out to create a work of art? It is commonly said that making a work of art is a creative act, but what *exactly* is the nature of this endeavor? Does artistic creation take place in the mind of the artist? Does the artist create a mental image or prototype of the work prior to bringing about its material manifestation in the world? If so, should we consider artistic creation as a vocation of the mind rather than the hands? If artistic creativity takes place in the mind of the artist, then the object in the world we call the work of art must represent the effort of an artist to translate a mental ideal into a material form. Following this line of thinking, the work of art would literally be an after-thought, a mere simulation of the original creative object that exists only in the mind of the artist. This approach to artistic creativity has the undesirable result of turning creativity into a mental process and works of art into worldly simulations that merely stand-in for creative objects that reside in the minds of artists.

An alternative approach to artistic creativity sides with the hands over the mind, identifying the creative object with the actual work of art in the world. Creativity is not a mental activity, but rather the process or physical act of "making," by which an artwork is given form and introduced to the world. No longer is the artist the sole recipient and witness of the creative object, but rather the instantiation of creativity in a work of art is (or can be) an object for public scrutiny. Creativity is given real form in the world, rendered observable as a material manifestation in the form of a work of art, and yet the connection between the artist and this creative product remains obscure. So what role does the artist occupy in aesthetic creation? If creation is merely a physical process, what

ties can the artist claim on the finished product? We typically want to attribute a high degree of skill and originality to artists, so a theory of artistic creation that has the tendency to reduce the artist to an accidental role in the creation of a work of art may strike many of us as errant. Great works of art are said to reveal the hands of their creators, but what about their minds? If creation lies in the physical making, then what happens to the means that are artist's intentions, conceptions, and mental images? In short, where the first theory has the unfortunate consequence of rendering the work of art somewhat redundant, the second theory has the unfortunate consequence of rendering the mental intentions and imagination of the artist somewhat irrelevant.

A third option among theories of artistic creativity conceives of creativity in neither the novelty of mental images nor artworks, but rather in terms of uncovering a universal. The creative act, according to this conception, resides in the discovery of a universal form or possibility. Depending on how we think of universals, the act in this conception of creativity is either a recovery, or alternatively, a discovery. If we ascribe to a theory of universals resembling the Platonic conception, then artworks as universals are copies or instantiations of eternal forms. Although artistic creativity could still be considered in terms of novelty—the artist being the only person to realize a particular form—the product of the creative act would not involve the production of anything new, but rather the reclaiming of an ideal form and its simulation in the phenomenal world. If, conversely, we think of universals not as actualities waiting to happen, but rather as possibilities that are not eternally present but dependent on current and past actualizations of possibilities, then the realm of possibilities would be forever changing with the state of affairs in the world. This theory of universals accommodates more of a teleological view

of artistic creation as developing over time. Thus artistic creativity would be more aptly categorized as discovering a possibility that has never been actualized in the world or even recognized as a possibility prior to the creative act.

Regardless of what position we take on the nature of universals, this general approach has an additional difficulty when it comes to the ascription of the creative act. It is conceivable that one could argue either way in terms of ascribing the recovery/discovery of the universal form/possibility to a mental or physical act. In other words, does the recognition of the universal take place in the mind of the artist in the form of realizing a mental image or does the substantiation of the universal take place in the physical construction/introduction of the work of art to the world? In the latter instance, the possibility arises for an artist to stumble on a universal, a happy accident if you will, whereas in the former instance the artist must fully intend the production of a particular universal. Of course, neither mentally stumbling on a universal nor fully intending to bring it about in the world guarantees the success of accomplishing the feat. Thus, an additional worry enters the picture in terms of whether the artist possesses the necessary means to provide form to his or her artistic creation. This third option, therefore, can be seen as straddling the problems confronted by the first two theories and adding on a few more obstacles of its own.

In this chapter a general inquiry into the nature of creativity will begin with an account of how the aforementioned conceptions of creativity carry different implications for the status of an artwork. This discussion will focus on the three theories of creativity previously discussed, namely (1) creativity as the production of a mental image or prototype (mental object), (2) creativity as the physical production or introduction of a

work of art to the world (material object), and (3) creativity as the discovery/recovery of a universal form or possibility (universal object). It is philosophically interesting to note how these theories of creativity differ in regard to the roles intention and imagination play in the creative act. Moreover, each conception of creativity presupposes its own ontological account of the origination of the work of art. Depending on where the creative act is located—in the discovery of a universal, the manipulation of an artistic medium, or the images and ideas in the artist's mind—the conception of the aesthetic object will vary accordingly, as either universal, physical, or mental.

The defining issues that separate the three major theories of creativity can be summarized in response to the following questions: (1) Where does creativity occur: in the mind of the artist, the emergence of the artwork in the world, or in the discovery/recovery of a universal? (2) What does our theory of creativity tell us about the ontological status of the creative product or work of art? (3) How do artworks with multiple instances—like music, drama, and literature—achieve (and retain) their identity as instances of a particular work? and (4) What unique challenges do ready-mades present to drafting an account of artistic creativity? Clearly these issues are deeply intertwined, therefore, to draw an accurate picture of the operations of creativity in artistic production, we must first sort through each of these conflicting views.

### 1.1.1 Creativity as Formation of Mental Images or Prototypes

We need look no further than the commonly held romantic conception of the creative process, which promotes the reputation of artists as overly-introspective,

emotional souls, or geniuses bordering on madness, to uncover the sentiment underlying the theory that the creative act has more to do with the mind of the artist than the art work. Certainly the fame accumulated by some artists greatly outshines their work. Many people who are familiar with the larger-than-life personalities of Van Gogh and Warhol are able to quickly volunteer information pertaining to a severed ear or silver wig, but are incapable of naming any of their works or relaying anything meaningful about their art. Pop culture's obsession with artists also accounts for why a simple line drawing by Picasso can be auctioned off for fantastic sums while fairly accomplished paintings by unknown artists often sell for a pittance. The theory of artistic creativity that locates the creative act in the formation of mental images or prototypes in the mind of the artist attempts to account for the common belief that the significance of a work of art comes from a crossover between work and artist, where the artist is credited with endowing the work with their own ethos. As an internal product of imagination, the creation of the work of art occurs in the mind of the artist and is only subsequently translated into an external form.

Concerns over the mental object theory arise when art forms like music and literature are taken into consideration. In these areas it is not clear what would be the mental object preceding the creation of the work of art. Do musical works exist in the minds of composers or novels in the minds of authors? Can a musical work be mentally encapsulated in an imaginary sequence of notes unfolding over time or in a drama as a collection of characters, plots, and stage directions? A critic might point out that it is hard to imagine what these works would be without resorting to the compact written forms they assume in the world. This recommends the conclusion that these works

cannot be separated, even conceptually, from their manifestations in the world. This claim warrants serious consideration. What sort of mental object would dramatic, literary, or musical works enjoy prior to gaining formal (or notational) expression in the world? It is tempting to think that highly complicated works of art that unfold over time must fall outside the limits of the human capacity to grasp something in its entirety. Because of the presumed limitations of imaginative conceivability, many philosophers have been persuaded to abandon the mental image/prototype approach to understanding creativity altogether.

Although it may be the case that some things do not lend themselves to mental images, the argument against artistic creativity founded on the powers of conceivability makes a straw man out of the position that artistic creativity takes place in the mind of the artist by failing to consider a richer (or more abstract) notion of mental images. By assuming an overly literal understanding of mental imagery, the conceptual creation of an artwork becomes a perceptual doppelganger: a shadowy counterpart to perceptual images and qualities, which unfortunately overlooks the more abstract notion of mental *conceivability*. Moreover, tying the creative act back to the mental image residing in the mind the artist has the additional effect of turning works of art into cognitive objects insofar as the work should be regarded as a material manifestation of a cognitive intention. This way of thinking about artworks can be useful in cases where artworks have multiple instances. Multiple performances of the same dramatic play or musical composition can claim to be instances of the same work because they all point back to the same mental object in the mind of the artist who first introduced them.

The mental object conception of creative activity is appealing because it credits an

artist with the conceptual creation of an artwork prior to its material introduction into the world and further endows the object with psychological properties originally belonging to the artist. Appealing to the profundity of personal and cultural particularity, the mental object theory credits the work of art with reflecting the irreproducible circumstances of a particular consciousness in a particular setting at a particular moment in history. Thinking about works of art in this way—as deeply enshrouded in the psychological makeup of an individual and the social conceptualization of their environment—further lends itself to the romantic notion that works of art are capable of expressing an artist and their age.

### 1.1.2 Creativity as Material Substantiation

For fear of reducing artistic creations to mental meanderings, the material object theory of artistic creativity locates the creative process in the substantiation of an artwork in the world to preserve the originality and contingency of individual works of art. One visual artist whose work seems to strikingly support this view of artistic creativity is Jackson Pollock. Confronted by Pollock's "splatter paintings" it is hard to imagine that these works of art could be the result of being guided by a definitive mental conception. Clearly these paintings are the unpredictable products of an artist spattering paint across a canvas that could not have been anticipated *before-hand* in the mind of the artist. These works are valued accordingly, as demonstrations of spontaneity and improvisation.

A materialistic conception of creativity claims that creative activity is unlike other purposeful activities in that the artist does not envision the final artwork as an end to

which artistic intentions are guided. According to this view, works of art are products of a creative process where creation is construed in terms of an origination, a coming about or final product that cannot be entirely foreseen by the artist. This position carries with it a strong appeal for the common sense assumption that a finished work of art is never the same as its preconceived image in the mind of the artist who created it. Mental images are simply not interchangeable with physical artworks. Not only does positing transference between mental objects and physical works suggest a category mistake, in many instances it is hard to imagine what the mental image preceding the artwork could be. A materialist approach to creativity, therefore, concludes that creation must emanate in the making, emerging at the moment the qualities and effects of the work come into being. After all, if the effects of an artwork could be imagined prior to its making, then the actual rearing of the work would be redundant; the nature of works of art would be reducible to mental objects instead of artifacts.

A modern argument for a materialistic conception of artistic creativity can be found in the work of Joseph Margolis. Taking the concept of a person as his inspiration, Margolis argues that works of art are like people insofar as they are embodied in physical form, but are neither identical nor reducible to mere physicality. Like people, works of art cannot exist except embodied in perceptible forms. Comparing works of art to people can be interpreted as supporting a strong sense of creation as origination: works of art are genuinely created and destroyed, subject to circumstance and chance. A possible critique of this theory would point out that the perceptible qualities of a sleeping person whose breathing is imperceptible might be identical to those of a dead person, thus demonstrating that the distinction between life, death, and a comatose state cannot always

be based on perceptible qualities. In a similar vein, the existence of a work of art does not depend on the acquisition of perceptible qualities nor is it influenced by our knowledge. For instance, the discovery of the cave paintings in Lascaux did not mark the coming into existence of those paintings. The cave paintings existed even when no one knew about them. Likewise, if all knowledge and evidence of Shakespeare's sonnets were lost—removed from consciousness and the world—this would not entail that they would cease to exist.

An additional problem can arise in locating the "physical" identity of the work, in the case of theatre, or the identity of a musical work that reaches beyond the written score or particular performance. If artistic creativity is tied to the introduction of the work of art to the world, then what ties multiple performances of a musical work together as instances of the same work? The material object theory can be criticized for failing to provide an account for an aesthetic work that transcends and unifies particular performances. Where the theory is subject to the criticism of nominalism, on the one hand, it also prevails in terms of its ability to account for how different instances of a particular work can vary due to the circumstances of its performance as a reflection of the different creative efforts of those involved in the work's production, on the other. A strict understanding of the material object conception of artistic creativity would indicate that a musical work comes into and falls out of existence with each performance (or assumption of perceptible qualities). According to this line of thinking, if the work is not contingent on its being introduced to the world, then it must enjoy some form of existence beyond its perceptible qualities.

To explain how multiple performances of the same work can occur without

admitting the intentional object in the mind of the artist or the existence of universals, Margolis substantiates a type-token distinction to account for the fact that we can talk about performances of the same music and copies of the same novel. Types, for Margolis, are "abstract particulars of a kind that can be instantiated."[2] In order to create a new type, an artist must first create a token of the type. All types are instantiated by at least one token-instance. It, therefore, follows that works of visual art like the Mona Lisa have only one token-instance per type.

With his type-token distinction in tow, Margolis is traveling down the path Goodman blazed with his autographic-allographic distinction. One shortcoming symptomatic to both theories, however, is that the specifics of production do not factor into the identity of an artwork with multiple instances. "Ode to Joy" is "Ode to Joy" regardless of whether it was played in 1785 by Friedrich Schiller or yesterday by me. The identities of allographic works (types with multiple tokens) are determined by the "sameness of spelling" of their symbolic representation. Borges demonstrated the flaw in this reasoning, however, in a short story where he pretended to review a "new" version of Cervantes' classic *Don Quixote* written by a (fictitious) Frenchman named Pierre Menard. Despite the sameness in spelling between the original and Menard's rewrite, Borges deemed the rewrite to be much richer in literary merit due to the way it resonates and reflects the history and events that have transpired since the writing of the original. Borges' mock review demonstrates that the historical context and artistic production of a work of art plays a role in both our interpretation and evaluation of the work.

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[2]Joseph Margolis, "The Ontological Peculiarity of Works of Art," in *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition*, Peter Lemarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, eds.,(New York: Blackwell Publishing Co, 2004), p. 75.

If types cannot exist without their tokens, what type is “Ode to Joy” beyond the set of all written or printed tokens? A serious objection seems to arise against the materialistic conception of artistic creativity if the tokens of a particular type can change over time by way of social contextualization and reception. Without a general concept under which all these tokens can subside or a type on which to base a comparison, there seems to be no obvious basis on which to conclude that instances of the same work are actually tokens of the same type as opposed to tokens of different types. Therefore, what first purports to be a robust conception of creativity—tying it back to the artist’s production of the work—turns out to have little regard for the intentions of the artist. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the analytic approach taken by Margolis focuses entirely on the social identification of artworks.

### 1.1.3 Creativity as Uncovering Universal Forms or Possibilities

In the presence of works of art like the slave sculptures Michelangelo created for the tomb of Julius II, it is easy to imagine that the work of art must have existed prior to its emergence in the world. The unfinished marble sculptures seem to testify silently on behalf of the view that Michelangelo was giving physical form to a pre-existing figure, creating the visual impression that the completed statue could be located in the block of marble all along.

In a universal conception of artistic production, the universal form of the work of art (spelled out in its entirety) serves as the object toward which artistic desire is directed

and the standard against which completed works of art are measured. This theory finds support in modern theorists like Kivy who maintain "it would not be wildly counterintuitive to construe musical composition as a kind of 'discovery' rather than as a kind of 'creating' or 'inventing.'"[3]

Kivy emphasizes the intuitive assumption that there must have been something to the "Moonlight Sonata" before any notes were committed to paper, something that epitomized the nature of the work and determined the particular piece it would become. This supports the idea that there was *some-thing* guiding Beethoven in the creation of the sonata that facilitated the production of a particular sonata instead of any other.

Another appealing feature of the creativity as universal discovery theory lies in the experience of artists and art connoisseurs to identify when a work of art captures something so aptly it inspires the compulsion to say it could not have been otherwise. Indeed, this sense of "getting it right," as though there was a necessity driving the wheels of artistic production, is where this theory finds its surest footing. It warrants mention that although a work of art in any medium can be found to possess this quality, it is most often attributed to musical or poetic works.

Making the claim that artworks are universals could be interpreted as undermining the common conception of creativity as novel production. A critic of the universal theory might say that the essence of creativity lies in the taking on of physical and perceptible qualities and therefore cannot apply to universals. A defender of the universal theory would not deny the importance of perceptible qualities in defining a

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[3]Peter Kivy, "Platonism in Music: A Kind of Defense," in *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition*, Peter Lemarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, eds., (New York: Blackwell Publishing Co, 2004), p. 96.

work of art, but would rather stress that these qualities hold true for *instances* of artworks, not the universals the instances represent. For example, a performance of "Ode to Joy" will have certain audible qualities, but these qualities will change depending on which instrument is used and will have no bearing on the essence of the work or its universal form.

The real crux of the debate between the universal object position and the views represented by both the mental object and material object theories can be characterized as a disagreement over two different conceptions of creativity. According to the universal object theory, artistic creativity should be thought of as a form of "discovery" or even "recovery." The particular identity of each work of art is waiting to be discovered and actualized as a possibility in the world. According to this view, artists are not sources of self-originating inspiration as much as sensitive individuals who are able to tap into the forms of universals and develop modes for their expression in the world, making explicit that which was implicit all along. Conversely, opposing theories of artistic creativity lay great stress on the uniqueness of novel "creations" that are strictly tied to a particular origination of material or mental objects.

At first these two senses of "creativity" seem to be vastly opposed: drawing respectively on the notion of creation as discovery and creation as origination. Upon closer scrutiny, however, the opposing conceptions of creativity are actually quite compatible. Taking a pragmatist approach to the problem, the first concession that needs to be made is that we do not have access to the realm of universals and therefore cannot definitively prove that any particular artwork is actually a substantiation of a universal form. That said, the practical difference between an original creation and the discovery

of something that no one has any previous knowledge of can be reduced to a rhetorical deviation. In the words of Kivy: "It is the achieving of 'new and valuable results' that warrants the epithet 'creative,' and it makes no matter whether that achieving is 'inventing,' 'discovering,' or 'creating in the godlike way.'"[4] The analytic philosopher thinks of creation in terms of originality, but the universal object supporter would prefer to think in terms of an "original discovery." At the end of the day, both philosophers want to assert a notion of creativity that renders it possible to bring into being something with the quality of novelty or originality.

The long-standing rift between creation and discovery can, for the most part, be reduced to a semantic confusion. Every art form is limited by its medium and influenced by its tradition. Jorge Luis Borges' short story, "The Library of Babble," exploits this line of thinking by inviting us to imagine an exhaustive library that contains a volume for every possible combination of English letters and words. This library would have an infinite number of volumes and would not only contain all the great known literary works, but it would contain all the great *unknown* literary works are well.

Because our ability to create meaningful works of art depends on our involvement in a larger system or matrix of meaning, a great writer is not one who develops a new way of speaking (except, perhaps, in the case of Joyce), but more often one who masters the art of uncovering (or discovering) the profound in the mundane. Even in the visual arts new works always occur in a context—against a background of other works that lead the way for the possibility of the work at hand. This is why we can speak meaningfully about the "evolution" of art. The artistic "discovery" and introduction of new forms of

[4]Ibid, p. 96.

meaning is no less astonishing when framed in terms of the universal object theory of creativity. After all, even if we assume that original introduction in the form of creation were possible, it would still have to be contextualized in terms of established systems of meaning, as opposed to constituting a continuation of these systems.

The real triumph of the artist in discovering a universal form lies in the fact that the work they have created fills a metaphorical gap in a pre-established system of meaning. In this way, works of art are both parts of the semiotic framework of our world and enhancements of it. This provides the basis for the intelligibility of the work for others and demonstrates, once and for all, how discovery, properly understood, can be more profound than creation. "Discovering" an artwork, therefore, should be conceptually compared to uncovering a loophole in the matrix of sense that simultaneously provides the possibility for the extension of the bounds of sense.

### 1.1.4 Levying an Appeal for Ready-Mades and Universal Objects

Thinking back on works of art like Michelangelo's slave sculptures may lend support to the conviction that there is more involved in the creation of a work of art then can be accounted for by trial and error, the serendipity of chance or the fortuity of play. Works of this sort recommend the theory of artistic creation as the discovery of a universal, but what can other works of art tell us about the nature of creativity? In

particular, what do the artistic intentions in the "creation" of a work of art that consists in more of a choosing than a making, like one of Duchamp's ready-mades, tell us about artistic creativity? It seems perfectly possible that Duchamp had no prior conception of what his ready-mades would be before setting his eyes on them. If this is the case, then the implication would be that the art object could actually preceded its own making insofar as the "making" could derive not from its physical production, but rather from its selection. The suggestion, therefore, would be that it is possible for some works of art like ready-mades to enjoy an existence in the world prior to their being conceived of by an artist. The causal relation promoted by the mental object theory of artistic creativity is hereby reversed: instead of the mental conception guiding the physical creation of the artwork, the physical form of the artwork can be credited with influencing or inspiring the mental conception that corresponds to it. Of course, it also warrants mention that, according to some, ready-mades are not actually works of art at all, but merely objects waged in a conceptual game, which is played out in the art world.

Regardless of what your opinion of ready-mades might be, the fact of the matter is that they are generally accepted as museum-appropriate representations of contemporary art and generally pose a challenge for theories of artistic creativity. In response to the charge that the creation of a work of art need not lie in the introduction of the work to the world, Margolis (in defense of the material object theory) offers an account of art works as socially emergent objects. According to this view works of art are culturally dependent identities that can change over time depending on their reception and interpretation. The "creative" moment in the case of the ready-made would not be the moment of material creation usually cited by the material object theory, but rather the

introduction of the art work into the class of aesthetic works. This institutionally-based account of the ontology of art denies the intentions and creative efforts of the artist in establishing the identity of the artwork. According to this theory, once introduced into the class of aesthetic objects, the work of art takes on a life of its own. At the same time, because Margolis considers artworks to be analogous to persons, it is reasonable to suggest that works of art can take on lives independent of their origins and thereby reflect the influences of their surroundings.

Among the virtues of Margolis' approach to artistic creativity is its ability to account for ready-mades by creating "an ontological difference between tokens of art-types and such physical objects as bottle racks and driftwood that can serve as the materials out of which they are made."[5] Duchamp's "bottle rack" can be distinguished from any other bottle rack on the basis of its status as a socially-constructed entity. Because the culture in which it resides recognizes this particular bottle rack as a work of modern art, the bottle rack is endowed with an importance that extends beyond its mere physical presence. In this regard, Margolis departs from Goodman who believed historical artistic production plays a role in the identity and meaning of autographic arts (types that admit of only one token). According to Margolis, as social objects, works of art are defined by their cultural context, not their historical relation to an artist.

Margolis' attempt to salvage a material object theory of artistic creativity in the face of ready-mades is not without its problems. One obvious criticism would be that society had no idea a bottle rack could be a work of art before Duchamp introduced the possibility. It would seem, therefore, that it is the artist, not the culture, who first imbues

[5]Margolis, "The Ontological Peculiarity of Works of Art," p. 75.

the physical object with the status of a work of art. The popularity and perpetuation of the object's status as a work of art may require the cooperation of the culture, but that does not mean that the object as work of art was always a social object. It is essential to the identity of a work of art that it was the conceptual product of an artist. This indicates that the importance of the artist and the creative act of making a work of art has worked its way back into our account. This criticism, in conjunction with the criticism of the mental object theory previously discussed, should give us pause and prompt us to reconsider the universal object theory of artistic creativity.

Taking into consideration the unique challenge of ready-mades at first seemed to reveal a weakness in the mental object theory by providing an instance of a work of art that was not first conceived in the mind of the artist. After all, where is the creativity in the discovery of Duchamp's bottle rack as work of art? Obviously this is not something that first occurred in the mind of the artist as a creative form or mental image. Surprisingly, however, there is a way for the mental object position to respond to the host of problems that is generated by the unique challenges posed by ready-mades. Even if we concede Duchamp lacked any determinate vision in anticipating what objects he would choose for ready-mades before encountering them in the world, this would not imply that his choosing was random. It is conceivable that there was a positive motivating force behind his choosing, a conceptual drive to create a ready-made with a nature determined by the choosing.

At this point a universal object theorist might interject that certainly there was something guiding Duchamp's selection and this guiding force was none other than an artist coming into acquaintance with a universal form of aesthetic significance. In this

way, the universal object theory is perhaps best equipped for providing an account of creativity that covers the curious case of ready-mades. Kivy would agree that creation as selection is compatible with discovery. If we consider artistic creativity in terms of a discovery or recovery, then it is perfectly conceivable that Duchamp has discovered a material form of a universal artwork in his discovery and selection of a particular bottle rack as an art object. The work of art, in this case, would demonstrate both the artist's intentionality (in producing an artwork) and the artist's imagination (in selecting an alternative mode of production).

In conclusion, ready-mades pose particular conceptual challenges to all three theories of artistic creativity. On the one hand, it seems improbable that a mental image or prototype of the artwork existed in the mind of the artist before the discovery of the object in the world. On the other hand, ready-mades undermine the type-token distinction posited by the material object theory by embracing a situation where only one instance of an object with multiple instances becomes a singular or autographic representation of a work of art. In short, the moral of the ready-made seems to be that, as a defining element in artistic works, creativity cannot be accounted for in the absence of the intentions and imagination of the artist.

Given the ambiguous nature of the competing conceptions of creativity, it is fitting that the same adjective "creative" can be complementary or disparaging depending on the context in which it is applied. Negative connotation of "creative" can be traced back to the notion that there is something novel about the creative process that undermines or breaks entirely from the norm. My goal in this section has been to reveal the different facets of this chameleon-like concept, but, as I roll it around, its

characteristics appear to change according to the theoretical framework in which it is considered.

At first the mental object position seems to support the strongest sense of creativity with the entire creative process occurring in the mind of the artist. The work of art is identified with the creative product of the intention and imagination of the artist, not the accidental result of physical materials and circumstances, as is the case according to the material object conception of creativity. The mental object theory claims that the work of art is an embodiment of an intentional object in the mind of an artist. It is difficult, however, to imagine what form the creative object before the mind of the artist could take in the case of music or the literary arts. The real downfall of the mental object theory is that it focuses on what is going on in the mind of the artist at the expense of providing an account of the nature of the artwork. By conflating mental ideas and conceptions with physical aesthetic objects in the world, the mental object theory is guilty of committing a category mistake. Instead of providing an account for the relation of an artist to his work, the mental object theory provides an account of how mental objects can be translated into physical objects, thus the daunting threat of solipsism still remains.

The material object theory asserts that creativity occurs in the medium of the artwork, not the mind of the artist, which leads one to wonder what *is* going on in the mind of the artist. In de-emphasizing the role of the artist's intentional mental state, the physical medium of the artwork seems to be *the* deciding force in the creation of the work. If the genesis of a work of art cannot be traced back to an intentional object in the mind of an artist, then artistic creation is like a happy accident in a random search without any determinate guiding force. The material object position wants to assert a

conception of creativity as novel origination not to be confused with discovery, but without the mental investment of the artist, where is the locus of ownership for this important creative originality supposed to occur? Denying the intentions of the artist, the material object theory attributes the creative production of the artwork to the manipulation of mediums and circumstances. The work takes on its own independent life; the meaning of the work does not draw from the mental intentions of the artist, but rather the physical contingencies of its own existence. This appears to tie the meaning of the work to its physical characteristics, something Margolis has attempted to resist by asserting that the product of creative activity is a social object. Therefore, despite the fact that creativity originated out of a singular set of circumstances that united an artistic medium with a circumstantial context, the meaning of the work is not dependent on the locus of the initial creative act, but rather on the secondary creative constitution of the work as a social object. The major problem with this view is that it denies the historical basis of the work, disjoining the work from its artist, medium, and original context after the work enters society and becomes a cultural object. The end result is that this view undermines its initial assertion, which ties creativity to the manipulation of physical substance and the substantiation of a work of art in the world.

Lastly, the strong sense of individual creativity appears to be completely subverted when considered under the narrow conceptualization of the work of art as a universal. Recalling the picture Plato painted of artists as an impassioned lot possessed by the gods, one downfall in affirming the identity of the universal nature of the artwork is that it appears to negate the creative role of the artist. Working from a strict view of artistic creativity as universal recovery, works of art suddenly seem to have little to do

with individual artists. This has the unwanted effect of demoting the artist to the status of an empty medium through which the universal forms are allowed to flow. On this extreme view, the artist would approximate what the material object theory would considered to be a "medium" for creative activity. This narrow, arguably misunderstood, representation of the universal object position portrays the theory as promoting the weakest sense of the individual creative efforts of artists. After all, if the object to be created is considered in terms of a universal that lies outside of the artist's mind, then perhaps the artist never completely grasps the object, but only accesses it.

I strongly believe it is time to rethink the universal object theory of artistic creativity. There is good reason to favor a pragmatic stance on mental creativity that affirms a conception of creativity compatible with discovery. A modified form of the universal object theory is long overdue: not only does the universal object theory provide a compelling account of creativity as a deeply insightful process capable of extending the bounds of sense, it also has the additional benefits of being able to account for the intelligibility of artworks by others and explain how artworks can partake in an identity that transcends their individual instances or performances. In conclusion, a robust conception of creativity requires an account of an agent engaged in an *intentional* act that utilizes the *imagination*. This means that there must be some sort of graspable object that demonstrates the essence of the artwork. Therefore, in order to understand artistic creativity, the connection between the intentionality and the imagination of the artist needs to be spelled out completely. Toward this end, I intend to illustrate how creativity is an intentional act directed toward the creation of an object that has been conceived (to some degree) by the artist's imagination.

## 1.2 Intentionality

What does it mean to call the creation of a work of art intentional? Is this like drawing attention to the actions of the artist: "See how she applies paint to the canvas? . . . This painting is no accident, she has created it intentionally." Or does the significant sense of intentionality here pertain not to the overt actions of the artist, but the artist's corresponding intentional mental state or intention that guides her action toward a particular aim? "Yes, I see she is putting paint on a canvas, but her *intention* is to paint a portrait of her mother." Finally, does the key to understanding intention in art refer to neither actions nor mental states, but statements or expressions of intention? If so, would it make sense to inquire as to the intentions of the artist in producing the work of art. "Tell me, what was your intention in creating this painting?" A possible response might be: "To produce a feminist critique of war." This last sense of intention is the most elusive. It can take the form of a projection about the future or an expression of intention about the past.

In the first sense of intentional action, the intention of the artist does not extend beyond the external actions taken by the artist. The object of artistic intention is simply the object in the world and the transformation it undergoes as a result of the artist's actions. There is the medium of the artwork, on the one hand, and the effort of the artist to transform that medium, on the other. The "object" of the artwork need not correspond to an ideal, goal, or projection that the artist is striving to realize. While listening to a lecture a student may deliberately—hence, intentionally doodle—and she may end up drawing the teachers face on a cat's body, but she need not have had the intention to do

so. The act of drawing was intended, but what was drawn was not the intended object of trying to draw. Likewise it is perfectly conceivable that the artist may simply work under a general intention to create a work of art in the absence of a specific intention directing her actions toward a particular future object. In this way, according to Anscombe, "an action can be intentional without having any intention in it."[6] This statement stresses the difference between intentional actions and intentions in acting.

In the second sense of intention, actions are guided by a further intention *in acting*: there is a mental object that serves to direct and guide one's actions. In the case of artists, this level of intention often manifests itself in the form of striving to create something that is not present in the world, but has arisen in the artist's imagination. Actions guided by this form of intention are not seen as ends in themselves (painting for the sake of painting), but rather as means to achieve an imagined end (painting as a means of visually depicting one's mother). The artist's actions are directed toward making an object in the world that corresponds to an imaginary image or toward bringing about a previously unrealized state of affairs.

Parallels can be drawn between these two forms of intention and the conceptions of creativity previously discussed. All three theories of creativity agree that creativity involves intentionality. They differ, however, on the form this creative intentionality takes. Shying away from the direction of actions by a predetermined conceptual object, the material object camp claims that works of art can be the result of actions that are intentional without the need for any further intentions in them. Conversely, the mental object camp denies the presence of creativity in the absence of guiding mental

[6]G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* 2nd ed. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963). p.1.

conceptions. The universal object theory is more difficult to categorize because there is still some ambiguity over how, exactly, the intentionality of the artist can lend itself to the discovery of one possibility for a work of art over another. Because creativity encompasses an activity, the set of actions that bring about a creative object or work of art must be under the direction of a conceptual intentionality. The analogy between the different conceptions of creativity and forms of intention is not, however, perfect. Equating an intention in acting with the mental object conception of creativity is dangerous insofar as it creates the impression that intentions are akin to internal declarations or mental willing.

Anscombe warns us against thinking about an intention as "a special interior movement," and goes on to say, "the idea that one can determine one's intentions by making such a little speech to oneself is obvious bosh."[7] Without an accompanying motivation for action, intentions are like empty promises. But unlike promises and other performative utterances, where the utterance of the promise is the promising, the statement of the intention cannot be equated with intending or having the intention. Anscombe points out that merely willing her arm to move is no more capable of moving her arm than willing a box of matches on the table to move is capable of moving them. Intention requires something more than a statement inside the mind. There must be an act of volition, a deeper sense of "meaning it" involved: a genuine motivation toward action. An intention cannot be distinguished from its result (or observable consequences) as if they were two different ways of knowing exactly the same thing. Intending to raise my arm and raising my arm are not like separate steps in a complex action. Intending to

[7]Ibid, p.42

raise my arm *is* raising my arm provided that I am not restrained or suffering from a mental abnormality.

Breaking the habit of thinking about intentions as orders given by a little voice in the mind can also shed new light on the concept of creativity. If the mental object position is correct, and the creation of the work of art occurs in the mind of the artist, then the introduction of the work into the world would either be redundant or of an entirely different nature than the original form in the mind. Conversely, there is good reason to resist the inclination of the material object theory to reduce creative intentions to actions. There must be more going on in the mind of the artist with an intention to paint a portrait of her mother than the intention to paint a picture. If we reconcile creativity in terms of intentionality, creativity would depend on the joint efforts of the artist's imagination and actions. What I am proposing is that creativity should not be looked upon as merely something that occurs in the imagination of the artist, nor should it be limited to the actions of the artist directed toward bringing about a creative product. An inquiry into the nature of artistic creativity should take as its object the creative act: the intentions of the artist as engaged in the creation of a work of art.

Is it possible to gather the intentions of an artist solely through a consideration of his/her work? Anscombe cautions us against making this leap because not all actions reveal the intentions of the agents who perform them. In order for an action—or performance in Anscombe's words—to guarantee the intentions of its agent, it must have been seriously *meant*. The question now becomes what does "seriously meant" add to the performance and how does meaning occupy the heart of intention? According to Anscombe, "the term 'intentional' has reference to a description of events. What is

essential to this description is displayed by the results of our enquiries into the question 'why?'" [8] Answers to this question go beyond mere descriptions of physical events to robust descriptions that reflect the complexity of a socially-structured world. In terms of the artworld, descriptions of this type are called interpretive or critical. To provide a description of artistic intention is to provide an answer for what the artist is doing *in* doing, making, or performing something. This is not to say that we are looking for special information in the artworld that we would not normally seek elsewhere. What we generally fail to realize, according to Anscombe, is that "a great many of our descriptions of events affected by human beings are formally descriptions of executed intentions."[9] Epistemology is so deeply infused with the effects of consciousness, that a strict accordance to objective fact would, more often than not, seem vacuous.

All that has hereto been said about intention in action also applies to the third form of intention or expressions of intention. The applicability of the question "Why?" to a prediction marks it as an expression of intention rather than an estimate or prophecy about the future. Both predictions and expressions of intention can be informatively descriptive statements about the future, but expressions of intention are not subject to external validation like predictions. A prediction of intention might be: "My work will appeal to and find acceptance among feminists." The prediction pertains to future states of affairs that fall outside the control of the artist. By contrast, an expression of intention would be: "My work will expose the devastating effects of war on domestic women." In this instance, the artist is detailing the intention in accordance with her actions in

[8]Ibid, p.84.

[9]Ibid, p.87.

painting. It would be a misunderstanding to inquire as to whether this intention was supported by the finished work. Expressions of intention need not correspond to mental images or physical works. Unlike projections that are often mixed with hoping, wanting, and believing, intentions are strictly reasons for acting.

"What was your intention in making this painting?" "My intention was to paint a feminist critique of war." Now does it make sense to ask what the object of that intention looks like? Can we conceive of what this call to action would be without confusing it with hoping or wanting? Here the intention is directed toward a conceptual or abstract object. At the same time, in order to physically paint this conceptual object, it seems that there must be an intermediate object of this intention in addition to the conceptual object, an object produced by the imagination that gives form to the idea. Ultimately, the three types of intention are like nesting Russian dolls, as we progress through the different types in ascending complexity, we do not replace the more simplistic forms, but transform them. In order to paint a feminist critique of war, the artist must intentionally set out to perform the actions of representing a visual image of the imagination that corresponds to an abstract content.

How do we know the intentions of another, what kinds of true statements we can make about them, and how can we guarantee the truth of these statements? Following Anscombe's, the best place to start in addressing these concerns is with what the artist actually did or is doing. The problem that quickly arises with this approach lies in distinguishing the properties which belong to the work of art from those imposed upon it. Imagine someone was to encounter the aforementioned painting and remark: "Look, she has painted a picture of Madeline Albright," an appropriate response might be: "No, that

was not her intention; she intended to paint a picture of her mother." But what distinguishes her intention in this way, making it so specific? What makes her picture a picture of her mother and not Madeline Albright despite the similarities in appearance? Moreover, does this intention exist only on a mental level or can it be associated with the actions of the artist? While it may not be apparent from mere observation that an artist has the intention to paint a portrait of her mother, a number of subsidiary intentions can be observed; i.e., she has the intention to paint a picture, she intends to paint a picture of a woman. Due to the fact that these deeds are means to the greater end of painting a portrait of one's mother, the artist in question cannot deny having the intention to perform them.

Drafting claims about the actions or intentions of an artist becomes even trickier given that not all descriptions of an artist's actions will be acknowledged or accepted by the artist. Imagine the following exchange: "I see you are making a minimalist painting." "No, I am painting a square." "But to paint a picture of a square like that is to make a minimalist painting." Here the problem might be one of semantics: the artist may not be familiar with the meaning of "minimalism." However, this begs the question of whether certain pictures of squares can be designated as instances of minimalism in the same manner as pictures of people can be called portraits. This, of course, is not to imply that defining the exact limits of what should be considered minimalist painting wouldn't be controversial.

Knowing the intention of the artist can radically change the way we view or experience a work of art and may even affect the nature of the work itself. Knowing that an author intended for a work to be read satirically or ironically has the ability to change

how a given audience will read the work. This knowledge need not come directly from the writer and ideally it wouldn't. The work should clearly betray the intentions of the author in its style and rhetoric. If we take seriously the proposition that intentions should not be considered as something that goes on in the mind, independent from the actions of the individual having them, then, if the work completely fails to provide any indication that it was intended to be a work of satire, it should not be considered to be a satirical work. Writing a work of satire requires participating in a system of established rhetorical conventions; failing to do so results in the failure to write a work of satire. If this were not the case—if authors had the power to designate a piece to be of any genre they wished—then the prohibition against private languages would have to be lifted.

The only instance where the input of the author would add to the reading of the text would be in cases where the rhetorical clues of the text were ambiguous. Because satire is based on conventions that change over time, it is conceivable that an author might have succeeded in meeting an intention to write a work of satire that lies at the limits of what are commonly recognized as satire. In this instance, interpreting the text could be greatly affected by procuring an additional recourse to the intentions of the author.

It is important to keep in mind that the objects of intentions are only objects insofar as they fall under a particular description. The same action can fall under multiple descriptions, some of which may be unknown or unforseen by the artist, but does this mean there are multiple intentions at work or that multiple descriptions can be accounted for by a single intention? According to Anscombe, the presence of a performance does not evidence the presence of intentions; the fact of the performance

does not guarantee the presence of a corresponding intention by the artist. You can intend to do something without actually succeeding in doing it, or intend to do something you simultaneously intend not to do. For instance, St. Jerome is said to have intended to kill his wife and her lover but, due to a case of mistaken identity, ended up killing his parents instead. His intentional action brought about an unintentional result, demonstrating that intentions and actions are not always compatible when viewed in light of the descriptions under which the actions or the intentions fall. St. Jerome did intend to kill the couple he discovered in his bed. This much is clear. The discrepancy in his intentions becomes apparent when we endeavor to further describe this couple and their relation to him. He did not intend to kill his parents, despite the fact that he did so, but he did intend to kill his wife and her lover, despite the fact that he failed to do so.

Anscombe does not think performances can be trusted to reveal the intentions of the agents who perform them because the agent might not have seriously meant to perform the action. The agent may have different intentions than those indicated by their actions. Perhaps we can avoid this skepticism, or relieve it a bit, by taking into consideration that works of art are done intentionally and are therefore unlike an ordinary, everyday performance. Of course, there is still a margin of error involved in attempting to reason from work to intention. For instance, are the intentions to paint a square and the intentions to paint a minimalist picture the same? If they are, this would imply that someone could do something without intending to do it. When taken into account with how disparate descriptions of an artist's intentions can be, admitting the possibility that an artist can accomplish something without having the intention to do so would open the critical floodgates when it comes to interpretation. In some instances

these different descriptions will be compatible, in other circumstances they will not. For example, the critic may claim a particular artist has made a feeble attempt at impressionism where the same artist may claim to have represented a new movement in abstract realism.

It is one thing to assert that intention should not be considered as something apart from the volition of action and quite another to trace the outcomes of intentional actions back to the intentions that brought them about. In order to account for the connection between a work of art and the intention that created it, a full account of the inter-connectivity of creativity, intentionality and the imagination is needed.

## 1.3 Imagination

What differentiates seeing paint on a canvas, a portrait of an artist's mother, or a feminist critique of war? Does the difference rest on the distinction between perceiving and imaging? Aesthetic experience draws heavily on the imagination. This is the point Magritte was making when he scribed "*Ceci c'cest pas une pipe*" under a picture of a pipe. As experienced art connoisseurs, we look beyond the objective presentation of the work to see what is presented in it. There is a significant sense in which we "see" a pipe in the picture: not paint arranged to resemble a pipe or a picture of a pipe, but simply a pipe. The goal of this section is to demonstrate the degree to which the imagination is involved not only in aesthetic experience, but perception in general.

What is the difference between perception and imagination? In order to answer this question we must first determine the respective roles of the real (the perceived) and what Sartre coins the irreal (the imagined) in each. Both perception and imagination involve an act to make present an object. The objects in question can be posited by consciousness as either existing, in the case of perception, or as nonexistent, absent, or existing elsewhere, in the case of imagination. Like perception, the imagination also includes a propositional act or belief, but unlike perception, the imagination never superimposes propositional acts or beliefs on images after they are constituted. On the contrary, in imagination, the propositional act is constitutive of an imaging consciousness.

The imagination is always qualified by intentionality; there is always an object the imagination is directed toward, even when that object happens to be nonexistent.

Because it is an intentional mental activity, an act of imagining can be distinguished from the object it is focused on. Although the act and object of imagination can be distilled out theoretically, they cannot be separated in practice. The imagination is not akin to a form of internal perception and access to the object of imagination is not akin to observation. The act and object phase of imagination are intentional actions of the mind: the mind directs itself toward, and absorbs itself in, its own object.

Unlike the object of perception, which constantly overflows consciousness, "the object of an image is never anything more than the consciousness one has of it; it is defined by that consciousness: one can never learn from an image what one does not know already," Sartre tells us in his masterly work, *The Imaginary*.[10] For this reason, the imagined object does not lend or submit itself to scrutiny by the mind. Nothing can be ascertained that was not known already; nothing can be known beyond what was originally posited by the imagining consciousness because it is in and through the act of imagining that the mind absorbs itself in a specific content. Unlike pictures, which can be re-evaluated to reveal new aspects and often contain more information than can be taken in at one glance, the content of the imagination is always completely given to consciousness. Imagining consciousness, therefore, can be likened to a sort of quasi-observation where nothing ever happens, unfolds, or changes.

[10] Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, Jonathan Webber trans., (New York: Rutledge, 2004), p.10.

### 1.3.1 Forms of Imagination

Different acts of imagination produce different types of objects. Casey in his book on the imagination distinguishes between three different types of action the imagination can take: imagining, imagining-that, and imagining-how. According to Casey, "we are capable not only of imagining (objects and events) and imagining-that (states of affairs obtain), but also of imagining-how to do, think, or feel certain things, as well as how to move, behave or speak in certain ways."[11] Where imagining is always sensory—an act that takes as its object an image of its own making—imagining-that and imagining-how can be either sensory or non-sensory. In the case of non-sensory imagination, the object takes on the quality of propositional or abstract thought. For instance, I can imagine-that scientists have discovered three new forms of bacteria on Mars or imagine-how a mathematical genius can perform long division in his head. In either case, I need not fix upon anything sensory. Casey suggests that there may be other alternatives as well, like imagining-as or imagining-with-respect-to. Although he does not elaborate on these other forms, I suspect that they would resonate closely with the concepts of representation and seeing-as that are so critical in aesthetics.

Most people grossly underestimate how large a role the imagination plays in everyday experience. Where does the imagination fit in terms of the three types of intentionality discussed earlier: intentional action, intention in action, and expressions of intention? Perhaps the most obvious connection between intentionality and the

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[11]Edward S. Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study* 2nd ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p.44.

imagination occurs on the level of intention in action. To have an intention in action is to strive to bring about something that does not currently exist. Presumably in order to do this one must have a clear idea of what this thing is. This level of intentional action guided by an imaginary object corresponds closely to the mental object view of artistic creativity where works of art are physical manifestations of mental conceptions, ideals, or images. Intentionality on this level is deeply engaged with and guided by the imagination and the imagination takes on a sensuous or imagistic form. Of course, this is also a limited sense of intentionality because it focuses on a very limited sense of sensory based imagination.

If the mental object conception of creativity is best captured by intention in action and sensory imagining, the material object conception of creativity would perhaps best correspond to intentional action that takes "imagining-how" as its object. The material object camp would maintain that works of art come about as the result of the physical process responsible for their introduction into the world. This thinner sense of intention does not accommodate a defined mental object corresponding to the intention. Intentionality, in this case, is not directed by a mental object, but rather the know-how to manipulate a particular medium. In this sense, imagining how to paint a picture could underlie the actual process of painting a picture without revealing the desire to paint any particular picture. Therefore, the material object conception of creativity depends on a thin understanding of both intentionality and imagination insofar as the actions of the artist are not being guided by a mental image of what the final work should be. The creation of the work comes about through the making. The intentions of the artist do not extend beyond intentional actions to any further intention in acting because doing so

would demand accessing the imagination for guidance in the creation of the work. The contribution of the imagination in providing technical know-how is not specific to artistic actions, but is an underlying element in all intentional action.

Finally, the form of imagination that an expression of intention takes as its object is imagining-that. The intentionality in having an image is different than having an apperceptive awareness of an image consciousness. As soon as an effort to describe an act of imagination is made, the awareness slides into an apperceptive form of awareness and out of the original content of imagination. Sartre describes this phenomenon as follows:

> As long as that consciousness remains unaltered, I can give a description of the object as it appears to me as imagined, but not of the image as such. To determine the characteristics of the image as image, it is necessary to turn to a new act of consciousness: it is necessary to reflect. So the image as image is describable only by a second-order act in which the look is turned away from the object and directed at the way in which the object is given.[12]

Unlike an intention in action that takes imagining as its object and focuses on the content of the imagination to direct the agent's action, an expression of intention takes both the agent's intention in action as well as the imagination as its object. This complex object has the form of imagining that a certain state of affairs in the world exists, or will come about, as a result of the artist's actions. One can imagine that something is the case

[12]Sartre, *The Imaginary*, p.4.

without imaging it in a concrete sensuous way, but neither view of creativity seems adequate to address this particular union of intention and imagination. The shortcoming in both theories can be attributed to the narrowness with which both the mental object and material object camps view imagination.

Is it possible to affirm the guiding force of the imagination in the production of a work of art without reducing the work to a physical manifestation of a mental object? In order to pursue this alternative to the two theories of artistic creativity previously discussed, we need to reconsider the possible forms mental objects can take. If it can be shown that an intentional object of the imagination does not fall into the classic description of imagining as sensory image-making in directing the creation of a work of art, then perhaps an account of creativity can be produced that places the origination of the work in the world without disjoining it completely from the guiding influence of the artist's imaginary aims. This middle ground would exercise the most abstract notion of intention and imagination, which would allow for the possibility to possess an intention like painting a feminist critique of war corresponding to a positively construed object of the imagination.

### 1.3.2 The Imaginal Margin

Following Casey, all objects of the imagination have three components: the positive imagined content, the mode or form in which the content has been given, and the imaginal margin (that which is left unspecified or vague). The imagined content is the

object phase of imagination or the intentional correlate that would be offered in response to the question "What did/do you imagine?" This positively construed content must admit to some degree of description but need not be strictly sensory in nature (in order to accommodate instances of imaging-how and imagining-that). The image or manner of presentation is the specific way the imagined content and the imagined margin are given together in the imaginer's consciousness. The imaginal margin is perhaps the most important element in the object of imagination. The imaginal margin is not merely the negative absence that lies at the periphery of imaginative content, but an essential characteristic of the imagined presentation. Thus, in addition to the three distinct act phases of imagination (imagining, imagining-how and imagining-that), there are three distinct elements to the object phase: (1) the imagined content, (2) the mode of presentation, and (3) the imaginal margin.

Despite the fact that the object of imagination is contemporaneous with the act of imagination and therefore incapable of revealing anything new to consciousness, this does not mean consciousness has exhausted all there is to know about the object. The unknown reveals itself as the margin, or that which is absent, in the content of the imagination. In Casey's own words:

> By 'imaginal margin' is meant the fading fringe found at the outer limit of specific imagined content. Unlike the world-frame of this content, it is not imminent in what we imagine. Neither is it present as a distinct factor which is external or transcendent to imagined content. For, being almost entirely featureless, it cannot be given any definite location; indeed, it seems to defy exact

> description of any kind, since it is not only unthematized (as are imaginal space and time) but unthematizable. It is so unspecific and formless that the imaginer tends not to notice it at all most of the time and must intensify his mental gaze to make it out.[13]

The image or manner that objects of the imagination are presented are the specific ways in which the imagined content and the imaginal margin are given together to the imaginer's consciousness. The imagined margin is a positive presentation of an absence, allowing itself to be apprehended as absent (like the backsides of objects in perception). There is nothing to the content of imagination outside of what is apprehended. The object cannot be removed from the act except by abstract theorization. Another way to think of the imaginal margin is to draw the somewhat elusive distinction between a *definite* image that *is not* fully knowable and an *indefinite* image that *is* fully knowable. The common sense conception of mental images tends to place them in the former category. The alternative explanation, and the one implied by the imaginal margin, asserts that it is inappropriate to seek further clarification in regards to the nature of one's mental images because there is nothing more to the image than what has already been initially grasped.

Sartre recognizes the importance of establishing the unique nature of imagination as at once exhausted and indeterminate, clearly distinguishing it from perception. The imagination does not abide by the same logic as perception. Berkeley treated images of the imagination as if they functioned just like pictures. Sartre notes: "Berkeley's error

[13]Casey, *Imagining*, p.53.

was to prescribe for the image conditions that apply only to perception . . . a hare vaguely perceived is in itself a determinate hare . . . but a hare that is the object of a vague image is an indeterminate hare."[14] Indeterminacy is one of the most important features of imagination. Indeterminacy is a constant that never varies because further clarification or information will never arise. This is unlike an object of perception, which is always determinate even when it is perceived as indeterminate.

The contents of mental images do not abide by the same logic as perceptual images. Having a mental image is not like looking at a picture on paper. This claim should seem apparent; after all, why would images abide by the logic of pictures when they are unlike pictures in so many other regards? Unlike pictures, there are no backsides to our images, we do not need light or even open eyes to see them, we cannot measure them, and we cannot show them to others. But *most importantly*, the contents of images do not possess the power to surprise. The image is completely revealed to the person entertaining it; it cannot be reappraised or seen in new ways. Pictures, by contrast, can be re-evaluated to reveal hidden aspects and often contain more information than can be grasped in one viewing.

A clear illustration of the difference between objects of perception and objects of imagination can be found in the case of fictional characters. Where there is a fact of the matter concerning whether or not Napoleon had a mole on his back, it does not make sense to entertain this possibility in the case of Sherlock Holmes. Imagination is not something we have ownership over or something that yields to our scrutiny. In Casey's opinion we don't *have* imaginative presentations, we *entertain* them. This becomes

[14]Sartre, *The Imaginary*, p.16.

evident when our attempts to hold tight the content of the imagination—as if it were determinate—fail. In order to achieve a fuller understanding of imagination, therefore, we must provide an account of these uniquely vague objects and the forms of intentionality they require.

### 1.3.3 Imagination and the Analogon

Imagine standing before Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein. Your response to the question "what do you see?" could take a number of forms depending on a wide range of factors like your emotional response to the image as well as the amount of knowledge you have about the subject or the reception of the portrait. Now imagine what Picasso must have imagined while painting it. Sartre would argue that there is something common in both experiences and it might be the last thing you would expect: Gertrude Stein herself. An image is nothing other than a relation. The motivating force driving Picasso to paint the picture was not an image of Gertrude Stein, but rather the object in the world that is denoted by "Gertrude Stein." Even if the portrait were painted in her absence, Picasso's imagination would not be directed towards her image, but rather directly towards her. It is this same "her" you grasp when standing before the canvas, even if you unfamiliar with the fact that it is intended to be Gertrude Stein. After all, depictions need not share the qualities of the things they depict. For instance, as Picasso famously said: "It may not look like her now, but it will." The kind of experience that is involved with depiction, whereby something absent is made present, parallels the kind of

experience one finds in positing mental images.

The image on the canvas was created by Picasso's intention to paint a picture of Gertrude Stein; in a very important sense the intention defines the image. The image of Gertrude Stein that Picasso painted implies his knowledge of her. The painting does not act like a sign: taking its reader from the presence of the painting as signifier to a signified meaning that is absent in the physical presence of the sign. As an object of immediate experience, the picture engages the imagination of its viewers; as a result, the picture connects the viewer directly with the object Gertrude Stein. Aesthetic experience does not betray two objects—the picture and the woman—but only one: Gertrude Stein. When the imagination has been engaged in this way, it reverses the traditional structure of representation. The picture does not connect the viewer with an image or representation of Gertrude Stein, but rather connects the viewer directly with the object that is Gertrude Stein. This structure of the imagination brings about a curious result, as Sartre points out:

> My knowledge is nothing other than knowledge *of* the object, knowledge *concerning* the object . . . this results in the paradoxical consequence that the object is present for us externally and internally at the same time. . . Externally, because we observe it; internally, because it is in it that we observe what it is.[15]

At first glance it would seem Sartre is disagreeing with Wittgenstein's claim that we cannot perceive and imagine something at the same time. So what happens when we

[15]Ibid, p.11.

"see" Gertrude Stein in Picasso's painting? The image resides half way between perception and concept, and "reveals to us the object under its sensible aspect but in a way that prevents it from being perceptible."[16] Sartre would maintain that we are not perceiving Gertrude, but utilizing our imagination to reach her directly. Perception would interfere with this awareness because it would take as its object patterns of paint on a canvas. Thus perception is irreconcilable with imagination in aesthetic experience.

Sartre refers to the relation or merger between the portrait and the subject that occurs in the act of imagining as "magical." The picture functions as an "analogon," according to Sartre, a presence that facilitates the transition from the real object of the work of art to an aesthetic object of the imagination. The imagined synthesis that results directs the viewer's attention toward an irreal, aesthetic Gertrude Stein. Of course a gulf will always remain between the image of the artist and that presented by the analogon of the artwork. Unlike the image which is steadfast in its indeterminacy, the work of art subjects itself to perception as an object in the world. The work of art, therefore, only acts as an analogon when it engages the imagination of the viewer. As long as it remains on the level of perception, it will reveal itself only as an object in the world, and will not bring the viewer to the content of an imaginary object.

The question, however, remains: how do artists translate the content of their imagination into a work of art, a transition that requires a radical transition of mediums that lends itself to different forms of awareness? What is perhaps more mystifying than the translation of the artist's imagination to the art work, is that the work itself contains the capacity to facilitate imaginative experiences in its viewers. Aesthetic experience

[16] Ibid, p.92.

occupies the intersection where imagination and perception theoretically collide. Although it may not be correct to say that perception and imagination are compatible, they do seem to give way to each other in aesthetic experience, which requires a creative sense of perception. This is not, however, to say that accessing art requires the developed eye of the astute. On the contrary, the imagined synthesis is marked by spontaneity and accounts for the *draw* of artworks to envelop their viewers in an aesthetic experience. In some situations it actually requires an exercise of will to *prevent* consciousness from slipping from the level of perception into the imagination. Magritte's pipe painting plays on this phenomenon, drawing our attention back from imaginative synthesis back to the content of perception and the awareness that the painting is not, after all, a pipe. This form of seeing beyond the merely physical also finds company in what Wittgenstein described as seeing aspects or seeing-as.

The experiences involved in depiction and mental imagery are different than those found in perception, yet the objects in all three forms of experience share the characteristic trait of not being merely indicated, but seemingly present. Despite the present presentation of imaginary objects, we must guard against succumbing to the illusion of imminence: attributing determinate qualities and quantities to the contents of our images. Ultimately the image is nothing but a relation. The imagining consciousness that I have when looking at the depiction of Gertrude Stein in Picasso's portrait is not merely a consciousness of her image, but rather a consciousness that puts me in direct relation to her. My attention is absorbed in the object that is Gertrude Stein, not merely her image. My intention is directed toward making present an absent object through a content that bears some analogy with the object that is the woman. The painting,

therefore, *gives* Gertrude Stein, even in her absence. In Sartre's own words,

> The image, intermediate between concept and perception, reveals to us the object under its sensible aspect but in a way that prevents it on principle from being perceptible. The image aims at it, most of the time, in its entirety, all at once. What one searches to recover in the image is not this or that aspect of a person, but the person themselves, as a synthesis of all their aspects.[17]

A painting is never a perfect analogue to the object represented, but rather the animation of a certain matter aiming to make a representation of an absent or nonexistent object. The matter of Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein can just as easily become an object for perceptual consciousness as it can for imagining consciousness, but it imposes itself on imagining consciousness to be spontaneously seen as a face, while resisting being purely perceived. What we seek when we regard Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein is not how she may have appeared at some point in the past or, for that matter, the future, but rather Gertrude Stein in *general*, a prototype that spans all appearances of her.

Thus what lies at the intuitive basis of our image is never merely an object for perception, but rather a phenomena of quasi-observation, which is to say we do not read into the portrait anything other than what we, ourselves, put there. The more knowledge we impose on the portrait, the further our imaging consciousness moves away from perception. The knowledge that aims at the mental image through the analogon is none other than belief: belief that one is facing Gertrude Stein. What is at first seen as an

[17] Ibid, p.92.

object for perception becomes an object for imagining consciousness. The perceptual qualities of the portrait diminish with the rise in imagining consciousness, rendering the matter of the portrait more and more impoverished to the point that what appears as matter to imaging consciousness is vastly different than what appears as the matter of perception. As the matter of the portrait increases in indeterminacy, the object intended (i.e., Gertrude Stein) increases in generality.

Differentiating the idea of Gertrude Stein from the image of Gertrude Stein is not an easy task. It can be done, but Sartre tells us "the object of the idea and the object of the image—though taken in different ways—are the same."[18] The further we move in imaging consciousness away from perception, the greater degree to which the matter of our perception is penetrated with knowledge. Unlike perceptual consciousness that confronts the thing it aims at, imagining consciousness aims at an object or representation that serves as an analogon for another purely psychic object that is a mental image. Because imagining consciousness does not confront the thing it aims at, it cannot be anything other than a pure sign consciousness. The aiming is empty. In the words of Sartre: "we know—because this is an essential necessity—that there is in the mental image a psychic datum that functions as an analogon, but if we wish to determine more clearly the nature and the components of this datum, we are reduced to conjectures."[19] What we can say about the image consciousness is that it is constituted by a certain way of judging and feeling, which we are not directly aware of, but can be apprehended among the qualities of the intentional object.

Sartre's conception of works of art as analogons carries with it deep metaphysical

[18] Ibid, p.51.
[19] Ibid, p.53.

implications for the metaphorical transference of meaning. Metaphorical meaning is essentially metaphysical in structure just as the metaphysical is essentially metaphorical in structure. Sartre's account of the analogon is not unlike Heidegger's conception of works of art opening up other worlds: Sartre's theory takes us from the physical world to a psychic content to deliver us, once again, to the physical world. The artist creates the artwork based on their own imagination. The artwork in turn inspires the imagination of its audience, taking them to a content that is in some way similar to the original imagined content of the artist. But what is this content and how can anyone grasp it? And, finally, what endows the artist with the ability to successfully create an artwork that serves as an analogon? In response to the first concern, the object grasped is a particular thing or person, a grasping, a seeing of a particular aspect. In response to the second concern, if we consider the fact that it is almost impossible for one person to re-create an original imagining, the potential for someone else to entertain something akin to the original imagining inspiration of the work is no less probable than the artist doing so. Thus removing what heretofore has been considered the privileged access of the artist to the interpretive intentions of the work. The art observer accesses an imaginary content similar to what the artist experienced in making the work, but they arrive at this content through the work itself, not through the artist. It would therefore follow that the most direct path for the artist to take in revisiting or rediscovering the imaginative synthesis underlying the work of art would also be through exposure to the work. The real mystery, however, is raised by the third question: what enables an artist to produce an analogon? On this point Sartre remains silent.

## 1.4 Chapter Conclusion: Reconciling Creativity, Intentionality, and Imagination

This chapter began with an inquiry into the nature of creativity and the ambitious goal of pinning down and disambiguating the where, what, when, and how of the creative act. Starting with a conceptual distinction outlining three different approaches to the problem of accounting for artistic creativity—as either the formation of mental objects/prototypes, the material substantiation of a work of art, or the uncovering of a universal form/possibility—the limitations of some of our common ways of thinking about creativity quickly began to reveal themselves. It soon became evident that any philosophically thorough account of artistic creativity would also have to provide an account for how an artist's intentionality and imagination contribute to shaping and guiding the nature of the creative process.

The movement in the philosophy of language called speech act theory sets out to demonstrate that linguistic meaning is always contextual. In a like manner, I want to argue for the contexuality and performative element of artworks. Just as the bride standing before the alter intends and expects to be understood in a certain way when she says "I do," by putting forth a work of art into the world the artist is performing a certain action which reveals a number of intentions and expectations for the work of art to be "read" in a certain way. It is interesting to think about the comparison I'm making with artworks as contextualized performative utterances with Margolis' claim that artworks are like people. Like people, artworks extend themselves into relational encounters with

the expectation to be understood and taken as meaningful. We do not address a rock in nature (no matter how beautiful or awe-inspiring) with the same expectations and reverence as we do a human generated work of art.

The three theories of creativity previously discussed can be mapped onto three forms of intentionality and imagination. The mental object theory pivots on the idea that the artist in a creative act is directed toward, and guided by, intentions underlying his or her actions or, in Anscombe's words, an intention in action. This theory of creativity focuses on the guiding force of mental conceptions, which occupy the central role in creating works of art. Orientating oneself towards a mental object for the sake of guiding artistic activity requires accessing the imagination in the form of a sensory imagining. Building off the strongest sense of imagining, this theory stipulates that the artist must first create a mental image of the artwork they wish to create prior to its manifestation in the world. Of course imaging a work of art and actually setting out to create it are two radically different tasks. Hence the real downfall to this theory lies in the gulf it places between the creative product of the imagination and the material product that is the artwork in the world. The biggest worry, however, surrounding this theory is that it sets the bar too high for artists. It seems to be the case that there are abundant counter-examples in the forms of artists who have set out to create works of art without possessing anything akin to a clear idea of what it was they wanted to create, aside from the notion that they would recognize it when they saw it. At the end of the day, mental images are not exchangeable with artworks and an accurate theory of creativity must be able to accommodate for the significance of the discoveries that can emerge from the process of bringing about a work of art.

Anscombe teaches us that intentions *need* actions. Intentions cannot be likened to mental willing that takes place only in the mind. The mental object theory completely undermines this insight into the nature of intentionality, choosing instead a form of imagination in place of actual artists' intentions. If we apply Anscome's insights on the nature of intentionality to the problem of creativity, then the creative act must consist in more than merely the formation of mental images or prototypes. There must be an act of volition, a bringing about that betrays a deeper sense of "meaning it" than merely entertaining a mental image.

In the other extreme, the material object theory maintains that creativity resides in the making, the introduction of a work of art into the world. This theory relies on a theory of action that can be purposeful and intentional without indulging any intentions in acting. This form of intentional action takes as its object not a mental image or conceptual plan, but rather imagining-how, where the "how" can most accurately be characterized as the technical knowledge of how to manipulate a particular medium. The artist does not create according to a mental image or internally imagined plan, but rather in accordance with the physical process of bringing about the material manifestation of an artwork. This theory can be criticized for portraying too thinly the roles of the artist's intentions and imagination in the production of the creative work.

Surely it is one thing to say that the actions of an artist in bringing about the creative product of a work of art should be included under a comprehensive theory of creativity and another thing to say that a theory of creativity could be constructed around these actions alone. The material object theory undermines the intentions of the artist by equating the intentions of the artist with the result that is the work of art, as if they were

two ways of knowing the same thing. This should prompt us to seriously reconsider not only the universal object theory, but the legitimacy of conceptually separating out the mental object and material object theories as discrete approaches to creativity in the first place.

Finally, the universal object theory utilizes expressions of intention and imaging-that. This form of intentionality can alternatively take as its object an image and/or an apperceptive awareness of an imaging consciousness. The artist's intention in acting and imagining consciousness of imaging-that are taken together as objects to guide the actions of the artist. On the one hand, the artist is absorbed in imagining-that a certain state of affairs could be brought about to exist. On the other hand, as soon as the artist attempts to reflect on the content of this imagining, they slip out of the first hand experience of imaging-that and into a second-order apperceptive awareness that attempts to take the original imagining consciousness as its object. In an effort to describe the contents of this original imaging-that, the intentionality of the artist assumes the form of an expression of intention, referring back to the original intention in action as well as an apperceptive awareness of the role of the imagination to direct one's intentions in the form of imagining-that. Because the universal object theory allows for a bit of leniency when it comes to discovering the form of a universal in either the mind of the artist as a mental image or in the physical act of making the artwork, it has a great advantage over the other two theories.

The main difference between the universal theory and the other theories of artistic creativity lies in the intuitive notion that there is something extremely poignant and profound when an artist has managed to create a work of art that has "gotten it right" to

the extent that one cannot imagine it being any other way. The idea of aesthetic rightness was, for Wittgenstein, *the* aesthetic predicate, greatly outshining even "beautiful" in terms of aesthetic significance. The intuitive sense of rightness implies that there is something against which the work of art is being measured to determine the degree to which it has "gotten it right." This "something," I want to argue is the discovery of a universal form. This theory explains how it is that different instances or performances of an allographic work can be identified as belonging to, or sharing in, the same artistic work. The universal object theory also provides us with an account for how everyday objects like ready-mades can become recognizable works of art. In the selection of a ready-made there is the discovery of a universal form of aesthetic significance, a potentiality that had, up until that point, been denied full expression. Making a case for including ready-mades in our theory of creativity brings to the fore the importance of the intentions and imaginings of the artist, without which the recognition of ready-mades as works of art would not be possible.

One of the central keys to adopting the universal object theory of artistic creativity depends on our understanding what is meant by "universal object." Instead of eternal Platonic forms awaiting to be recovered, I would like to advance a theory of universals that likens them to poignant possibilities that are created and emerge from the symbolic system of signification in place for a particular culture at a particular time. The intention is that this approach will attribute a strong sense of creativity to the artist, a doing that exercises the imagination insofar as the intentionality of the artist is directed (either conceptually or sensually) toward an ambiguous, indeterminate notion of significance that will be readily accepted or appreciated by others. It is with this obscure

object in mind that the artist is able to fine-tune his or her creation. The ability to foresee new ways of meaning-making that build off and extend the systems of meaning already in place, demands a great deal of intentional and imaginative willing.

Abandoning the idea that the work of art is a physical manifestation of a mental image in favor of a theory that expands our understanding of mental objects to include highly indeterminate image-like feelings that can best be described as approximations of universal forms allows us to regard mental images as merely occupying one step in the realization of a universal in the form of an artwork. Unlike the mental object theory, which locates the creative act in the act of imagining a mental image, the universal theory regards the creation of an indeterminate image as one step in the intentionality and imagination required to bring about a work of art. The substantiation of the work achieves something that even the clearest mental image is unable to achieve: it provides form and structure to the realization of a universal possibility. Therefore, in a way, the universal theory can be seen as uniting some of the insights of both the mental and material object theories, by spreading the causal power across the intention, imagination, and process of physical production of the artist.

The universal object theory of creativity I propose shares a great deal with some of the basic structures and insights of the imagination. Artworks cannot be separated from the intentions of the artists who create them. In order for any work to be recognized as an artwork there must be an artist who intended to create (or discover) that work. Being an artist is a creative endeavor, unlike any other because the sphere of what constitutes art is always changing and never concrete. The imagination is always characterized by three distinct elements: (1) the imagined content, (2) the mode of

presentation, and (3) the imaginal margin. The solution to the mental object vs. material object divide in theories of creativity dissolves when we look a little closer into the nature of the imagination. Despite the fact that the three elements of the imagination are always present in all instances of imagining, this does not entail that they enjoy equal representation. In certain situations one element may greatly dominate the other two. Thus an artist can make a work of art based on a clear notion of an imagined content detailing exactly what the work should be, while others may only have a clear idea of how to go about making the work without any clear idea of what the finished work will be. In all cases the imaginal margin plays a key role and we cannot lose sight of the fact that it is possible to be directed towards the creation of something that is greatly unknown and concealed to us.

The fact that artists can be directed towards an ambiguously indeterminate object indicates that there is something to be directed towards, something capable of motivating and guiding action. This something, I want to say, is the universal element or possibility uncovered or discovered by the artwork. The significance of this universal not only holds the power to guide actions in the face of the indeterminate, but also determine when those actions have succeeded in producing the desired product. It is the presence of the universal in the work of art, which prompts our experience for some artworks to slide from purely perceptional experiences into experiences that exercise the imagination. The work of art itself holds the power to facilitate the imaginative experiences in all those who encounter it. The further our imagining consciousness moves away from perception, the more it is penetrated with knowledge. The knowledge that accompanies imagining experience of an indeterminate artwork is an approximation of the universal

form or possibility underlying the artwork. In this way, artworks are neither purely perceived nor engaged by imagining consciousness, but rather taken in by the phenomena that can best be characterized as a sort of quasi-observation.

Artworks serve as analogons for universal possibilities, representations of other purely psychic objects. The psychic object or universal accessed through a work of art does not confront imagining consciousness directly; the imagining consciousness engaged in the experience of artworks cannot be anything other than a pure sign consciousness. Because we can never access the intentions of the artist directly—one consciousness cannot seize and attach itself to another—in order for one consciousness to act on another, it must be retained and recreated by the consciousness on which it is to act. One consciousness cannot cause another consciousness, but one can motivate another. In creating a work of art an artist sets out to motivate others to engage the same universal possibility. Thus an artwork marks the transition from a *signifying* object in the consciousness of an artist to a *representing* object in the consciousness of an observer. The matter of the artwork solicits the observer to effect the synthesis of imaging consciousness because the artist has given the artwork the resemblance to a universal object. This is a sign consciousness because it is through the artwork that the observer is able to grasp a representation of an artist's intentions directed toward giving form to a universal object. In the words of Sartre, when confronted with a work of art "I cease to perceive, I *read*, which is to say, I effect a signifying synthesis."[20] Thus, in a very real way, artworks function like signs, guiding consciousness to grasp a universal form or possibility.

[20] Ibid, p.26.

# CHAPTER 2
# ON AESTHETIC OBJECTIVITY

## 2.0 Introduction

Since the rise of the poststructuralist movement, one of the central concerns of literary aesthetics has shifted from interpreting texts to demarcating boundaries to determine what falls within and outside of texts. In an effort to correct the mistakes of Romantic theorists like I. A. Richards, who believed the proper vocation for literary aesthetics was to establish the "relevant mental conditions" of a text's author, the poststructuralists pronounced the author dead and irrelevant to the project of literary criticism. The "author" whose death they were concerned with establishing was not the writer(s) credited with creating the text and endowing it with a specific set of features. It was the notion of a mind behind the making, a willing, intending, and, most importantly, a *meaning* author, who not only determines what words make it to the page, but somehow holds direct sway over what the words on the page will *mean*. According to the poststructuralists, no author can establish how their text will be read or interpreted. An author has no more claim on the meaning of a specific text than anyone else; they may own the publishing rights, but they can never "own" a text in terms of fixing its meaning for all those who may read it. Foucault perhaps captures this sentiment most poignantly when he says: "the writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of 'expression' . . . [it is] an interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very

nature of the signifier."[21]

Given the nature of the investigation into creativity, intentionality, and imagination conducted in the first chapter, I feel obliged to respond to the postructuralist charge described above. In this chapter I will, therefore, begin by addressing the relevancy of authorial intentions to the interpretation of a work. From a consideration of authorial intention, I will then shift the discussion to a more metaphysical approach to how it is we account for the "objective" features or properties in the world in the first place. My hope is that indulging this latter discussion will not only prompt us to re-think our general ontology, but reconsider where the "bounds" of the text (or artwork more generally) actually lie.

[21] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p.116.

## 2.1 A Reconsideration of the "Intentional Fallacy"

In 1954, W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley published an article arguing for the recognition of what they termed the "Intentional Fallacy." As critics in a school of thought known as "New Criticism," their objective behind coining the "fallacy" was to provide a logical justification for categorically precluding any consideration of artistic intention in the interpretation of art. Motivated by what they identified as the fallacious reasoning underlying all efforts to establish a logical connection between the intentions of an artist and the meanings of the artworks they create, Wimsatt and Beardsley crafted the expression "intentional fallacy" to cover both the excavation of psychological intentions—"the author's attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write"—and conscious intentions—the "design or plan in the author's mind."[22] The range of intentions the so-called "intentional fallacy" was designed to address coveres all biographical considerations: from the basic intentional action to the complex expressions of authorial intention. This broadly construed definition of artistic intention permitted a wide-range application of Wimsatt and Beardsley's critique as well as a basis for drawing a distinction between internal evidence—that which can be directly introspected from the object—and external evidence—the psychological or social background of the object—in the evaluation of a work of art. The conclusion urged by Wimsatt and Beardsley asserted that the interpretation of art should be limited in appeal to pertain solely to internal evidence. The justification for this position was provided in the form of five axioms.

[22]W. K. Wimsatt and Monrow C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in *Philosophy Looks At the Arts*, 3rd ed., Joseph Margolis ed., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), p. 368.

The first of Wimsatt and Beardsley's axioms defines the logical claim made by the "fallacy" as follows: works of art may be the intentional products of artists, but "the designing intellect as a cause" is not an appropriate standard for evaluating the value of these works. There are no characteristics belonging to a work of art that depend on knowledge of causal conditions, whether the conditions be physical or psychological. While it is undeniably the case that artworks are caused, knowledge of that cause should never be used to assist in either the evaluation or interpretation of an artwork. In effect, Wimsatt and Beardsley are denying that there is any reason to seek knowledge of the cause of an artwork, in either the artist or the originating artistic intentions, if the goal is to gain adequate knowledge concerning the effect (i.e., the meaning of a work of art). This position can be interpreted as directly countering the common assumption that the identification of an object as a work of art is based on the knowledge that it was created by an artist. Traditionally even the most sophisticated theories in the ontology of art uphold an intimate connection between the identification and evaluation of aesthetic works. This is why arguments over what constitutes a work of art often digress into arguments over what *deserves* to be called a work of art. Therefore, contrary to what the "intentional fallacy" asserts, in aesthetics the conceptual basis for evaluation is more often than not indistinguishable from identification.

The second axiom provides an account for how the intentions of an artist can come to be known. This axiom appeals to an understanding of intention divorced from action—as if the intentions of the artist and the product brought about by their actions were only loosely associated—such that a work of art may meet or fail to meet the intentions of the artist. Wimsett and Beardsley make the surprising claim that a

successful work of art is capable of revealing the intentions of the artist insofar as the work is capable of revealing what the artist was trying to do.[23] Exactly how this would occur—given that there is no direct connection between intentional causes and aesthetic effects—is not explicitly specified, but they do say that if an artwork is successful, then it should provide sufficient evidence of the artists' intentions. Conversely, if the artwork fails, then one must look outside of the work in order to uncover evidence of the artist's intention. If the connection between artistic intention and meaning is possible, then it makes one wonder why we should support a philosophical theory that undermines the accomplishments of exemplary artists who manage to create works of art capable of revealing their intentions. Moreover, it remains to be seen what form the unfulfilled intentions of inferior artists would take: are they failed intentions in acting that leave no trace or expressions of intention? I cannot shake the suspicion that this theory would lend itself to enormous complications with regards to the sincerity, memory, and reliability of an artist's expressions of intention. Moreover, the outrageous implication of this approach would seem to call for the bifurcation of aesthetics itself, into an aesthetics of successful art and an aesthetics of unsuccessful art!

Without any means to access the cognitive and psychological intentions of the artist in the moment of artistic creation, the closest thing we have to the creative act is the artwork itself. So, in a surprising reversal, Wimsatt and Beardsley seem to promote something that looks dangerously like the theory they intended to deny (i.e., they affirm a link between the intentions of the artist and the artwork). The important distinction they

[23]"One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. . . How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do." Ibid, p. 368.

want to maintain, however, is that the connection between artist and artwork does not go both ways: the artwork may provide insight into the intentions of the artist, but the intentions of the artist cannot provide insight into the nature of the artwork. If the artwork betrays the artistic intentions that went into its creation, then we can say knowledge of the artwork carries with it knowledge of the artistic intentions underlying it. In short, the philosophical position put forth by Wimsatt and Beardsley does not deny the relation between artistic intentions and works of art, but rather the epistemological access we can have to these intentions. In other words, although the work of art may evidence the intentions of the artist who created it, it need not.

In a Wittgensteinian manner, the third axiom asserts that works of art should be judged on the degree to which they "work." According to Wimsatt and Beardsley, "A poem should not mean but be . . . a poem can be only through its meaning—since its medium is words—yet it is, simply is, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant."[24] Unlike practical messages, where there is a disconnect between the meaning and mode of presentation, works of art convey their meaning directly and are indivisible from it. When compared to the capacity of a work of art to communicate, ordinary language can seem abstract. More often than not, successful works of art can be categorized by the complete absence of the superfluous or irrelevant. A poem cannot be separated from its meaning; it is not a conduit for meaning, but the incarnation of meaning itself. Works of art embody the unity of form and content, style and meaning. Successful interpretation can be distinguished by the ability to account for the artwork and all its parts as a whole. Interestingly, this third axiom, more

[24]Ibid, p.368.

than any other, lends credence to the view that looking for artistic intention in a work of art leads you not to external factors, but rather deeper into the nature of the work itself. Accordingly, this assertion has been used both in defense of the position that artistic intentions can be evidenced in a work of art and in opposition to it. The other interesting thing about this axiom is that it seems to deny the ability of artworks to embrace internal strife, conflict, or disharmony, something many contemporary artists and critics would resist.

The fourth axiom stresses, once again, that the meaning expressed by a work of art should not be confused with the meaning (or intentions) expressed by an artist. The identification of meaning should be limited to the work: it is not the poet who speaks through his poetry, but the poem itself. Similarly, the book directly reveals the voice of the narrator, where the voice of the author can be arrived at only through a subsequent act of biographical inference, not the voice of the author. The essential point of the fourth axiom is that while evidence of an artist's intentions at the moment of creation are limited to what can be found in the work of art—if they are to be found at all—these traces are not to be confused with the meaning of the work. Correct interpretation of aesthetic meaning should invoke neither external evidence of artistic intention nor internal evidence of artistic intention as evidenced by the work.

Lastly, the fifth axiom provides support for the division between the meaning of the work and the intentions of the artist by suggesting that the original intentions of an artist in creating a work of art may be realized more fully in a subsequent revision of the work. According to Wimsatt and Beardsley, it is conceivable that where the original work failed to meet the intention of the artist, a latter revision may succeed. In such

cases, "it follows that his [the artist's] former concrete intention was not his intention."[25] The interesting thing about this statement is that it tends to undermine the significance of the second axiom. According to the second axiom, artistic intention should be considered in terms of the cognitive and/or psychological dispositions of the artist at the *moment* of artistic creativity. If, however, a subsequent moment of creative action is capable of revealing the same intentions more accurately than the first, this would imply that the intentions of the artist are not fleeting states tied to the moment of creation, but rather enduring states that extend over time. If this is the case, and artistic intentions are extended over time, then this would undermine the division between intentions in action and expressions of intention. Moreover, the work of art would no longer hold a privileged position in terms of providing access to the intentions of the artist because the work of art would not be the closest thing to those intentions.

Acknowledging the possibility that the intentions of an artist may be more adequately expressed by a secondary work not only assumes that it is possible to access artistic intentions independently from the work of art, but implies that these intentions are capable of providing insight into the nature of the artwork. Of course, this would entail that the artistic intentions in question were compared with both works of art and found to be more accurately represented by the latter. If the work of art is evaluated in terms of an external source of intentionality, then our understanding of the work must include a comparison of the work with the intentions of its creator; but this, of course, is exactly what Wimsatt and Beardsley set out to deny in the first place. It therefore strikes me as misleading to suggest, in the context of the philosophical position against taking artistic

[25]Ibid, p.369.

intentions into consideration in aesthetics, that an artist's intentions can be more aptly realized in a revisionary work. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that if the author finds a revised work to more accurately capture their intentions, then their intentions must have changed from the time of the original creation.

### 2.1.1 A Philosophical Critique of the "Fallacy"

Wimsatt and Beardsley's staunch position against incorporating artistic intentions in aesthetic theory undoubtedly arose from practical concerns surrounding the possibility for disagreement over the meaning of a work of art with the artist of that work. Beardsley invites us to imagine an unaccommodating painter who offers an interpretation of his work that departs radically from the generally accepted interpretation. He points out that if the two interpretations are disparate enough, ontological concerns can arise over the true identity of the work. According to Beardsley, "If we consider the 'real' painting to be that which the painter projected in his mind, we shall go at it one way; if we consider the 'real' painting to be the one that is before us, open to public observation, we shall go at it another way."[26] One virtue of this position is that it comes to the rescue in instances like this, offering a theoretical platform to support the purveyance of artistic interpretations that depart from the artist's own. There are, however, some serious conceptual issues underlying this attempt to tease out the identity of the "real" work in

[26]Monroe Beardsley, "The Artist's Intention," in *Aesthetics*, Susan Feagin and Patrick Maynard eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.225.

this way. To begin with, in the previous quotation Beardsley slides back into speaking about artist's intentions as psychological events cloistered off inside the artist's mind. No concession is offered for the possibility that the intentions of the artist might be evidenced directly through the work of art. Omitting this possibility should curtail any confusion between the "real" work and the projection in the mind of the artist for the simple reason that the projection was a fleeting state (if it existed at all) independent of the artwork.

I would like to argue that there is only one "real" object that is the work of art and this is the object that is objectively observable. The intentions of the artist are present in the work of art and in many ways define the nature of the work. That said, there is no need to look beyond the work to find evidence of artistic intention. The work betrays both the intentional actions of the artist as well as the intentions the artist has in acting. Admittedly, providing an account for the latter is more difficult, but this can be one of the fruits gained by peering deeply *into* a work of art. I intend to demonstrate that the inclusion of intention in aesthetic interpretation need not extend to the volatile realm of artists' *expressions* of intention. At the same time, a case can be made for a strong sense of intention that embraces the meaning and being of a work of art without filling in the exact nature of the intention in question. Achieving this objective requires carving out a conceptual space for a strong sense of intention that does not demand a detailed articulation. Taking seriously the analogy between a work of art and a metaphor, in conjunction with further inquiry into the indeterminate nature of the artwork as an expression of pure possibility, should prove fertile for bearing out the nature of this new conception of intention.

Wimsatt and Beardsley's argument against the relevancy of artistic intentions hit the theoretical scene at a time when great currency was given to the theory that art (generally speaking) functions like a language. Unfortunately, more often than not, these claims were fairly superficial in their comparisons, often failing to provide an account for what the counterparts to linguistic semantics or syntactics would be in the non-literary arts. The philosophical contributions of Wimsatt and Beardsley can be seen as a continuation of this tradition. Despite the fact that their "fallacy" advocates for the consideration of a work of art in isolation, independent of the artist and culture from which it arose, their theory also stresses the importance of identifying the work of art as a social object. According to Wimsatt and Beardsley, "the poem is not the critic's, but the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it)."[27] Embodied in language, the poem is an object of public knowledge. The community of language users does not need the poet to tell them what the poem means, it expresses its meaning on its own.

Although Wimsatt and Beardsley tend to focus on poetry, it is fair to assume that visual works of art also take on a comparable status as public objects in a pre-established system of meaning. They go on to say, "what is said about the poem is subject to the same scrutiny as any statement in linguistics or in the general science of psychology."[28] It is unclear, however, whether they consider linguistic and psychological scrutiny to be interchangeable. Presumably the meaning of a work of art can be cashed out in the same way as the meaning of a sentence. It would therefore follow that a work of art should be

[27]Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," p.369.

[28]Ibid, p.369.

capable of conveying information about emotions and other psychological states in a fashion similar to linguistic expressions. Just as the meaning of a sentence is the product of linguistic meaning—as opposed to the speaker's meaning—the meaning of a work of art belongs to the work, not the artist. Locating aesthetic meaning in the artwork instead of the artist prompted Wimsatt and Beardsley to draw a division between what words mean and what people mean:

> What the sentence means depends not on the whim of the individual, and his mental vagaries, but upon public conventions of usage that are tied up with the habit patterns in the whole speaking community. It is perhaps easy to see this in the case of an ambiguous sentence. A man says, 'I like my secretary better than my wife'; we raise our eyebrows, and inquire: 'Do you mean that you like her better than you like your wife?' And he replies, 'No, you misunderstand me; I mean I like her better than my wife does.' Now, in one sense he has cleared up the misunderstanding, he has told us what he meant. Since what he meant is still not what the first sentence succeeded in meaning, he hasn't made the original sentence any less ambiguous than it was; he has merely substituted for it a better, because unambiguous, one.[29]

The problem with distinguishing between people meaning and word meaning is that it disconnects meaning from use. What the first sentence "succeeded in meaning"

[29]Beardsley, "The Artist's Intention," p. 227.

presumably has nothing to do with the intentions of the speaker or the context in which the statement was delivered. This brings up a lot of issues of the meta variety; e.g., how can there be a point of view that does not derive from a point of consciousness? Moreover, how can a poetic voice speak meaningfully of love and loss without drawing from a source of experience or knowledge of such things? Normally the presence of language reveals the presence of a social being. Both artist and society are implicated in a meaningful work of art.

Speech-act theorists like Austin and Searle demonstrate that linguistic meaning cannot be divorced from use. One can imagine a situation where the original sentence is not ambiguous, or where a shift in speaking patterns within a particular community would deliver the same statement without any ambiguity. Although distinguishing between what someone means and what someone says can be useful in instances of irony, metaphor, or figurative speech, making such a division in everyday parlance is a dangerous endeavor; it presumes a form of mental meaning which lies outside of language and dangerously teeters on affirming the existence of private language.

Some twenty-eight years later, Beardsley re-visited the philosophical position he proposed under the name of the "intentionist fallacy" in light of some new insights brought about by speech-act theory. This time around Beardsley was careful to distinguish between saying and intending in regards to illocutionary acts. He denied that to know a writer's motives and intentions is to know the relationship he stands to what he has written. At the same time, he claimed that "to know what illocutionary action was performed is to know what action the production of such a text generated by the

appropriate conventions."[30] By distinguishing between the performance and representation of illocutionary acts, Beardsley attempted to segregate the literary use of language from everyday speech. This approach accompanies a deep-seated belief that there are no truth claims in literary speech. Representations of illocutionary action are not intentional like the performance of illocutionary acts. In producing a poem or work of fiction the writer is refraining from illocutionary commitment; hence, they represent—without actually performing—an illocutionary act. This is not a failure to perform, but rather a *refraining* from performing.

According to Beardsley, "only intentional text production can generate illocutionary actions."[31] In knowing her intentions an artist may not be aware of what illocutionary act she is performing (although she may be aware of whether she is serious, joking, or ironic). If, however, knowing the artist's intention means knowing what illocutionary actions she is performing, this would determine how the text reads. For example, in order to perform an illocutionary action of warning I must have the intention of warning, but I can represent an illocutionary action of warning without having an intention to warn. It is interesting to note that Beardsley does allow for the possibility that a computer-generated poem can represent an illocutionary action. "Even if one must have a particular intention to *perform* a certain illocutionary action, it does not follow that one must have that intention to *represent* that action."[32] This position brings up

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[30]Monroe Beardsley, "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy Revisited," in *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition*, Lamarque and Olson ed., (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p.227.

[31]Ibid, p.192.

[32]Ibid, p.193.

interesting connections with Barthes' position on the "death of the author." Beardsley seems to extend Barthes theory: not only is the author dead, leaving the reader in charge of giving meaning to the text, but the author need never have existed. If it is not essential to an illocutionary action that it be performed intentionally, then it follows that intending to do something cannot be a requisite for doing it.[33]

Beardsley applies his distinction between performing and representing illocutionary actions to both internal and external levels of meaning. For instance, if a novelist writes a scene where a mother gives her son advice, the novelist is not giving advice, but representing the giving of advice. And, if a satirist writes a piece castigating a politician, they are not actually castigating that politician, but representing an illocutionary action of castigating a politician. I cannot subdue the worry that this account would be ultimately circular. If Beardsley is correct, it would follow that interpretation is always an exercise in meta-analysis: this work is *representing* the castigation of a politician (or *representing* a memoir, or *representing* a sonnet, etc.). It seems that thinking in this way would create an unwanted regress. After all, what does it mean to represent a love story? What is it a representation of if all stories are themselves representations? Moreover, it seems Beardsley must admit that the intentions of the author are unavoidable as well as relevant to the determination of literary genres and hence, by extension, to the interpretation of the work. Imagine how our understanding would change if we were to discover that Anne Frank intended to produce a work of

[33]"We cannot say that an illocutionary action is necessarily intentional (and hence that it is the intention that conclusively decides what sort of illocutionary action is being performed), because that would make intending to perform an action of a certain kind a requisite condition of performing it." Ibid, p.193.

fiction or that Dostoevsky intended his account of a Siberian prison camp to be read as an autobiographical work. That genre determines interpretation to a great degree seems, to me, beyond dispute.

One major factor that Beardsley's theory overlooks is the role of the imagination in aesthetic works. Because artistic works are the creative products of the imagination, they exhibit different structures of intentionality, sincerity, performance, and representation. Ultimately, I think Beardsley was too quick to assume that works of art must fall on one side or other of the binary division between illocutionary vs. non-illocutionary acts. I would like to suggest that they cannot be accurately classified into either group. Many theorists have suggested that works of art share a deep affinity with the structure and function of a metaphor. The point in making this analogy has been to disrupt the binary conception of meaning that traditionally smothers our understanding of art. Artworks are not based on pretense or duplicity. It is absurd to say that utterances made in the literary arts are unintentional. If anything, there is a surplus of intention in art, not a dearth. Beardsley's conception of artistic intention not only degrades the importance of art and its capacity to convey meaning, but promotes an unfortunate misconception of artistic sincerity. The sincerity involved in writing a love story need not be based on the genuine expression of romantic feeling: an artist need not be in love in order to write about love. The sincerity involved in writing a love story rests on the reality and power of love itself, taken as the subject. This allows the author to convey deep truths about love without citing an actual love, an act that cannot be anything but intentional to the utmost degree.

The real downfall of Beardsley's theory lies in its failure to make key distinctions in the treatment of artistic intentions. Taking seriously the analogy between aesthetic works and metaphor begins with making a clear distinction between what Anscombe called intentional action, on the one hand, and intentions in acting, on the other hand. Drawing on this distinction brings to light the fact that what a speaker is actually *saying* cannot be reduced to merely what has been *uttered*. For instance, there are intentional actions, like intentionally making the statement: "She has dog ears," and there are intentions in acting, like intending to communicate the claim that she has tremendous hearing through uttering the statement, "She has dog ears." Finally, there are the artist's statements of intention. Both intentional actions as well as intentions in acting contribute to the meaning and being—the how and what—of the work of art.

I am not interested in attempting to account for all the possible expressions of intention an artist may give. Therefore, at first glance it would appear as though I am upholding Beardsley's division (albeit slightly modified) between internal and external sources of meaning as well as the conclusion that aesthetic interpretation should be limited to the internal. However, when this division is reconsidered in light of metaphor, the distinction between internal and external evidence in the determination of meaning of the work of art is no longer as clear as it once seemed. If our interpretation of metaphor was based solely on internal evidence, we would be limited to a strictly literal interpretation, which would also, incidentally, be an *incorrect* interpretation. In order to correctly interpret a metaphorical passage, consideration must extend beyond the semantic content of the words on the page to a consideration of the possible intentions

underlying the utterance of those words. The motivation of a speaker to communicate a figurative meaning must be considered independently from the literal meaning conveyed by his or her words.

We do not meet the work of art with a naive eye; if we did we would miss out on much of its meaning. The issue does, however, arise as to how much information we need to bring to the piece. Consider Pynchon's book *Gravity's Rainbow*, which inspired the writing of a companion text twice the length of the original novel. Because the division between what is internal and external to the work is so ambiguous, the possibility arises for varying interpretations and disagreements over the meaning of a work of art. In drawing attention to the problem I am not attempting to re-draw the line, but rather shift our thinking about the meaning of the work away from the pitfalls that belie this binary way of thinking. After all, what does it mean to apply the same categories of internal and external evidence to metaphor? If we did not go outside the text to consider the intentions of the artist in writing it, we would never get beyond the literal meaning to the figurative. But the real triumph is that we do, and without performing a slight of hand in terms of attributing meaning to the text that isn't already there.

### 2.1.2 Pure Possibility and Metaphor

To confront a work of art is to confront a possibility. Works of art are intentional objects designed to engage the consciousness of intentional beings. There is always an

element of indeterminacy in every work of art. This indeterminacy makes itself known in the ambiguity of meaning and is indicated by the question: "What does it mean?" that often accompanies works of art. It is this indeterminacy that attracts the imagination of the viewer and accounts for the fact that aesthetic experience is always partially an exercise in imagination. The intentional act of imagining-that falls under the radar of self-reflection most of the time, but can be clearly identified when reflected upon. Indeterminacy is co-extensive with pure possibility: the more indeterminate a work of art, the more it presents itself as purely possible and the greater the presentation of pure possibility, the greater the tendency for a work of art to be indeterminate.[34] Modern art is well known for its indeterminacy and ability to involve the imaginations of its observers through the projection of pure possibility. We meet works of art with an intention to understand the work or experience it fully. When the work encountered responds to these intentions with a presentation of pure possibility, the imagination of the viewer is invited to open up and undergo its own exploration.

According to Edward Casey, pure possibility is the primary characteristic of the "thetic" character of the content or object phase of imagination. In his own words, "by 'thetic character' or 'thetic quality' is meant the character or quality that consciousness posits in its intentional objects as an expression of its attitude toward the existential status of these objects."[35] The thetic character, therefore, is the "feel" consciousness connects

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[34]This is an application of Casey's discussion of indeterminacy and pure possibility, taking it from its original context of imagining and applying it to the experience of a work of art. This may not be such a big stretch at all if experiencing a work of art is inseparable from an imaginary experience.

[35]Edward S. Casey, *Imaging: A Phenomenological Study*, 2ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p.111.

with its object. Consciousness treats the intentional objects that are the contents of imagination as pure possibilities, which is to say consciousness does not posit these objects as existentially existing in the world. And yet, these objects do have a thetic character of their own, as an existential status of pure possibility. For example, when I imagine a pipe I remain fully aware of the fact that my pipe is a possibility of a pipe, not an existentially present pipe in the world. My pipe is also, in a certain sense, substantive, allowing me to refer to it directly. Curiously, Casey does not seem to consider that we sometimes confuse the thetic quality of the object phase of imagination with the thetic quality of the object of perception. This sort of confusion would be analogous to what occurs in Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein or Magrette's pipe painting.

The use of the imagination in experiencing a work of art departs from Casey's understanding of the thetic quality of the object phase of the imagination. It may also be the case that the content of the imagination in conjunction with a work of art—the presentation of pure possibility—may serve to define the nature of the work. By contrast, Casey does not think the positing of pure possibility can have any bearing on our realization of real objects in the world:

> By 'pure possibility' is meant a kind of possibility that is posited and contemplated for its own sake and not for the sake of anything external to, or more ultimate than, itself. It is the sort of possibility that is considered on the basis of its inherent interest, not on the basis of its actual or potential value in the realization of projects that transcend the act of imagining itself. . . In fact, it is

> precisely their lack of thetic actuality that renders their intrinsic sense of possibility 'pure'—pure, that is, from entangling alliances with the actual.[36]

The imagination that accompanies aesthetic experience is considered on the basis of its inherent interest because it contributes to the realization of the actually existing entity that is the work of art. Works of art are intentional objects designed to inspire the imagination of those who experience them. They are part actual, part imaginative, objects of contemplation. Seeing the pipe in Magritte's painting of a pipe or Gertrude Stein in Picasso's portrait is part of the thetic actuality of the work of art, which transcends the act of imagining and becomes part of our perceptual experience or epistemic account. The feeling of uncertainty or uneasiness we might experience before an abstract work of art is part of what defines the existential nature of that work. On one level, there is no ambiguity about the work, it merely exists, but on another level, because the work presents itself as having the indeterminate nature of pure possibility to our imagination, this experience makes us return to perception and experience the work in a new way.

In order to incorporate imagination into the aesthetic perceptual experience, we must assume the precarious position of opposing Wittgenstein, and Sartre in the belief that it is possible to have continuity between perception and imagination. Seeing aspects is, for Wittgenstein, an imaginative experience, but strictly speaking perceiving and imagining are distinct acts. As we saw in the last chapter, Sartre maintains the

[36]Ibid, p.116.

separateness of percepts and images, but posits the work of art as an analogon to explain how we make the transition from perception to accessing the imagination. Casey, by contrast, does admit that aesthetic experience permits the extension of perception into imagination and even goes on to say that the "extension of perception serves to enrich perception itself . . . we return to the work refreshed, and in such a way as even to enhance its perception."[37] The position I wish to defend is one where both artist and observer engage the free play of the imagination and it is through this play that the significance of the work of art comes to light. Therefore, the imagination finds inspiration in the presentation of the pure possibility of the work of art in its indeterminacy.

Because we attribute intentionality to the writer, we can recognize a metaphor when we see one. A computer might be capable of making a poem, but it cannot make a metaphor. Metaphor involves the attribution of a property to an object that does not literally possess it; they prompt much thought and require the use of the imagination. Perhaps these are the aspects of metaphor Kant had in mind when he characterized aesthetic ideas as metaphorical. My goal in this section has been to draw attention to the deeply metaphysical implications inherent in taking seriously the analogy between metaphor and aesthetic works. The work of art makes the leap of meaning possible, connecting seemingly disparate things and bridging the gap between different minds. In the words of Sartre,

We may therefore conclude that imagination is not an empirical power added to

[37] Ibid, p.141.

> consciousness, but is the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom; every concrete and real situation of consciousness in the world is pregnant with the imaginary in so far as it is always presented as a surpassing of the real.[38]

Surpassing the real with the imaginary is an essential component in what it means to live in a meaningful, value-laden world. This, in the Wittgensteinean sense, reflects "our way of life." Imagining consciousness and perception are not like oil and water, occasionally shaken up, but never genuinely mixed, rather they are two ends of seamless continuum. Imagination is an essential and transcendental condition of consciousness. As an analogon, the work of art is at once a portal to an absent object of awareness and also a positive presence, containing that which is beyond itself in itself. Hence the contradictory syntheses that renders the work of art an *irreality* under Sartre's terminology.

Instead of trying to escape the expansive properties of works of art by retreating into the esoteric nature of imagining consciousness or resorting to denying them altogether, I would like to consider the possibility that works of art really do possess the power to express properties that are impossible for ordinary material objects to posses or express. Of course how this is possible remains to be seen, but certainly the unique play of artistic creativity, intentionality, and imagination in works of art hold the key.

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[38]Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, Jonathan Webber trans., (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.186.

## 2.2 The Reality of Aesthetic Properties

In his article "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World," John McDowell, takes seriously the claim that aesthetic values are given to us in the world. Toward this end, McDowell investigates the possibility that aesthetic value is part of the fabric of the world. He has been greatly impressed by the remarkable fact that "aesthetic experience typically presents itself, at least in part, as a confrontation with value: an awareness of value as something residing in an object and available to be encountered."[39] But what is the nature of aesthetic experience that lends itself to the conclusion that aesthetic properties are objective? What does this curious claim tell us about the structure of the world, the nature of aesthetic experience, and the nature of our beliefs? Opponents to the objectivity of aesthetic value maintain that value is not perceived in the world but rather projected upon it; aesthetic value is not ontologically grounded but rather a mere reflection of our subjective tastes.

The first step to locating value in the fabric of the world, according to McDowell, lies in abandoning the claim that value is objective. The fundamental mistake of theorists in the past has been to conflate the thesis that value is in the world with the thesis that value is objective. McDowell is responding to thinkers like J. L. Mackie, who in his book *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, advances the position that the objective world excludes phenomenal properties like affective states. Mackie maintains that the objective

[39]John McDowell, "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World," in *Pleasure, Preference and Value: Studies in Philosophical Aesthetics*, Eva Schaper ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.1.

world consists only in what can be experienced, at least in principle, by everyone. This is a troubling claim for McDowell, because he cannot envision how phenomenal states can be separated out from the experience of sentient beings. According to Mackie, because we are not able to experience the inner mental states of others—literally feel another's pain or experience his or her joy—it would be misconceived to attribute to these things a reality that places them among the furnishings of the world. This is not to say that pain and joy do not exist, for even on Mackie's account affective or secondary properties can be objective. What are not objective, however, are the properties associated with how these properties are *experienced*. This is to say that while tooth aches are an objective fact in the world, what it is *like* to *experience* a toothache is not. Despite the degree to which this claim may appeal to common sense, McDowell thinks it has short-changed the ontology of our world.

It is often said that value cannot be part of the objective world because an undeniable variation of values occurs from one community to another. According to this line of thought, there is no basis on which to claim one set of values over another, leaving relativism to rule. In short, we have no basis on which to claim that any of the competing values are true or genuinely reflective of the world. It is important to recognize, however, that variation in value is not the same as disagreement over value. We can be pluralistic about values without succumbing to relativism. Moreover, our ability to apprehend value does not stand in the face of our ability to acknowledge that there are values other than, or in opposition to, our own. The truth of this claim is demonstrated by our acknowledgment and occasional appreciation of aesthetic works from other cultures.

In a sophisticated attempt to revise relativism, Mackie suggests that variation in values indicate different ways of life. The perpetuation of value in the world should not be interpreted as implying that perceptions of objective values are ubiquitous. On the contrary, just because practically everyone clams to perceive value in the world does not mean it is there to be perceived. Rather the "perception" of value is part of "our way of life," and while value claims may be informative with respect to our way of life, they are not informative with respect to the fabric of the world. This, however, is not a new idea. Both Kant and Wittgenstein maintain that there are deep similarities between aesthetics and ethics in the degree to which they confront us as given in the world. They also agree that the power to judge aesthetic value is part of our way of life. According to Kant, the common sense, or *sensus communis,* that is the aesthetic power of judgment deserves to be called a shared sense more than our intellectual one.[40]

According to Mackie, the values we "see" in the world are a result of our way of life; not, as others are want to claim, merely disagreements in our perceptions of objective values. The connection between aesthetic values and our way of life is echoed in Wittgenstein's writings in aesthetics as well: "the words we call expressions of aesthetic judgment play a very complicated role, but a very definite role, in what we call a culture of a period . . . to describe their use or to describe what you mean by a cultured taste, you have to describe a culture."[41] Unfortunately, Mackie's explanation is too quick to deny that these properties are part of the fabric of the world. While it may be true that

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[40]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment,* Werner S. Pluhar trans., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987), p. 162.

[41]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, Cyril Barett ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press), p.8.

we may have a cultural sensitivity which allows us to perceive aesthetic values, this does not necessarily preclude the possibility that these values are actually there in the world. Mackie's argument, therefore, falls back into a simple prejudice against the possibility of subjective properties existing in the world.

Phenomenologically speaking, sense value is incompatible with an objective world; you cannot divorce "what something feels like" from either a particular feeler or subjective feeling. According to the subjectivist, or other error theorists like Mackie, the feeling of being amused does not exist in the world, but this position presupposes a limited understanding of what constitutes the objective world. There are good reasons to support the claim that the purely objective status of the world has little meaning for us because we can never know it and because the world according to "the view from nowhere" is nothing short of meaningless. McDowell is quick to concede "there would indeed be something weird (to put it mildly) about the idea of a property which, while retaining the 'phenomenal' character of experienced value, was conceived to be part of the world as objectively characterized."[42] At the same time, there is also good reason to believe in a more experientially-based conception of the world, where secondary qualities are seen as existing in the world, independent from our experiences of them. This would amount to asserting that all the qualities of the apple—as red, somewhat spherical in shape, and sweet—actually exist on a par directly in the apple itself.

Certainly we can experience aesthetic values, but can we abstract from our experience of these values to conceive of them existing in the world independently of our

[42]McDowell, "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World," p.4.

experience of them? One thinker who answers this question in the affirmative is Bernard Williams. In the words of McDowell, "What Williams calls the 'the absolute conception of reality' is something arrived at by extending the conception of the world as it is in itself so as to encompass and be able to explain the various appearances."[43] The problem with traditional conceptions of the appearance/reality divide has been a heavy handedness when it came to over classifying the world in terms of appearance. The problem is that either we take stock of all the appearances, which leaves us without a determinate picture of the world, or we claim to have access to a determinate picture of the world, which is ultimately nothing more than favoring of one set of appearances over all others. Opting for the latter would leave us forever plagued by the worry that we may have picked the wrong set. In the words of McDowell,

> The idea that we have a transparent mode of access to reality can permit us to . . . claim to have, if not "a determinate picture of what the world is like independent of any knowledge or representation in thought," at least a determinate picture of a determinate picture of what the world is like in itself.[44]

The success of the absolute conception of the world—the observer-independent objective conception of reality—can be arrived at not through a consensus, but rather through explanatory power. To supply an account of "reality" our conception of the world must

[43]Ibid, p.7.

[44]Ibid, p.8.

"embrace and explain the particular points of view it transcends."[45] Williams warns us against thinking that subjective properties can be dissociated from objects in the world, as though we need not think of an object as actually possessing such properties. If subjective properties are not connected with objects in the world, then how can they figure into our experience? It's one thing to say we are the ones who project these properties onto the world, it is quite another thing to provide an account of how these properties arise in our experience without connecting them to the objects in which our experience is absorbed.

What exactly is taking place when we attempt to incorporate states of consciousness (affective states) into an objective conception of the world? We talk about experiences as though they are things among other things. We place them into the fabric of our conception of the world, but what does it mean to think about someone's experience of pain as though it can be located in the world? The consciousness of others may be located in the world, but are the contents of affective states? How could we even conceive of a world which includes the contents of someone else's conscious states? I do not have access to the conscious state of another, I only have access to my own conscious states, and so what does it mean for me to posit the conscious state of another as part of my conception of the world? The answer to this question, according to Williams, can be captured in the phrase: "for me it is so for A."[46] In other words, I image my experience of pain and attribute that experience to A. McDowell admits that this may yield a third-person account, but resists the suggestion that this is sufficient when it comes to the

[45]Ibid, p.9.

[46]Ibid, p.12.

objective view. In the end, the third-person account will ultimately fail to provide a transparent mode of accessing reality.

The other account McDowell takes on as purporting to capture reality "as it is in itself," is the scientific view of inquiry. According to McDowell, it is nothing short of a "philosopher's fantasy" to suppose that science can give us a scientific or "Archimedean point" of view that can serve as a base-line against which to compare representations of the world. Contributing to the seductive nature of the scientific point of view is a rampant amnesia in the face of the fact that what we believe to be the most reliable methods for accessing knowledge about the world are themselves products of—not antecedents to—our beliefs about how the world is. This is further underscored by the fact that the methods we hold up as means for accessing the world are themselves part of the world from which they purport to provide knowledge. The scientific world view was developed for instrumental reasons and favored for its explanatory power. Thus, an Archimedean point of view is ultimately relativistic in nature; it is the view of reality that appeals to us the most, or as our standpoint relative to other possible standpoints. This would not be such a problem if we could just give up the conviction "that there ought to be, so to speak, an 'Archimedean' meaning that we could confer on the words 'objectively speaking.'"[47] We need to stop insisting that we can speak intelligibly about "objectivity" and embrace the fact that, in McDowell's words, "all our assessments of truth are made from the standpoint of a 'conceptual system' that is inescapably our own .

[47]Ibid, p.14.

. . it is pointless to chafe at the fact that what we believe is what *we* believe."[48] And furthermore, that we justify beliefs with further beliefs should not undermine our confidence in these beliefs.

In conclusion, the scientific or Archimedean point of view does not provide us with a window with which to peer out of the house of appearance into the nature of reality. What recommends the scientific view is not a metaphysical necessity, but rather that our way of life seems to find the scientific point of view the most appealing account of reality. The scientific view may be the most appealing and complementary to our way of life, but this does not mean it can claim to provide a truly "objective" picture of reality. Neither McDowell nor I want to advocate abandoning the scientific view; rather we should supplement this view with the understanding that our notion of the world is actually a metaphysical one. The implication this carries for aesthetic properties is that they need not be objective in order to be part of the fabric of the world. In the words of McDowell, "If we can disconnect the notion of the world (or its fabric or furniture) from that notion of objectivity, then we make it possible to consider different interpretations of the claim that value is part of the world."[49] Accomplishing this feat—providing an account for the possibility of aesthetic properties to adhere in the world—further opens up the possibility to confront what, according to McDowell, is the more interesting issue, namely "a plausible connection between the experience of aesthetic value in particular, which might be summed up in the question: 'How can a mere *feeling* constitute an

[48]Ibid, p.14.

[49]Ibid, p.16.

experience in which the world reveals itself to us?'"[50] Stated somewhat differently, is it possible to have knowledge of something if that thing is experienced by us as a *mere* feeling? Although it's one thing to claim that all knowing is accompanied by feeling, it is another thing entirely to say a mere sensation can, in itself, be a form of knowing.

### 2.2.1 Feeling Meaning: A Brief Investigation into Sensing and Sense

Can feelings access, reveal or read meaning into or from the nature of the world? Stated in another way: is it possible for the world to reveal itself to us in the form of a feeling? I believe the answer to both of these questions is yes. In the *Principles of Psychology*, James remarks on the "feeling" that accompanies meaning. James tells us that "we feel [a word's] meaning as it passes," and that,

> There is not a conjunction or preposition, and hardly an adverbial phrase, syntactic form, or inflection of voice, in human speech, that does not express some shading or other of relation which we at some moment actually feel to exist between the larger objects of our thought . . . we ought to say a feeling of *and*, and feeling of *it*, a feeling of *but* and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of blue or a feeling of cold.[51]

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[50]Ibid, p.16.

[51]William James, *Principles of Psychology, Vol. 1*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1890), p.281, 245-6.

Wittgenstein corroborates on this phenomenon in his contemplation of the feeling accommodating the word "if." Both thinkers seem to suggest that every instance of meaning has a feel; e.g., that there is a phenomenal side that accompanies "and" by synaesthesially capturing the essential meaning or feeling of conjunction.

If the senses of words carry their own feel, certainly the same is true for sentences. But does the feeling we associate with a sentence have anything in common with the feeling we might associate with painting or music? According to Wittgenstein, it does:

> What we call "understanding a sentence" has, in many cases, a much greater similarity to understanding a musical theme than we might be inclined to think . . . but I don't mean that understanding a musical theme is more like the picture which one tends to make oneself of understanding a sentence; but rather that this picture is wrong, and that understanding a sentence is much more like what really happens when we understand a tune than at first sight appears.[52]

The way music speaks to us is bodily. We may feel possessed by the tune or be carried away by the melody. There is a way in which music speaks only to us, a sense in which our experience of it seems personal. There is often a strong compulsion to think or feel that music is speaking directly to us, as if its effects on us are somehow unique. The

[52]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1958), p.167.

personal character that the experience of music can so acutely induce may be akin to what Wittgenstein is after when he refers to the ways in which understanding is private or what Wittgenstein refers to when he says, "'meaning it' is something in the sphere of the mind. . .but it is also something private! . . it is the intangible something, only comparable to consciousness itself. . . it is, as it were, a dream of our language."[53] On this score, art has more in common with language than is commonly credited.

It is nothing more than "a dream of our aesthetics" to claim that in creating a work of art, the artist attempts to pass along an "intangible something" that is the private sense of feeling the artist experiences in "meaning" the work or that my experience of a work of art is somehow uniquely my own. Claiming that there is something metaphysically private in the meaning of a work of art is akin to making claims about Wittgenstein's beetle in a box. The meaning behind the work of art cannot be a private mental meaning. Wittgenstein has continually demonstrated that what we think of as the private is actually a product of the public. The contents of our inner life are shaped by the language we speak as the necessarily social system of signs in which we find ourselves. This is not, however, to deny the importance of aesthetic feeling, but rather to further stress its significance.

Kant also addresses the power of feeling in relation to the meaning of art by directly associating the aesthetic idea with "a feeling of which quickens our cognitive powers and connects language, which otherwise would be mere letters, with spirit."[54]

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[53]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations 3rd ed.*. G.E.M. Anscombe trans., (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1958), p.358.

[54]According to Kant, the Aesthetic idea "is a presentation of the imagination which is conjoined with a given concept and is connected, when we use imagination in its freedom, with such a multiplicity of partial

The feeling associated with the aesthetic idea is what discloses meaning; it is the life behind the words that strive to articulate it. According to Kant, fine art has the purpose of arousing pleasure which accompanies presentations that are ways of cognizing. The feeling associated with the aesthetic experience is a pleasure of reflection, not sensation, which connects the animating principle in the mind (i.e., spirit) with language, furthering the cultivation of our mental powers to facilitate social communication.

For Casey, the aesthetic feeling associated with the work of art is indicated by the "thetic" character of the object phase of imagination as characterized by pure possibility, where the imagination hits upon something that reveals the presence of pure possibility in the world. This feeling can be characterized by the collision of an intentional object of the imagination with an informative window into the nature of the world. Because the content is not clearly defined, as it would be if it were focused on an object in the world, we come to know and identify it by its feeling as opposed to its content.

Casey may have captured the feel of this insight, but it was Sartre who articulated the form of knowing that underlies the feeling. In his exposition of the analogon, Sartre provides an account for the imagined synthesis that is the transition from the work of art to an aesthetic object of the imagination. Sartre presents a unified theory of aesthetic appreciation as imaginative experience. The sensory pleasure gained from arrangements of colors and shapes on a canvas, he argues, should not be confused with the aesthetic pleasure gained from experiencing an imaginary object through the canvas. The artist

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presentations that no expression that stands for a determinate concept can be found for it. . . . hence it is a presentation that makes us add to a concept the thoughts of much that is ineffable, but the feeling of which quickens our cognitive powers and connects language, which otherwise would be mere letters, with spirit." Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p.185.

presents the audience with an analogon, a canvas through which the audience can imaginatively apprehend the aesthetic object itself. The feeling that accompanies the analogon is not purely sensory; it is the feeling of opening up to meaning.

Is, however, the philosophical framework discussed in the last chapter on artistic creativity (i.e., creativity as the discovery of a universal object) equipped to accommodate this sense of aesthetic feeling? According to G. L. Hagberg, if the universal object discovered in the creative act is comparable to a mental idea and, therefore, the theory a covert form of Idealism, then the answer to this question would be no. Hagberg acknowledges that initially Idealism,

> promises much in the explanation of art, but it is a promise made under the illusion that there exist simple and direct correspondences, in language, between thinking and saying, and in art, between thinking and creating. . . Wittgenstein said that "the language is itself the vehicle of thought" . . . to employ the analogy between art and language in another way, we might say . . . that the materials are themselves the vehicles of art.[55]

Hagberg's critique of creativity as the discovery of mental universals would be damning if my theory of creativity was actually a closeted form of Idealism, but it's not. The theory of creativity I wish to advance is designed to highlight the unique ability of creative objects to function like universals; creativity as universal discovery does not rely

[55]G. L. Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p.49.

on the transmission or intuition of a universal form or an innate idea to the embodiment of this form as an artwork in the world. If this were the case, there would be a problem with the loss of information between unlike mediums. Moreover, unlike Platonism, which places universals and objects in the world at odds with one another, the theory I'm advocating for would admit not only objects in the world, but find among these objects the presence of a certain universal quality. In my mind the real burden, and the one I wish to meet, consists in providing an account for how a particular object can possess a universal property.

### 2.2.2 Artistic Genius

On a practical level, the insight or inspiration that strikes an artist prompting them to create a work of art does not need to be translated into the form of an artwork. On the contrary, the guiding force or motivating inspiration for an artist to create a particular work arises from the pre-established semiotic structures of recognized meaning that populate our world. The shift I am attempting to make is away from a conception of universals where the artist is merely the vehicle for the transmission of forms and where the forms exist outside of the intentionality and imagination of the artist. The version of creativity as universal object I endorse preserves the integrity of the artist and demonstrates that creation in the strong sense is compatible with discovery.

Of course, it would be misleading to characterize the creative power as private;

artists do not create in a vacuum. What is actually taking place is a co-creative process between artist and audience. The audience is part of the social system of meaning and it is through audience participation in this semiotic structure that the matrix of meaning is maintained. Through his participation in his community, with an eye toward giving back to it, the artist is able to foresee the possibility for new expressions of meaning. *New* expressions of meaning, therefore, are not *novel* insofar as they rely upon the established structure of meaning upheld by a particular society. The commonality that perpetuates between different semiotic systems through time and across cultures also creates the potential for an artist to successfully create a meaningful work that endures over time and across cultures. This serves to further underscore the point McDowell was trying to make: aesthetic values are not only part of our culture, but part of the fabric of our world, representing our way of life.

The co-creative efforts of artist and audience in creating an aesthetic object that is created through an act of discovery can be illustrated by the artist who finds a tree branch and places it on a pedestal to be appreciated as a work of art. Let us imagine that the branch in this instance can be further appreciated for its quality of looking like a statue of an old man. The branch and the connection with the old man are both rooted in creativity and discovery. The finding is a creative act. The quality of the physical object itself, although unchanged, has ontologically shifted in the act of co-creation. What is most remarkable about this process is the *lack* of communication between artist and audience who are the co-creators in the making of this work of art: a making that is also a discovery.

What power underlies the artist's capacity to introduce meaning into the world,

which simultaneously relies upon the unwitting collaboration of others? Emerson describes the powers of genius: "whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist . . . nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."[56] But, Emerson goes on to say, genius also carries the expectation for the universal acceptability of one's ideas:

> To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men—that is genius . . . speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost . . . genius is the ability to discover what seem to be new ideas and the ability to communicate those discoveries with complete success to others.[57]

Genius, following Emerson, is the unique ability to dig deep into the self to uncover truths that are not private, but public. This conception of the public originating in that which has been considered to be the most private (i.e., the creative efforts of an artist) is treated extensively in Kant's work of genius. "Genius is the innate mental predisposition (*ingenium*) *through which* nature gives the rule to art," Kant tells us in the *Critique of Judgment.*[58] The "rule" nature gives to art can be thought of more in terms of a foundation. That the artwork is meaningful is guaranteed by the fact that the possibility for it derives from nature. In other words, the artist is not introducing a work that reflects

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[56]Emerson, quoted by Paul Guyer in "Exemplary Originality: Genius, Universality, and Individuality" in *The Creation of Art: New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 123.
[57]Ibid, p. 123.

[58]Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, paragraph 46, p.174.

a private meaning of his own, but rather a work that reflects what previously was just a pure possibility in the "natural" system of meaning that is the world. The rule for art comes from neither artist nor artworld; the rule comes from nature, an expression of a possibility that was always there to be realized, not the construction of a mind in isolation or an introduction furnished by an institution (such as the artworld).

Although the resonance between Kant's theory of genius and my own theory of artistic creativity as universal discovery is fairly apparent, Kant seems to distance himself from any notion of the creative object as universal with his insistence that "the foremost property of genius must be originality."[59] The sense of "originality" in this context is the opposite of "imitation" or following a formula in the production of an artwork. The curious thing about the originality at work in genius is that it leaves the artist at a complete loss to explain how it is they "came by" the ideas for their work. There is, however, a feeling or "animating principle of the mind" that quickens the soul and "imparts to the mental powers a purposive momentum; i.e., imparts to them a play which is such that it sustains itself on its own and even strengthens the powers for such play."[60] This principle, of course, is the ability to exhibit aesthetic ideas, which are presentations of the imagination.

For Kant, the artist must create a work that is an expression of his own freedom of imagination. Moreover, understanding works of art should encourage the free play of imagination and understanding in the audience and should find their rule in nature. Of course, creating a work that engages the imagination of others and embodies the

[59]Ibid, paragraph 46, p.175.

[60]Ibid, paragraph 49, p.182.

metaphysical influx of meaning is no easy feat. In the words of Alexander Gerard,

> The fertility of imagination that constitutes genius is rare, but it is a rare talent to invent conceptions which, once invented, 'we are apt to think . . . must have occurred to almost any person,' that is, conceptions that can be counted on readily to find wide acceptance, free of any taint of idiosyncrasy that might reduce their appeal to an audience limited by time, place, interest, or its own talent.[61]

The motivating force driving an artist to create a particular work of art may not be intellectual or conceptual; it could be more bodily rooted in terms of being sensual and felt. Accounting for how the desire to create can be so strong in artists when the object underling their intention to create a work of art can be so indeterminate has been a great problem for philosophy and artists alike. My proposal that the object towards which creative intentionality and imagination is directed functions like a universal allows us to account for how there can be such a strong guiding force in the absence of a clear mental image without reducing artworks to the serendipity of chance involved in the material process of bringing the work into being. On the one hand, my consideration of the artwork as an object with universal properties allows for a great degree of indeterminacy and vagueness in terms of artistic intentions. On the other hand, my theory admits a strong degree of precision in terms of proving a measure by which to gage the degree the artwork has "gotten it right" in the end. This is not to say that there is an actual

[61]Alexander Gerard, quoted by Paul Guyer in "Exemplary Originality: Genius, Universality, and Individuality," p.120.

comparison between a particular artwork and a universal taking place, but rather that through contemplation of the particular artwork one can assess the degree to which it strikes one as necessary, accurate, or could not have been otherwise. The mark of genus is the ability to negotiate ambiguity and indeterminacy to bringing about the clearest possible expression of the universal nature inherent in a particular work of art.

## 2.3 Chapter Conclusion: The Significance of Intentionality and Aesthetic Value

Creativity is traditionally interpreted as a private process that engages the unique imagination and personal intentions of an artist. I do not wish to deny the significance of individuality in the creative process. The Sistine Chapel could not have been created by just anyone, it could only have emanated from Michelangelo's unique variety of genius. The Sistine Chapel reflects the presence of a brilliant talent, but it also reflects an entire conventional system of representation, and a rather tormented relationship between one man and the church. The ceiling might be the product of an individual, but this individual is deeply infused by a particular culture at a particular time within the larger context of an elaborate semiotic system of established forms of representation and meaning. Now it may appear as though I am eagerly committing what some have called the "intentional fallacy" by saying that the Sistine Chapel can only be understood within its larger context of artist, society, and human semiotic structures. This would depend, however, on how the "fallacy" is interpreted. If the "fallacy" lies in prioritizing biographical information about the artist over the presentation of the artwork in the interpretation of the works' meaning, then I may be persuaded to see it as an actual fallacy. The main source of my unease with the claim underlying the charge of the "intentional fallacy," however, is the presumption that artists' intentions, social influences, and the larger framework of human forms of signification and representation all lie *outside* the work of art. The flaw in the "fallacy," therefore, is its failure to

adequately search within the bounds of the work to reveal the presence of what has too hastily been deemed external to the work.

The closest analogy to making a work of art can be found in crafting a metaphor. Both metaphors and works of art exercise the ability to use the common to the ends of achieving the uncommon. Understanding a metaphor requires a movement beyond the established meaning of words to a deeper meaning that at once relies upon the literal meaning and transcends this meaning. An elaboration of meaning that incorporates two distinct levels of interpretation; the power of metaphorical meaning has more in common with feeling than it does with linguistic expression. The possibility to craft such a powerful literary trope is necessarily grounded in a socially established system of signs; metaphor is not the private expression of an individual mind. The most essential quality of language is its social nature. The metaphor may be crafted by an individual, but it is the expression of a collective. For this reason, metaphor is one of the best illustrations of how that which is most public underlies and enables that which is most private.

Works of art function metaphorically on many levels and often play on the fluctuation between private feelings and social meaning. Originating in the unique individuality of an artist's creativity, the work of art at first appears to be the expression of a particular consciousness. Similarly, the experience of a work of art often takes on a very personal character. A work of visual art or music can make me *feel* a certain way. The power of art to inspire feeling over explicit interpretations of meaning has led many theorists to suggest meaning in art is purely subjective. I would like to assert the opposite: the fact that works of art "speak" to us in a manner that feels so private—affecting our emotions, minds, and bodies with a feeling that is uniquely an aesthetic

experience—actually recommends the objective status of meaning in art. Swinging the pendulum away from the private origins and ends of artworks in their creation and reception, I would like to move toward the recognition of artworks as instantiations of universals and embrace the implications this claim carries with it.

What I am advocating for is a new consideration of what I am calling the universal object conception of creativity. The connection between the intentionality and imagination of the artist in the creative act is not a private sense of intentionality. In creating a work of art, an artist is not introducing a new form of private language, but *discovering* a new way of making meaning in the world. The move from creation to discovery marks the move away from the mythic unintelligibility of art to unveiling the basis of the arts in the larger framework of the semiotic system of meaning that is our way of life. This means abandoning the conception of the artist as oracle who intuitively seeks out new possibilities for the extension of meaning in the world. The limits of these possibilities are provided by the society in which we live and the established semiotic structures that make up our way of life. For this reason, the extension of meaning marks the discovery of a new means to extend or manipulate the established structure.

Because artistic creativity is rooted in discovery, the products of this creativity express meaning that occupies a direct connection with social forms of intelligibility. In creating a work of art, an artist uses public means to express that which is most private. The audience of the artwork, by contrast, uses private means to experience that which is most public. Hence the contradictory synthesis, which underlies aesthetic objects: the writer of the metaphor uses public words to express his or her private feelings and the reader uses private feelings to experience public words. In order for this contradictory

synthesis to exist there must be a connection between feeling and meaning: that which is most private and that which is most public.

In order to interpret a sentence or passage as metaphorical the reader must take the intentionality of the artist into consideration as representing an intention to speak figuratively. The metaphor is there for everyone and in that sense it is public, but it requires the positing of an individual consciousness that is inextricable from the private. The success of metaphorical meaning relies not only on affirming the relationship between the personal intentionality of the writer to the page, but also on the personal feeling of the reader. Metaphorical meaning is never cashed out in linguistic expressions; on an essential level it can only be *felt*. It was an intuition of this feeling that led the artist to uncover the formulation for the metaphor in the first place. The artist is not first in possession of this feeling, only to subsequently search for a way to express it. Rather, the artist *intuits* the feeling and by this I mean the artist intuits the possibility for a new formulation of meaning that can most accurately be summarized as a feeling. Once the "divination process" is complete, and the new form of meaning is discovered, the full extent of the feeling can reveal itself. The audience engages the public formulation of written language on a page and is taken from the public to the private in (1) the intuition of the artist's intention to speak metaphorically, and (2) the experience of this metaphorical meaning as a feeling.

Thus, the importance of intentionality in art cannot be denied. The imagination of the artist directly provokes the imagination of the audience through the vehicle of the artwork. Not only do both parties employ their imagination in the creation of the work of art, together they *create* the possibility for the work. Aesthetic experience moves beyond

seeing or reading, taking us to a deeper level of meaning that is an awareness of an unrealized possibility in the matrix of meaning. In this sense, all works are the products of a co-creative effort on behalf of artists and their audiences. The "private" experience of the artist is essentially a "public" action; the audience is anticipated in the making and required for the success of the work. Because the possibility for new forms of meaning take root in the established semiotic structure of our world, discovering a possibility necessarily carries with it an appeal to social intelligibility. I believe this is what Wittgenstein was alluding to when he said that aesthetics should not be concerned with beauty, but rather with "getting it right."

To engage a work of art is to confront a possibility. The indeterminacy in the work attracts and engages the imagination of the viewer. For Sartre, of course, it is not the indeterminacy of the work that the captures the attention of the observer, but rather the work as it serves as an analagon to bring the viewer in contact with some real thing or person through the work. I would like to purpose that these two different perspectives on the nature of the creative object can be brought together under the universal object theory of creativity. The thing about grasping universal significance is that it may be extremely ambiguous, only clearly identified by contrast to that which it is not, as opposed to being grasped by direct definition. Because we often do not have a well defined discrete content to attribute to the nature of the universal object, we often know it affectively or, as Casey would say, by its "thetic" character.

The thetic character of a work of art is created by the collision of perception and the imagination. This exemplifies the special ability of a work of art to engage the imagination of the observer to the degree that the imagination surpasses even perception

in the experience of the work. The contradictory synthesis in our experience of a work of art is this play between the imagination and perception and the presentation to imagining consciousness an object that is at once real and absent. When I look at a portrait I see a portrait and I directly access the person in the portrait. In viewing a portrait I therefore make present that which is absent and hold it together with that which is present. In this way, the work of art can be said to hold its own "beyond." Thus, by virtue of the fact that works of art engage our imagining consciousness, they are able to express properties that exist outside the realm of possibility for ordinary objects.

McDowell enjoins us to consider that aesthetic value and properties reside in the fabric of our world. Aesthetic experience confronts us as an experience with value. We have been quick to discount aesthetic value-laden experience and aesthetic properties on the basis that they are not objective, and hence not real. The problem with this way of thinking lies in the nature of what we take to be the meaning of "objective." The idea that what is real is what can be experienced by everyone and can, therefore, be deemed objective is simply erroneous. If we insist on an "objective" account of aesthetic properties to determine which properties can be said to inhere in the actual work verses which properties are merely reflections of our own projections onto the work, the picture we create will horribly short-change the actual nature of our reality. Aesthetic properties need not be "objective" in order to be ontologically grounded. Aesthetic properties and experiences of value are not merely aspects of "our way of life" as Mackie maintains, but actually inhere in the world, independent of our experiences of them. Perhaps the ultimate irony is that even our bias for "objectivity" and the scientific viewpoint is a reflection of our aesthetics, namely the demonstration of our preference for one

conceptual system over another.

In the end, the significance of aesthetic value and meaning may have more in common with affective states and feelings than we realize. Certainly our aesthetic feelings possess more meaning and significance than we typically give them credit. There is a way in which art speaks directly to the body to convey information. In many ways we are fore-most sensing organisms and artworks are uniquely endowed with the ability to cause rich meaningful experiences in us. The meaning in aesthetic value cannot be accurately represented by a mystical experience of transference between the subjective states and intentions of an artist and the subjective states and affectations of an observer. Rather, aesthetic meaning is the discovery and public accessibility of significance in a new form of socially contextualized meaning. We can call it a "feeling meaning," a quickening of the senses, a thetic character, or the presence of an analogon, but the point remains: artistic intention and aesthetic significance are not subjective properties merely imposed onto the surface of our world, but rather profound qualities that inhere deeply into the very fabric of our existence. At the end of the day, meaning and feeling are inextricably intertwined on both sides of aesthetic creativity. In order to spell out the intricacies of the creative process that enable the connection between meaning and feeling, I will turn now to investigate the connection between perceiving (specifically seeing) and reading.

# CHAPTER 3
# SEEING

## 3.0 Introduction

This chapter on the nature of seeing represents the first step in a three-part inquiry into the relation between seeing, reading, and the ambiguous status of the object of creative and interpretive intention. Following a corresponding chapter dedicated to reading, the culmination of this investigation will be drawn out in a final chapter entitled "Seeing-as and Reading-In." The goal of this investigation is to re-evaluate the sharp distinction between the act and experience of seeing, on the one hand, and the act and experience of reading, on the other. One of the main jobs of this chapter on visual perception, in keeping with this general agenda, is to highlight the concept-casting active-interpretive reading-like elements of visual experience, debunking the myth of "passive thoughtless reception of raw data" through vision. If we can show that, not in spite of, but because of the imagination-laden, conceptual, integrative character of visual experience, what is seen, like what is read, could be discovered as part of the living human objective world, then, hopefully, the age-old enmity between realism and creative imagination may begin to heal.

On an elementary level, seeing and reading are similar in that they both consist in visual experiences (unless, of course, one is reading Braille). Where seeing and reading are thought to differ, however, is the degree to which these two activities and abilities use

and depend on concepts. In order to have successfully read something, one must achieve a conceptual understanding for what one has read. Reading, as it is generally conceived, is active-interpretive and directly concerned with inventing, imposing, or carving out meaning. Compare this description to your understanding of seeing: would you be comfortable characterizing seeing in the same way? Would it be correct to say that in order to have successfully seen something, one must understand the content of what they have seen? An affirmative response to this question draws our theoretical understanding of seeing and reading close together, while a negative response (the standard answer) places a gulf between them.

In the Cambridge dictionary of philosophy, Fred Dretske tells us, in the beginning of his entry on "perception," that different stages of perception can be clearly distinguished corresponding to (1) the initial perception of objects and events and (2) the subsequent perception of the facts about these objects. In short, Dretske is drawing a distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic perception, which entails the curious claim that, in non-epistemic perception, "seeing an object (or event)—a cat on the sofa, a person on the street, or a vehicle's movement—does not require that the object (event) be identified or recognized in any particular way (perhaps . . . in any way whatsoever)."[62] In other words, according to this definition, which I will hereafter refer to as the "dictionary definition of perception," the first moment of perception (often referred to as primary perception) is prior to, and untouched by, the introduction of concepts and need not be characterized in any way whatsoever.

[62] Fred Dretski, "Perception," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Robert Audi ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.569.

The idea of a pre-cognitive form of primary perception has long been attractive to philosophers because it provides a psychological account of vision when, by contrast, perception involving knowledge of facts and beliefs requires the invocation of the entire cognitive system, including memory and concepts. For this reason, a theory of non-epistemic perception safeguards against the threat of perceptual relativity: the claim that the contents of perception are relative to the observer's linguistic and cognitive capacities. The theoretical division between epistemic and non-epistemic perception allows us to maintain that our knowledge, concepts, and memories do not influence or determine the content of our perceptual experience, but merely the contents of what we claim to know or say about our experiences.

I agree that we can perceive objects and properties we lack words for, but is it accurate to say that we can perceive objects and properties of which we lack any conceptual understanding whatsoever? It is one thing to say that we can misidentify what it is we see, it is another thing entirely to say that we can see without identifying ("perhaps in any way whatsoever") what it is we see. Dretske maintains that initial, or primary, perception is a form of the latter, non-epistemic variety of perception, but he only provides evidence, in the form of examples, for the former, epistemic, albeit fallible, perception. I admit that someone without any knowledge of cats can have the same basic perceptual experience of a cat on the sofa as a cat aficionado. I also admit that the content of this perceptual experience is not altered if the person in question misidentifies the cat as a dog. The claim I have difficulty with, however, is that anyone, cat savvy or not, can have a perceptual experience that does not consist in identifying, to some degree, what it is they see. Presumably children perceive colors and shapes before learning the

names for these properties, but isn't the *perception* of different qualities really the *identification* of different qualities? Dretske wants to defend a theory of primary, non-epistemic perception that is non-linguistic and nonconceptual. In the chapter that follows, I will argue against this idea of non-epistemic perception to the degree that I believe primary perception is conceptual, with the caveat that the conceptual content of perception need not be linguistically structured.

Dretske believes the conceptualization of perception comes from the introduction of names to objects and marks the transition from non-epistemic object perception to epistemic fact perception. By contrast, I intend to develop a theory that grounds concept formation in the fabric of the world itself, preceding even the introduction of linguistic categories. The key to accentuating the differences between our respective theories lies in demonstrating why it is we cannot be said to have the power of sight in the absence of some degree of conceptual understanding of what it is we see. Of course we can always be wrong about what it is we think we are seeing or we can lack the words to describe what it is we see, but whether our "knowledge claim" corresponds to facts of the matter in the world is not as pressing a problem as trying to account for what it would mean to see without possessing any degree of recognition for what one is seeing.

Another reason why I believe we need to abandon what I am calling here the "dictionary conception" of primary perception is because it isolates the content of the different senses in experience, making it necessary to provide an explanation for the basis on which we ascribe the contents of different sensory experiences to the same object in

the world.[63] After all, if the sensations from my different sensory faculties are experienced by me as discretely unique, then on what level can I claim they share a common objective source in the world? In other words, how do I know it is the same apple I both see and touch when the sensory input indicates that I am experiencing two radically different objects? In the chapter that follows I intend to demonstrate not only why concepts come from the world and precede the individual's acquisition of language, but why concept-enriched accounts of primary perception must necessarily precede what ultimately is an ad-hoc intellectual separation of the senses. Far from striking us as distinctly unique separate sensory experiences, we perceptually experience objects as sensory wholes. Moreover, the existence of trans-modal unified object perception is evidenced by the trans-modal nature of our concepts and conceptual organization of the world.

In terms of methodology and in an effort to answer the question of what constitutes an act of primary perception, we shall digress, in this chapter, into the problem of determining how much one can be expected to "see" if and when a long-standing blindness is reversed. The justification for this path comes, in part, from the obvious obstacle of impenetrability involved in investigating the form of perception experienced by prelinguistic individuals. A clear virtue of investigating the introduction of vision to the blind is that these individuals have a fully developed conceptual framework to pull from for identifying or recognizing their newly won visual contents. Of course, if primary perception is nonconceptual, then we should not expect the newly

[63]"There are characteristic experiences associated with the different senses. . . a causal theory of perception (of objects holds that the perceptual object, what it is we see, taste, smell, or whatever, is that object that causes us to have this subjective experience." Ibid., p.569.

sighted individual to be able to identify or recognize visual objects at all. By contrast, if the previously blind individual does prove capable of identifying and reporting on the nature of visual objects, this would suggest that primary perception is actually conceptual in nature.

Investigating the power of sight in individuals who have lived a great part of their lives without it has the additional advantage of bringing to the fore the connection between the faculties of sight and (active, haptic) touch. As previously stated, the traditional conception of primary perception entails a separation of the senses based on radically contrasting content. To confuse the contents of vision and touch is to commit a category mistake akin to asking what the color blue feels like. According to the traditional theory, the experiences and objects of the senses are so different that the connection between them can only be learned through experience. In other words, it is through experience that I come to learn that a particular smell, appearance, feel, and taste all belong to the same object I call an "apple." In the chapter that follows, I intend to demonstrate that the dictionary definition of perception is incorrect and prove that, despite the fact that our sensory experiences take on distinctly separate characters, the separation of sensory content is more apparent than real. According to the traditional theory, a newly sighted individual would be unable to draw any assistance in identifying objects of perception from the conceptual framework of haptic objects. If, however, the senses are united in primary perception, revealing a world of objects that are experienced as sensory wholes, then we should expect the blind man would not only have some vague notion of the objects populating his vision, he would actually be able to identify them due to the fact that his conceptual knowledge, albeit acquired through the faculty of touch,

would prove applicable to the faculty of sight.

One of the goals in this chapter is to demonstrate that the world is given to us populated with objects that present themselves as sensory wholes that are always experienced, to some degree, in their sensory fullness. I can close my eyes and experience the world without sight, but this does not mean I am experiencing objects without visual properties or that I am ignorant of these properties; the visual is already entailed in the tactile, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory. In terms of the larger scope of my project, the hope is that by coming to a fuller understanding of how and why the same thing can be both touched and seen, we will be in a better position to problematize how and why it is possible for the same thing to be both seen and read. Of course I am not talking about the ink-marks which are trivially both seen and read. I am talking about the thoughts, the meanings, and the significances which animate what is read. It is to these that I want to restore perceivability (without equivocation), not just thinkability. Seeing, then, could be recognized as understanding and conversely understanding as a form of seeing. In the end, the goal of this chapter is to develop a theory of perception that rejects the portrayal of seeing as a nonconceptual immediate experience in favor of a theory of vision that has more in common with reading than previously anticipated. Towards this end I intend to demonstrate how even the most basic acts of visual perception involve a great deal of synthesized understanding and grasping of conceptual meaning.

## 3.1 Molyneux's Question

Imagine a man who is cognitively adequate in every regard aside from the fact that he has been blind since birth. Now, if this man were to suddenly gain the power of sight, would he be able to visually identify the shapes of common objects—like cubes and spheres—or would he continue to be limited to making distinctions like these only through the faculty of touch? This question has been revisited in Western philosophy for over three hundred years, ever since a Frenchman named William Molyneux first posed the question to John Locke in a letter. As has already been discussed, how we respond to this question carries huge implications for the nature of perception and the inter-sensory basis of empirical knowledge. The hope is that this unlikely path towards understanding perception will bring to the fore the often overlooked host of problems surrounding what constitutes an actual instance of seeing. Once again, the goal is to dissolve the myth that seeing is a passive, nonconceptual activity, while resisting the empiricists' claim that when seeing is developed as a skill learned over time, it gets adulterated with non-visual "higher cognitive" elements. Answering Molyneux's question, therefore, can be viewed as a means for shedding light on the common basis for different modes of perception as well as the difference between seeing and reading as it affects our capacity to synthesize information presented in iconic images and linguistic signs.

There are two common ways of interpreting the focus of Molyneux's question as pertaining to either (1) the potential for sight or (2) the potential for shape recognition. The distinction pivots on whether shape recognition should be used as evidence to prove

the presence of vision or whether the presence of vision should be used as a tool to prove the power of shape concept application across sensory modalities. If we take the former, the central question at stake is whether the previously blind man, who already has haptic mastery over the shapes, will be able to *see*, with emphasis placed on the extent of his power of vision as evidenced by his ability to recognize shapes. The second question, by contrast, emphasizes the philosophical implications of the previously blind man's ability, or lack thereof, to *identify* the visual correlates of his shape conceptions. Obviously, this version of the question presumes he possesses the capacity to see and focuses rather on his ability to identify what it is he sees. The real motivation driving this question is to discover whether concepts like "sphere" and "cube" are the same across the different sensory modalities.

If Molyneux's man succeeds in identifying the shapes, the implication would be that the application and understanding of concepts like "sphere" and "cube" are the same in relation to both vision and touch (e.g., the same concept of "cube" is used when describing a line drawing of a box or the feel of a die). If different sensory modalities share the same concepts, then it must belong to the nature of concepts to be either amodal (without modality when it comes to the senses) or transmodal (applying equally across the different sensory modalities). In other words, we can discuss the concept "spherical" without having to indicate whether we intend a tactile or visual notion of spherical because "spherical" encompasses them both. Therefore, despite having had no prior experience with visual objects, Molyneux's man would be able to use his haptic knowledge of shapes when presented with the task of discerning visual shapes.

### 3.1.1 Locke and Berkeley

Locke, and the empiricists who followed him, interpreted Molyneux's question to be about the range and objects of different sense-organs. This led Locke to provide a negative (predictive) answer to the question: will the previously blind person's tactile capacity to recognize a sphere carry over to his first sighting of a sphere? One of the sources of the negative verdict was the belief that perceptual access to the world is not direct, but mediated. For Locke, experience of the world takes place on the level of secondary qualities. All experience is mediated by our senses: we can only know the world indirectly, through our powers of sight, touch, smell, and taste. Therefore, our "knowledge" of the world reflects how skillful we are in the use and mediation of our senses. Not only do the individual senses require development over time, but the ability to communicate between them must be learned as well. Through experience we learn to make associations between the different senses and extend the use of sensory-specific concepts from one modality to another (e.g., the property "fuzzy" has been metaphorically extended to apply to qualities ascribed to each of the senses). Therefore, without time and energy dedicated to learning how to see and how to synthesize the sensations gathered by the senses, the previously blind man would not be able to visually identify shapes known to him through touch.

Some of the basic tenets of empiricism maintain that visual perception is a skill developed through experience over time and that all cooperation and communication between the different senses must also be learned through experience. Locke's answer to

the problem of perception, therefore, also provides an answer the question of concept modality. Even if the subject of Molyneux's experiment did possess the power of sight, he would not be able, simply by transferring data as it were from touch and muscular sensations, to distinguish between the cube and the sphere visually. The haptic knowledge he possessed would never transfer over to enrich his vision. The extension of concepts across the senses would require either skillful induction (a sort of metaphorical application of a concept from one modality to another) or the skillful association of concepts learned through separate empirical applications (e.g., intellectually drawing a connection between the separate concepts of "sphere") acquired independently through the faculties of sight and touch.

Another philosopher who answered Molyneux's question in an emphatic negative was Berkeley. Unlike Locke, Berkeley focused on the second formulation of Molyneux's question, which takes as its focus the ability to identify and articulate the contents of one's visual experience. Berkeley based his answer on what he believed to be the nature of concept possession and denied that there are any common ideas between the senses—to the point of excluding even a shared conception of space. Failing to span the senses, conceptual knowledge is strictly and exclusively tied to the sense from which it derives (e.g., a tactile experience of a sphere forms a tactile concept of "sphere," while a visual experience of a sphere forms a visual concept of "sphere"). Not only are two concepts of "cube" tied to the sensory modes from which they arise, no two concepts share a common resemblance to one another. Berkeley strictly denies the existence of common sensibles and maintains that the qualities presented by each of the senses are entirely and essentially different. The idea that the same qualities span the senses is, for Berkeley,

nothing but a mere abstraction. Suggesting that we can see tactile qualities is no less absurd than suggesting that we can hear or smell tactile properties; in each a category mistake is being committed. The formation of general concepts, by contrast, is the product of abstracting from empirical knowledge. In other words, a general conception of "cube" is an intellectual product created by abstracting from different sensory concepts of cube gained through experience.

In denying the possibility of visual space, Berkeley maintained that the ability to see the world in three dimensions is a skill developed over time through experience. In effect, the only sense that is actually capable of producing an egocentrically based concept of space is touch. According to Berkeley, vision cannot register depth and sound cannot yield a conception of egocentrically based space due to its tendency to collapse or coalesce. Therefore, Molyneux's man would be unable to differentiate between the sphere and the cube because whatever power of vision he has would lack any conception of egocentrically based space. In order for Molyneux's man to make the switch to utilizing a visual concept of space, he would have to form a generalization from his tactile concept. Without any conception of visual space at his disposal, however, the previously blind man would experience something akin to James' "blooming buzzing confusion:" a two dimensional world of confusing colors and variation, completely unlike a spatial field furnished with clearly discernable objects. In Berkeley's own words, "A man born blind, being made to see, would, at first, have no idea of distance by sight; the sun and stars, the remotest objects as well as the nearer, would all seem to be in his eye,

or rather in his mind."[64] If Berkeley is correct, and our sense of (3D) visual space is the highly evolved product of mental abstraction from our tactile sense, then the only thing shared between the visual conception of "sphere" and the tactile conception of "sphere" is the commonality of spelling in the words we use to denote these two concepts.

The goal of this chapter is to construct a compelling rebuttal of both Locke and Berkeley's positions. The reasoning underlying this rebuttal will include not only an argument for the complete amodality of concepts, but also the transmodality of sensory qualities or qualia. What remains to be seen, however, is whether the communication between the sensory modalities can be attributed to the application of concepts across modalities (contra Berkeley) or whether the communication between sensory modalities can be attributed to the existence of an innate, nonconceptual, direct connection between the senses in primary perception (contra Locke).

### 3.1.2 Gareth Evans and John Campbell

The work of Gareth Evans provides us with a different approach to Molyneux's question. According to Evans, the first question is the more difficult one to answer: will Molyneux's man be able to see? An affirmative answer to this question warrants serious skepticism, according to Evans.[65] By contrast, the second question should not prove to

[64]Berkeley, "An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision," in *Philosophical Works Including Works on Vision*, (Vermont: Everyman, 1975), par 41, p.20.

[65]In an effort to limit the difficulties inherent in verifying the actual ability of Molyneux's man to see,

be so difficult. If the newly sighted man does genuinely have the visual experience of the cube and sphere, but is unable to distinguish between them by applying the terms "cube" and "sphere," the proper conclusion to draw is that he is not, after all, in full possession of these concepts. The absurdity of the empiricist's position, which ties all concepts to their original application in a particular sense, becomes apparent, according to Evans, in an analogous example involving a deaf man. Where common opinion may be divided on the projected ability of Molyneux's man to visually distinguish between the cube and sphere based on his knowledge of these concepts in touch, common opinion should be in accord on the projected ability of a previously deaf man to audibly distinguish between pulsating and constant based on his knowledge of these concepts in touch. The connection between "pulsating" in touch and sound seems so obvious that it is hard to imagine that the connection between them must be learned through experience over time. If, by contrast, the deaf man is able to intuitively apply these concepts across different senses without having to undergo separate instances of learning how to apply these concepts, then this would support a positive response to Molyneux's question.

Evans argues against Berkeley's claim that the blind man has no simultaneous space concepts on the premise that only the power of touch can be the basis for a sense of space. Spatial concepts accompany visual presentations, according to Evans, and there is not an unbridgeable gap between visual and tactile spatial concepts because they are both specifiable egocentrically in terms of behavioral space. In Evans' words, "Any visual experience of distinct but spatially related phenomena must consist in the subject's

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Evans has proposed that a more reliable test would be to directly stimulate the brain of a blind man with lighted images of circles and squares to see if he could identify these visual shape impressions.

possession of spatial information specifiable in egocentric terms."[66] Experiments have been conducted in contemporary neuroscience that appear to support the idea that there is a distinctly visual space. For instance, babies can recognize the difference between small and large circles even when the large circle is moved to a distance that makes it appear small. Moreover, babies have also demonstrated the expectation to tactually experience things that fall within their field of vision. This seems to imply that the ordinary experience of objects incorporates spatial concepts derived from both vision and touch. It therefore seems misguided to insist that concepts corresponding to objects can be separated from the unified experience from which they arise.

The potential for Molyneux's man to succeed in distinguishing between a cube and a sphere does not indicate his ability to use abstract concepts. Rather, understanding shape concepts derives from first-hand experience of shape relations in egocentric space. In other words, shape concepts are the products of experience with the causal properties that categorize the different shapes (e.g., the tendency of a ball to roll) within the realm of our causally effective space (i.e., the area immediately surrounding oneself where the majority of experiences of a causal nature take place). The behavior of the individual agent in the world—the movement, actions, and aims—provides content to egocentric space. Space concepts are formed when this content consists of relations between objects and the properties that serve to distinguish different shapes from one another. Because the senses take part in the same collection of behavioral experiences, egocentric space is the same in vision and in touch. In other words, when I bend over to tie my shoes, I am

[66]Gareth Evans, "Molyneux's Question," in *Perception* Robert Schwartz ed., (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p.140.

performing a particular behavior with an intended outcome. By leaning over and directing my attention to my feet, I provide egocentric space with the visual contents of a pair of white laces. By taking these laces into my hands I provide egocentric space with the tactile content of pliable cotton cording. The point is that both of these contents—the visual content of white laces and the tactile concept of pliable cotton—are derived from the same experience. The unity of the derivation of these different concepts in the same behavioral operation guarantees their mutual participation in the same egocentric space.

Because the different senses all operate in the same egocentric space, the contents of these different modalities are the same. For instance, my understanding of "sphere" could be attributed to an early experience with a ball. The visual impression of the ball and the tactile impression of the ball are both tied to the same experience of the properties expressed by a particular ball. Because these concepts arose from the same experience, the egocentric content of my understanding of "sphere" from visual experience is the same as my understanding of "sphere" from tactile experience. Evans makes two major philosophical points in regards to egocentric content. First, "egocentric spatial content is of the same type in vision and in touch," and second, given the sameness of egocentric spatial content, "shape concepts have the same content whether they are acquired and used on the basis of vision or on the basis of touch."[67] According to Evans, egocentric spatial content is the same because our senses and their data are carved out of the same total experiences; we do not have separate experiences of vision and touch.[68] Therefore,

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[67]John Campbell, "Information Processing, Phenomenal Consciousness, and Molyneux's Question," in *Thought, Reference, and Experience: Themes from the Philosophy of Gareth Evans.* José Luis Bermúdez ed., (Oxford: Claredon Press, 2005), p. 196.

[68]The separation of the senses is nothing more than an *ad hoc* intellectual abstraction. Merleau-Ponty

we should answer Molyneux's question in the affirmative: the previously blind man should be able to identify the cube and the sphere because he is applying the same concepts of "sphere" and "cube" on the same egocentric basis in sight as he previously did in touch. Presumably one of the things the previously blind man would recall about the distinction between cubes and spheres is that cubes lend themselves to being stacked where spheres do not and, moreover, this property can be accounted for by the fact that cubes have clearly defined tops and bottoms. Now, when the newly sighted man is asked to distinguish between a cube and a sphere, his determination is not aided by memory of the visual difference between spheres and cubes, but it is conceivable he would notice the lack of a discrete top and bottom (not to mention the lack of corners) on the sphere and thereby conclude it must be the unstackable sphere and not the cube. It is important to notice that the translation of concepts like "sphere" from touch into vision depends on the translation of subsidiary concepts like "top," "corners," and "stack-able" from haptic to visual applications.

Evans distinguishes between the kind of content involved in biological information processing, which he believes to be nonconceptual, and the conceptual representational content used in thought and talk. Drawing heavily on the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual representational content (e.g., the difference between thinking or saying, "I'm sitting in this chair" and the bodily information employed in the actual activity of my sitting in the chair, which can be referred to as biological information processing), Evans argues that our conceptual understanding of

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insists that all the senses are involved in every sensation, to the extent that it makes sense to say paintings are not only seen, but smelled and tasted as well.

shape concepts come from our nonconceptual experience with shaped objects. Despite the great discrepancy in the phenomenal character of shape objects across vision and touch, the senses of vision and touch share the same egocentric contents, phenomenal characters, and make the same contributions to our understanding of shape concepts. We come to the same understanding of shape concepts, despite taking different routes through the different senses to arrive at them, because the egocentric content (i.e., the information about what it is we have experienced) is the same across the senses for each concept.

John Campbell has put forth a rigorous critique of Evans' solution to Molyneux's question. Campbell doubts that an experience founded on the information content of one sensory modality, like touch, can be applied to another modality, like vision. If the basis of phenomenal experience were nonconceptual, then it would not lend itself to comparison for determining that two separate experiences in different sensory modalities take as their focus the same object. "If two aspects of your experience have the same phenomenal content," Campbell argues, "it should seem to you that they do. . . But there is no such transparency of the content involved in biological information processing."[69] The experience that founds the content of one sensory modality does not always lend itself to being applied in another sensory modality.

Campbell questions Evans' commitment to egocentric space at the expense of space in general. According to Campbell, because Evans denies the importance of space in general he fails to recognize the causal significance of deictic and intrinsic locations:

[69]Campbell, *Information Processing*, p.4.

the relation of objects to one another (the window is next to the door) and the projected egocentric space of one object in relation to another (the window is to the right of the door). If affordances for action in the world can be derived from sources other than egocentric space (i.e., deictic and intrinsic locations) then egocentric location must merely be a ground for affordances (among other possible grounds), rather than being constituted by them. Accordingly, affordances would not determine the location of egocentric space, but rather the location of egocentric space would determine the affordances.

Unlike the affordances Evans addresses, deictic and intrinsic affordances are derived from spatial relations within egocentric space. Therefore contrary to what Evans' maintained, deictic and intrinsic place-identifications provide evidence for the existence of affordances that are not the basis for egocentric space. In other words, the problem, as Campbell points out, is that,

> We lose the argument that the spatial contents of different sensory modalities must be identifying the same affordances in the same ways. . . We have to acknowledge that it is possible that a single egocentric location could be identified in two quite different ways, yet still be grounding the very same possibilities of behavior.[70]

The issue, therefore, comes down to the following: does our orientation in the world

[70]Ibid, p.11.

determine the affordances presented to us or do the affordances in the world determine our orientation in the world? If, pace Evans, we opt for the latter and maintain that affordances determine egocentric space and the same space is shared by all the senses, then all the sensory modalities would engage in identifying the same affordances in the same ways. It would be transparent to us that the spatial contents of touch were the same as the spatial contents of vision. The answer to Molyneux's question would therefore be yes: the previously blind man *would* recognize that it is the same object that is both seen and touched because the affordances of the object comprise and identify the egocentric location of the object. Since the subject has only one set of behaviors, the same affordances are prescribed in both sight and touch. Therefore, regardless of which sensory modality is employed, to identify an object is to identify what set of affordances it provides to egocentric space. And, because the affordances of an object are always the same in every modality, egocentric space must be the same as well. However, if Campbell is correct, and egocentric location determines the affordances in the world, there would be no way to guarantee that different sensory modalities would identify the same affordances in the same ways. This creates the possibility that we could identify the same egocentric location in different sensory modalities while simultaneously failing to recognize that it is the same, due to the fact that egocentric location is not determined by the affordances, but serves as the ground for the determination of affordances. What this means, in regard to Molyneux's question, is that the previously blind man would not realize that it is the same object in touch and vision because he has identified the object in different ways through the different sensory modalities of sight and touch, despite the fact that these different ways of identifying the object, or orientating oneself towards it,

ascribe the same set of affordances to the object.

Campbell does not think Evans' response to Molyneux's question can be shored up by further claiming that a logical inference could be drawn connecting the object of touch with the object of sight based on the evidence that they ground the same behavior. Even with the addition of such an inference, it would still not be transparent that the same object has been consecutively identified by touch and vision. In other words, the manner that the object was identified in egocentric space does not guarantee the identity of the object separately through sight and touch to the same extent as grounding the identity of the object in affordances. There is nothing in Evans' theory that precludes the possibility that two spatial contents could be the same and yet assessed in conflicting ways by a rational subject. If egocentric content of the senses is not conceptual, then there would be no reason "to suppose that sameness or difference of egocentric content in different sensory systems must be transparent to the subject."[71] For this reason, Campbell concludes that the proper response to Molyneux's question would take the negative: the previously blind man would not recognize that it is the same object he has successively touched and seen because, unlike conceptual contents that can be compared, the egocentric spatial content of sensory perception is nonconceptual in nature and, being nonconceptual, they cannot be compared to determine the sameness or identity of their corresponding objects.

Unlike two statements that may vary syntactically, but nevertheless express the same thought so that one cannot take different positions in relation to them (e.g.,

[71]Ibid, p.17.

accepting one while rejecting the other), there is, according to Campbell, no such transparency in perception. The nonconceptual content of touching *x* cannot be compared to the nonconceptual content of seeing *x*. Thus there are no grounds for holding that the previously blind man would recognize he is now seeing an object he has previously known through touch as a sphere. This perspective on the uniqueness of sensory space holds a strong affinity to the qualia problem; e.g., there is no way to tell if the coffee I drink today is the same as the coffee I smell. Campbell points out that if the contents of sensory perception are nonconceptual, then they cannot be compared to determine whether or not they are transparent to one another. But in asking this question Campbell is overlooking the more fundamental question of how we know whether the separation of the senses is actual or merely apparent. After all, if the contents of sense perception are nonconceptual, on what grounds can we claim that there really are distinct contents differentiating different senses? The burden of proving that the contents of sensory perceptions are transparent to one another depends on the assumption that the separation of the senses is real and not merely a post hoc conceptualization that we have found it useful to make.

On Campbell's assessment, if the "transparent unity of egocentric space is somehow grounded in the transparent sameness of the concepts we apply on the basis of sight and touch," then Evans has lost his entire theory, which purported to show that we apply the same shape concepts on the basis of sight as we do on the basis of touch.[72] "The whole strategy was to establish transparent sameness of egocentric content across

[72]Ibid., p.23.

the different sensory modalities, and argue that this was the basis for the transparent unity of the shape concepts we use."[73] If, however, we begin without any transparent unity in egocentric space prior to the "content being input to a 'thinking, concept-applying and reasoning system,' we will not be able to establish the unity of the shape concepts we actually have merely by saying that they are responses to egocentric content."[74] In Campbell's opinion, Evans errs in oversimplifying perception into nonconceptual egocentric content (i.e., information-processing content) in contrast to conceptual content of thought.[75] The central issue raised by Molyneux's question, according to Campbell, bears on the relation between phenomenal content and conceptual content. And the central question, therefore, should be stated thus: "How then could it be possible for us to acquire and use the very same shape contents of sight and touch?"[76]

Given the differences between the phenomenal contents of different sensory modalities, it is by no means clear how we are to account for why the same shape concepts are acquired from different modalities. By contrast, the problem Evans takes to be of central importance concerns how the structure of nonconceptual egocentric content (information-processing) of shapes in different sensory modalities relate to conceptual thought and the identification of shapes. Focusing on this latter question seeks to reveal the relation between phenomenal content and information-processing content as well as

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[73]Ibid., p.23.

[74]Ibid., p.23.

[75]According to Campbell, a more accurate representation of the process would admit three forms of phenomena involved including two forms of nonconceptual content: (1) nonconceptual information-processing content, (2) conceptual content, and (3) phenomenal content that is nonconceptual but related to conceptual content. Phenomenal content is evidenced by our ability to explain conceptual verbal reports via, in part, the contents of sub-system processing in the brain. As to the roles of the other forms of nonconceptual content, Campbell is infuriatingly vague.

[76]Ibid., p.25.

the relation between information-processing content and conceptual thought. Without accounting for the relation between phenomenal content and conceptual thought, Campbell does not believe Evans' approach can supply an adequate answer to Molyneux's question.

Campbell thinks Evans also errs in the assertion that our knowledge of shapes is based on egocentric space when this knowledge could alternatively be based on object-centered frames of reference. Campbell goes on to say that even if Evans is correct, "the ability to extract shape information from egocentric information could still be modality specific; that is, the capacity to perform this kind of derivation might be something that the subject has in relation to touch, but not in relation to vision."[77] Invoking the use of deictic and intrinsic frames of reference, Campbell contrasts these with the egocentric frames of reference. Unlike the egocentric frame, in deictic and intrinsic frames of reference the subject does not have to engage in verbal reasoning to find locations, rather these locations are determined visually. Campbell points out that, if Evans is correct, then "a subject who can find deictic and intrinsic locations on the basis of vision alone ought to be able to perform the very same operations to find deictic and intrinsic locations on the basis of touch."[78] But this is where the problem arises, according to Campbell, because the conceptual procedure used to derive deictic or intrinsic information about location may be modality specific. Despite the fact that any reasoning I apply to my visual information seems to be general purpose (applicable also to tactile information), "the sub-personal processing applied to visual egocentric information,

[77]Ibid., p.28.
[78]Ibid., p.30.

whether conscious or not, may still be modality-specific and not available for use on information provided by touch."[79]

Campbell takes further issue with Evans' claim that "if an information processing procedure can be applied to the conscious content of any one sensory modality, then it can be applied to the conscious content of any sensory modality."[80] Following Evans, the same procedure enabling the blind man to derive information pertaining to the shape of an object through touch can be applied to derive information about the shape of an object in vision. Campbell thinks there is no reason to suppose that this computational operation can be applied equally to all of the sensory modalities. What Evans seems to be pushing for is a procedure that is general-purpose and not modality-specific, where the procedure does not occur on the level of sensory information, but rather on the conceptual level of apperceptive consciousness about one's perceptions. Moreover, Campbell thinks the claim that we derive shape information from egocentric spatial information should itself be regarded as suspect. He sees no reason why shape information needs to be derived in relation to the subject when it could just as well be derived in relation to the object.

The problem with this attack on Evans' position is that even if we admit that shape information can be interpreted on the basis of the characteristics of an object in relation to itself, this account piggybacks on an egocentric account that places oneself in relation to the object allowing for the further consideration of the object in relation to itself. To deny the centrality of egocentric space is to commit a philosophical regression

[79]Ibid., p.31.
[80]Ibid., p.26.

in adopting an account of the world from a "view from nowhere" at the expense of the insights phenomenology has given us. Moreover, this seems to overlook the fact that the affordances of an object constitute the content of egocentric space. In his proposed alternative information determining procedure, it appears Campbell is trying to avail himself of these affordances without acknowledging the presence of egocentric space. Campbell claims that even if Evans is correct, and the subject of Molyneux's experiment had the same egocentric visual content as he previously enjoyed only in touch, it would not follow that he would be able to apply the shape concepts he competently used in touch to his visual experience. After all,"the ability to extract shape information from egocentric information could still be modality specific."[81] This charge seems to miss the crux of Evans' argument: the ability to perform a derivation to determine the shape of an object in relation to vision and the ability to perform a similar derivation in touch are grounded on the same set of affordances relative to a given egocentric space. It is the affordances of the shape that give rise to the egocentric space wherein the subject comes to know the object. Therefore the derivation has more to do with making sense of a particular set of affordances than it has with what modality is responsible for making these affordances available to consciousness.

According to Campbell, it is perfectly conceivable that a subject would be able to derive deictic and intrinsic relations on the basis of sight, but be unable to do so on the basis of touch and this, moreover, is seen by Campbell as demonstrating the failure of Evans' theory. Evans' mistake, as Campbell sees it, lies in the assumption that:

[81]Ibid., p.28.

> After visual or tactual information-processing becomes conscious, once we are at the level at which the information-processing contents are 'subjectively available,' any further operations performed on the now conscious contents cannot be modality-specific but must be general-purpose, central-system operations.[82]

While Campbell admits the above holds true for verbal reasoning applied to perception, he denies that the same can be said of the "sub-personal processing applied to visual egocentric information, whether conscious or not." [83] This would mean that it is possible for me to have the same conscious information provided by touch and vision—the same insofar as both senses are focused on the same phenomenological experience of a particular object—and yet fail to recognize the commonality of the subject matter due to the different presentation of the information by the different sensory modalities. If, however, these occurrences of conscious information provided by touch and sight are addressed by way of verbal reasoning, no such confusion could arise. It seems to me Campbell wants to maintain Evans' "Intuitive Criterion of Difference" while denying Moore's Paradox. In other words, why should the conclusion of shape identification be transparent when affordances are considered in terms of linguistically structured sense experiences, but remain opaque when the same sets of affordances are considered in terms of their preverbal perceptual antecedents?

Lastly, Campbell appeals to instances in which patients demonstrate the capacity

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[82]Ibid., p.30.

[83]Ibid., p.30-31.

to engage in causally appropriate behavior with shapes while lacking the capacity to accurately name these shapes, and argues that our grasp of shape properties is not exhausted by our grasp of causal significance. What, then, does our grasp of these properties depend on? Campbell suggests that shape concepts may be categorical properties rather than merely collections of dispositions. If shape concepts are categorical properties, then obviously we need to provide an account of these properties beyond merely correlating them with an ascribed collection of dispositions. Evans sought to answer Molyneux's question by proving that the collection of dispositions we ascribe to a cube on the basis of sight and the collection of dispositions we ascribe to a cube on the basis of touch confront the same shape property of a cube in exactly the same way, but this approach fails to account for what underlies our grasp of causal significance and ascription of dispositions. Providing an account for the actual basis of shape concepts as categorical properties is, according to Campbell, the ultimate challenge of Molyneux's question and the challenge that remains unanswered.

In the end, the discussion between Evans and Campbell on Molyneux's question generates more questions and problems than it answers. From the criticisms Campbell levies against Evans' view, a picture begins to materialize of what an adequate account of perception would require. Evans' insights coupled with Campbell's criticisms point the way to a new approach to Molyneux's question. The first step in this process will begin with a look at the points of similarity and contrast between the sensory experience of Molyneux's man and the occurrence of first perception in newborns.

### 3.1.3 The Baby and The Blind Man

A number of experiments in cognitive psychology have been conducted with the goal of isolating conditions that would provide an empirical answer to Molyneux's question. Most of these cases involved individuals who were born with thick, vision-obscuring cataracts. The outcomes in cases in which the cataracts were removed from adults seem to speak against Evans' affirmative response to Molyneux's question. Evans knew about these reports and was not dissuaded by them. In fact, in all of the cases he concluded that the data was ambiguous: "while it is true that subjects cannot name the circle and the square, this is because they do not have any visual figure perception at all but are restricted to a confusing succession of experiences of light and color."[84] As previously mentioned, Evans found the philosophically rich problem in Molyneux's question to be the issue of concept application across sensory modalities and recognized that the most problematic element in answering this question lay in affirming whether the previously blind man could be said to truly possess the ability to see.

The possibility needs to be considered that there may be a difference between the ideal and actual capacities of the blind to regain the faculty of sight. The full force of this claim comes to light when we compare Molyneux's ideal man with a newborn: are they similar in isolating the phenomena of first, naive, perception? Do Molyneux's man and the newborn baby have the same potential to see when gazing out into the world for the first time? Surprisingly, the answer to both of these questions is no.

[84] Gareth Evans, "Molyneux's Question," p. 137.

Obviously the blind man's sense of self and knowledge of the external world far exceeds that of the newborn. This foreknowledge would help him in making sense of new visual sensations, but his ability to have these sensations may not be equal to those of a newborn. The blind man has highly developed senses due to his lack of sight, but the neglect suffered by the visual neural networks in his brain have resulted in his being at a great disadvantage compared to the newborn when it comes to actively seeing for the first time. Molyneux's man is unlike the infant or a normally sighted man not only in that his vision failed to develop, but also in that his neural networks responsible for processing visual information have since degenerated. By not accessing the areas of the brain associated with sight, he failed to build up these areas and developed others in their stead. Likewise the newborn has yet to develop many of the neural networks responsible for visual sensory processing. For instance, it is estimated that the newborn's vision is thirty times poorer than a fully functioning adult's, is extremely nearsighted, and not fully binocular.[85]

According to the empiricist, an additional factor that would lead to confusion is that the infant's senses have not yet learned to communicate with one another. The baby has to learn to integrate the information being processed by her senses. If the ability to synthesize different sensory modalities is something that must be learned, then an infant would not be able to copy a facial expression before learning how to see, how to feel her face in different gestures, and how to associate which felt gestures correspond with which visual appearances. The ability to mimic a facial gesture implies a great deal of

[85]For further discussion on the visual capacities of newborns, see Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.165.

knowledge and reasoning and yet multiple experiments have testified to the ability of newborn babies to mimic facial expressions within minutes of being born, before achieving any visual recognition of their own faces. So, how can a newborn baby, who has not yet had the experience necessary to establish an organized proprioceptive knowledge of her own body, successfully mimic the facial gestures presented to her? The obvious answer is that the visual abilities of newborns to mimic facial gestures indicate the presence of a basic level on which vision is innate rather than learned.

Vision is not a skill that depends entirely on education through experience. A basic degree of innate vision exists because the different senses communicate directly with one another and do not need to learn to do so. In support of this claim, consider a study that indicates infants are able to visually identify the shape that they had previously known only through oral touch. In this study newborn infants indicated a visual recognition for pacifier shapes they had suckled on for 90 seconds by staring at those shapes significantly longer than others. This led the researcher in charge of the experiment to conclude that infants "register the same information about the shape of the object even if it is picked up through two different modalities, touch and vision,"[86] providing further evidence that the affordances that ground egocentric space do not draw separations among the senses. The baby is not required to draw inferences from the appearance of an object in one sense to another, the cohesion of the same object as registered by different senses is intuitively grasped.

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[86]Andrew N. Meltzoff, "Molyneux's Babies: Cross-Modal Perception, Imitation and the mind of the preverbal infant," in *Spatial Representation*, Naomi Eilan Rosaleen McCarthy and Bill Brewer eds., (Oxford: Blackwell: 1993), p.219-35. See also Arlette Streri and Edouard Gentaz, "Cross-Modal Recognition of Shape from hand to eye in human newborns," in *Somatosensory and Motor Research*, 20 (2003) p.11-16.

Given the weakness of the newborn's initial vision, it is tempting to think the visual experiences of the newborn and Molyneux's man would have a great deal in common. The fact that the powers of sight in Molyneux's man and the newborn are so different is a result of the senses developing separately from the power of vision in Molyneux's man and developing together in the newborn. This difference testifies to the mode-independence of the senses or, put another way, to the fact that the categorical separation of the different sensory modalities is merely an illusion. On the one hand, the discrepancy can be attributed to development, but, on the other hand, if it were merely a question of development, we would expect Molyneux's man to be a quick learner, to develop his newfound power of sight with a similar veracity as demonstrated by the newborn. Unfortunately this is not the case; learning to see after spending the first part of one's life blind is an excruciatingly difficult thing for both humans and animals; innateness, it appears, is subject to atrophy.

The contrast between Molyneux's man and the newborn indicates that the concept of innateness may not be contrary to the concept of prior experience after all. Innateness and experience may complement one another. The innate may be what we have prior to birth, but this could include both our perceptual capacity and experience. After all, we know that babies in utero react to sound, light, and movement. Therefore, it may very well turn out that the development of what we take to be innate is in fact dependent upon experience. Take, for instance, the numerous experiments with raising animals in the dark, retarding the development of their vision. What these experiments demonstrate is that if an animal is kept in the dark through the formative period of visual development, functionally sound eyes will never realize their capacity for sight. Dark-induced

blindness, however, can be reversed if light is introduced within a critical period of time and the earlier the better. An analogous situation in humans can be found with children born with cataracts: the earlier these cataracts are removed, the greater the chance for the child to fully regain his or her full visual capacity.

Lastly, many of the current experiments with newborns seem to indicate that perception is inter-modal from the start and that different sensory systems are predisposed to communicate integrated information in an egocentric spatial framework. This interaction allows for the experiences in which each sensory modality informs the others: perception in one modality can lead to the recognition of objects in another. Following this model, first perception is not akin to James' confusion, as it betrays signs of being organized from the start. James' confusion only makes sense from the lack-of-perspective of unembodied perception: a blooming buzzing confusion that represents the ultimate blurring of sensory modalities.

The solution to Molyneux's problem, therefore, demands an account of the relation between perception, egocentric space, and embodiment. Ultimately providing an answer to Molyneux's question will require constructing of a theory of perception based on a strong sense of embodiment.

## 3.2 Answering Molyneux

The implications of Molyneux's question run wide and deep for the philosophy of mind and theories of perception. One of the major points of contention separating the different sides in this debate is whether the different senses share the same experiential contents or inherently possess the ability to communicate with one another. How we answer this question will depend on what we take to be the nature of egocentric space.

To review, Evans thinks egocentric space is the same for all the senses. Shape concepts share the same egocentric content in every modality because egocentric space is founded on the affordances of the world. Thus there exists a transparency between the different senses due to the fact that they identify the same affordances in the world. Campbell, by contrast, disputes the claim that egocentric space is the same across the sensory modalities and insists that there is no way to rule out the possibility that the connection between visual and tactile space is made abstractly as a consequence of experience. If Campbell is correct, it would follow that shape concepts in different sensory moralities would appeal to different conceptions of egocentric space and it would not be obvious that the haptic recognition of roundness or "round" is the same as the visual recognition of roundness or "round." Campbell also points out that the affordances of deictic and intrinsic perspectives cannot be derived from the affordances of egocentric space. In Campbell's opinion, this proves that there is no basis on which to claim that the senses must share the same egocentric space. Once again, the ability to derive affordances from perspectives other than egocentric space would demonstrate that

egocentric space is the ground for, not the ground of, affordances.

I believe we can find a way out of the dilemma created by Evans and Campbell and that the solution lies in a reformulation of the notion of egocentric space. I intend to show why it is essential that the senses communicate directly with one another and why this communication logically infers the presence of an egocentric space that is common to all the senses. I wish to advance a theory of perception that begins with the body and develops through formative stages (1) motion, (2) exposure to others, (3) anticipation/prediction, and (4) emotion, in order to become a fully developed system. I intend to demonstrate, with the help of Merleau-Ponty, how the body holds a place that serves as a bridge between internal and external spheres of influence. Both Evans and Campbell overlook the possibility that the body is part of both sides—taking part in that which is innate as well as that which is learned through experience. This reconsideration of egocentric space will conflict with Berkeley's conception of space by asserting that there is only one experiential space that all the senses refer to and which underlies the communication between the senses.

### 3.2.1 The Body and the World

Like Kant, Merleau-Ponty makes the distinction between the world preceding our knowledge and the world of things that make up our objects of experience. For Kant, the world of experience is jointly constructed by data collected by sensory receptors and the categories of the understanding: the play of the imagination and the understanding in

accordance with structure provided by the constraints of space and time. The conditions for experience are a priori and universal, they come prior to experience and cannot be changed by it. For Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, there is an additional influence coming back from the world and our experience in it that contributes to shaping our world of experience. Some of the conditions for experience are embedded in experience itself. Experience in the world plays a role in shaping future experiences because the body is at once in the world, part of the world, and a result of the interactions between the self and the world.

The contrast between the two thinkers should now be clear: for Kant a priori conditions of the mind determine a posteriori conditions of experience while, for Merleau-Ponty, the picture is reciprocal: the embodied self conditions, and is conditioned by, experience. We are products of our world just as our world is a product of our mental and sensory structures. The world plays a part in conditioning experience, which is why the blind man is unlike the newborn. The blind man and the newborn have not had the same mental development of their perceptual functions given to them by experience. For Merleau-Ponty, the limits of the world of phenomena are not predetermined as they are for Kant; the body is a system of exchanges between the self and the world. The self sees the world and is caught up in the world as part of the visible.

A thing among things, the self is part of the fabric of the world. The embodied self is at once subject and object, the sensing and the sensed. In contrast to Kantian transcendental subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty tells us that reality is generated through the dynamic interdependence of vision, movement, and bodily awareness. In the words of Merleau-Ponty, “My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least

in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my 'comprehension.'"[87] The world is not conformed to the self or the self to the world; rather the self and the world mutually affect and determine each other.

If the world is a fabric woven from our bodies and sensations, our imagination and dreams definitely form a significant contribution to the wrap and woof of threads. If reality were merely woven out of the sensations and representations that present themselves to us in experience, we would be paralyzed by the sheer number of sensory impressions bombarding our senses at every moment, to say nothing of the chaotic and ambiguous nature these impressions can have. We are not overwhelmed by our sensations because there is always a degree to which experience is ordered and perceived as sensible. At the same time, experience is much richer than the limits of sensation: dreams dance around the sensible world all the time: seeing a tea cup that belonged to my grandmother can conjure her image or the sound of her voice, but I do not confuse these impressions with the sensations of the reality we call shared. Ultimately the coherence of reality owes a great debt to the imagination; the imagination aids in filling in the gaps left by the ambiguity of sense data while filtering out impressions that derive from memory—not the sensible world—but whose parallel presence serves to enrich our experience of the sensible. The imagination comes to our rescue to selectively weave sensory impressions together and darn the gaps created by ambiguity. This is not to say that the world is a product of synthesis or judgment. On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty tells us, "the real is a closely woven fabric . . . It does not await our judgment before

[87] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Colin Smith trans. (New York: Routledge, 1962), p.235.

incorporating the most surprising phenomena, or before rejecting the most plausible figments of our imagination."[88] We do not hold fast to the dictates of reality, the aspects and particulars that we encounter in the sensible world are vast and often unexpected.

It therefore follows that every act of perception is always an aesthetic activity. The act of the imagination serves as the "basis of the unity of consciousness," conditions the nature of the subject, and forms the basis of aesthetic judgment and empirical knowledge.[89] Things are brought together into an ordered, coherent whole like a well-composed text. But this text is very post-structuralist in nature, for the text writes itself as well as its author into being. In this way, Merleau-Ponty folds the Kantian schema back upon itself: ambiguity (the invisible) can be found continually conditioning the composition of reality (the visible). Reality or "the visible" is never static, new experiences are always capable of revealing new characteristics. The potential of the invisible, therefore, always underlies the visible as it undergoes the process of realization. This constitutes the major departure Merleau-Ponty makes from the transcendental idealism of Kant. The dynamism of the interaction between a priori conditions of the mind and a posteriori conditions of experience together form Merleau-Ponty's embodied conception of reality. On this view perception can be likened to an aesthetic activity because reality is not merely constituted by the sensory representations forever flooding my perceptual field, rather what I experience as reality is a coherent whole brought about by the synthesis and organizational powers of the imagination. Perceiving is not an open reception to an outside world as much as an aesthetic activity of composition where the

[88] Ibid, p.x.
[89] Ibid, p.xvii.

aesthetic taste of the imagination determines which aspects of the invisible are elevated to the visible. Loaded with conceptual import, "perception" is synonymous with the recognition of significance in the world.

Where do the philosophical insights of Merleau-Ponty, especially concerning the reciprocal conditioning of the world and experience, get us in terms of the current debate over Molyneux's question? When considered in relation to one of the main points of contention between Evans and Campbell, they get us quite far indeed. Merleau-Ponty's insight into the nature of experience can shed a novel light on the debate over the causal connection between affordances and egocentric space. It may be possible to retain the position of affordances as the grounds for egocentric space and hence the trans-modality of the senses that rest upon this common foundation, and still provide an account that encompasses deictic and intrinsic perspectives. If the relation between affordances and egocentric space is recursive in nature, deictic and intrinsic perspectives could be derived from the perspective of egocentric space. This would advance a conception of egocentric space that is capable of objectifying itself under the considerations of alternative perspectives, while drawing from a rich exchange of information across the senses. Egocentric space need not, as Campbell claimed, be incompatible with object-centered frames of reference. Moreover, the claim that deictic and intrinsic frames of reference can only be identified visually, and not through the power of touch, would appear equally unfounded.

An analogy for the revision in the conception of egocentric space can be illustrated in the difference between visualizing walking to work verses visualizing the map that displays one's route to work. When we look at the map, we can take multiple

perspectives on the route—focusing one moment on the overall shape and curvature of the path, the relation of one section to another, or closely analyze a particular segment—perspectives that extend beyond the immediate first person, temporally ordered, perspective gained by actually walking the course. Our egocentric sense of space extends beyond the limits of our egocentrically based perception; the extension of egocentric space beyond the limits of first person perceptual experience results in the ability to consider the world from perspectives that extend far beyond the perspective generated from egocentric space. This explains why we "perceive" the backsides of objects and why the ability to judge depth is experienced as part of our visual faculties.

Traditionally, egocentric space has erroneously been equated with behavioral space when, in fact, egocentric space is actually much more elaborate and accommodates perspectives beyond the scope of those possible from the standpoint of the body's immediate sphere of influence. For example, I can think about my position in relation to the room, the building, the country, or even the world. In focusing on the perceptual self as the subjective source for experience, Kant overlooked the role and contribution of the body to the objectification of the self among other objects of experience in the world. At once origin and end, the perceiving self is both subject and object of perceptual experience. In a very real sense, the view from the other is always already inherent in the view of the self; to perceive is to be perceived. In the words of Merleau-Ponty:

> To see is to enter a universe of beings which display themselves, and they would not do this if they could not be hidden behind each other or behind me. In other words: to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habituation to grasp all

> things in terms of the aspect which they present to it. But in so far as I see those things too, they remain open to my gaze, and, being potentially lodged in them, I already perceive from various angles the central object of my present vision.[90]

In a significant sense, we mentally re-construct the world more from a third-person than from a first-person perspective. In our understanding of egocentric space the body occupies a place as a thing among things. We need to keep track of where the body is among these other things, taking it into consideration from a third-person perspective. Harking back to the need for a new approach to our thinking, we are not merely transcendental consciousnesses perceiving the world, we are embodied beings. Being a thing in a world of things, navigating movement in this world, and creating an internal model of the external world, all generate perspectives that far exceed the limits of our perception.

### 3.2.2 Proprioceptive Awareness, Body Schema, and Body Image

It's one thing to say that affordances and egocentric space work together to educate and codetermine each other, but this claim creates a chicken/egg type of dilemma when it comes to determining which comes first or provides the ground for the other: a priori innate ability or awareness learned though experience. Going beyond Merleau-

[90] Ibid, p.68.

Ponty to the more recent work of Shaun Gallagher can provide us with a new approach to this question, which demonstrates that the parameters of the problem are not as clear-cut and narrow as Evans and Campbell first supposed.

Both Kant and Merleau-Ponty provide perspectives on Molyneux's problem that can be interpreted as suggestive of a theory of innate ideas and the claim that we are predetermined to have the type of experiences that we do. Indeed, Locke thought saying "yes" to Molyneux's question meant affirming innate ideas (a belief which greatly influenced him to give a negative response to the question). Locke believed that in order for Molyneux's man to succeed, concepts like "cube" and "sphere" would have to be hard-wired in the brain rather than learned through experience, a suggestion that any good empiricist would find intolerable. The empiricist position Locke advocated, by contrast, derives all sense data from experience as well as the ability to correlate different sense data to common objects of experience.

In the opposite extreme from Locke's empiricism, we find the philosophy of Kant. In positing a transcendental ego, Kant and other philosophers who share this view maintain that consciousness takes place outside of the world (as opposed to deep within it). Kant and his followers reverse the empiricist thesis, and their conception of perception provides an affirmative answer to Molyneux's question based on the belief that space is a necessary a priori condition for sensory experience. Molyneux's man would "see" the sphere and cube in the same way as any other normally sighted man. As for the ability to identify the shapes correctly, this burden would fall on the harmony of the imagination and the categories of understanding, but there is no reason to suspect that Molyneux's man would be unable to make the appropriate identifications. Although Kant

does not technically believe in the presence of innate ideas, he does affirm the presence of ideas that function *like* innate ideas. For Kant, not all ideas are abstracted from experience; some ideas presuppose perception, but this does not mean they are innate ideas in the sense Locke disparaged. Ideas that presuppose perception are not created through abstraction from sensory experience, but rather by extrapolating from what Kant called the "laws inherent in the mind."

Evans also believed Molyneux's question could be answered in the affirmative without having to ascribe to a belief in innate ideas. According to Evans, it may be the case that the connection between ideas is learned. The education in question would occur directly between the different senses, allowing for the direct communication of tactile concepts into visual concepts. Of course in order for communication to exist between the senses, the senses must share a common conception of space, something Berkeley ardently disputed, and the education of the senses must precede, not be abstracted from, experience. Otherwise Campbell would object that there is no way to guarantee that the senses would mutually inform one another because the experiences of the senses are different enough to be taken as discrete. In other words, there would be no way to guarantee that I would draw the inference that I am experiencing the same shape in both touch and sight if these experiences occurred discretely.

With respect to the criticisms offered by Campbell and the division between innate ideas and perceptual information based on experience, I would like to suggest a new approach to cover both what Kant referred to as the "laws inherent in the mind" and the ground Evans believed would provide for the communication of the senses. My intention is to affirm the existence of innate abilities that precede experience, without

necessarily having to admit the existence of innate ideas. The approach I wish to advocate lies in drawing the distinction between body schema and body image. "Body schema" is intended to denote subconscious awareness of the positioning of the body and the sensory motor functions. "Body image," by contrast, encompasses a large range of conscious self-aware information from perceptual or proprioceptive awareness of one's own body to the psychological orientation one has to his or her own body. The distinction between body schema and body image has been conspicuously absent in the debate over Molyneux's problem and the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (although there is ample evidence to indicate that his work does anticipate this distinction).

On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty thinks the ability to perceive must be learned through experience. For the newborn child, perception begins in a state of disorganization because perception is, above all else, embodied. In infancy, the body and the subject's bodily awareness is in a state of disorganization, so it stands to reason that the baby's powers of perception would be disorganized as well. For this reason, Merleau-Ponty would side with the empiricists on Molyneux's question, maintaining that Molyneux's man would not be able to distinguish between the sphere and the cube based on the fact that he has not yet "learned how to see." Similarly, Merleau-Ponty holds that children must learn from experience, which is why he thought a baby would be unable to imitate a facial expression until somewhere around the age of 15 months old. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty also maintains that a child cannot make sense of what she sees without, on some level, making sense of who she is—what place her body occupies in relation to the world. In other words, she cannot come to understand the world of experience without understanding her bodily orientation within it. This brings to the fore

an underlying tension in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty: the child must have a sense of internal perception, as a body in the world, in order to develop a sense of external perception and yet there must be some level of external perception in order for internal perception to occur. Stated somewhat differently, the child must have some sense of a world in order to have a sense of being a body in the world. Obviously my fear here is that these conflicting requirements will lead to an infinite regress.

The distinction between body schema and body image is essential when it comes to determining which features of self-awareness are innate and which are learned through experience. Body schema is often referred to as proprioceptive information or tacit knowledge: the subconscious level on which sensory-motor functions operate and the position of the body is registered by the central nervous system (an unconscious level of awareness). Bodily schema is the inherent sense of self that is innate and underlies the self-awareness of all embodied, mobile, conscious beings. Body image, by contrast, is conscious self-awareness that comes from many sources including beliefs or attitudes about one's body, perceptual awareness of one's body, or proprioceptive awareness of the position of one's body in space. The legitimacy of this distinction, as well as the division of proprioception into preconscious information verses conscious awareness, has been repeatedly demonstrated by neurologically impaired patients who exhibit the presence of one in the absence of the other. Further evidence for the distinction has been provided by the phantom-limb phenomenon. The "phantom limb" may be the body's way of expressing the presence of an inconsistency between its body schema and body image. In the case of the phantom limb, the preconscious body schema may not have adequately adjusted to the loss of the limb. It is not surprising to learn that children who are born

with a congenital absence of a limb do not experience the phenomenon of having a phantom limb. What is surprising, however, is that these same children occasionally do develop a phantom limb right around the age of puberty. The implications of this phenomenon for body schema and body image are highly controversial. I would like to suggest that this phenomenon does not undermine the claim that body schema is innate, but rather demonstrates the ability of body image to effect body schema. Clearly the pubescent adolescent in question does not perceive the presence of a limb where there used to be an absence of limb, but her body image at this age, perhaps more so than any other, is greatly determined by her impressions and feelings associated with the bodies of others. In effect, what I'm suggesting is that her awareness of self has turned outward to such a degree that, by mapping the bodies of others onto herself, she has internalized an image of her body that holds more affinity to the idealized bodies of others than her own.

Rare neurological disorders aside, body schemas appear to be innate. By the time they enter the world, babies' perception and behavior is already influenced by the shape and movement of their bodies. On a subconscious level, the newborn child already has a developed awareness of his or her body. Indeed, it is this innate sense of body schema that enables the newborn to recognize the expression on the face of another and mimic that expression. Whether this mimicry occurs on a conscious level or a subconscious level, however, is open to debate. Popular opinion has been that neonates lack the sort of self-awareness necessary to intentionally mimic the facial expression of another. However, Shaun Gallagher, in his book *How the Body Shapes the Mind,* advances the view that the neonate possesses proprioceptive awareness—conscious awareness of one's

body and its position in space—in addition to a body schema.[91] While proprioceptive awareness is not in itself sufficient to constitute a body image, it indicates a level of awareness that can be interpreted as providing the seeds for the development of a body image. According to Gallagher,

> The general rule is that conscious experience is itself constrained and shaped by my prenoetic motility, but consciousness does not *directly* shape movement . . . this is most clearly demonstrated, in the negative, in cases where movement, instead of remaining under the non-conscious control of the body schema, must be made the phenomenal object of consciousness if it [bodily movement] is to be controlled at all.[92]

If Gallagher is correct, then not only is body schema innate, but so are the fertile seeds of body image in the form of proprioceptive awareness. This radical reconsideration of the initial sparks of consciousness evokes neither external sensory data nor internal mental states, but rather takes as its foundation the actuality of the body in motion. To summarize: the body gives rise to motion in space, which gives rise to consciousness of space, which develops to determine and control the rise of further motion. Consciousness, therefore, owes its origin to neither external nor internal stimuli (answering the age-old philosophical question as to what direction an initial awareness must take), rather the origin of consciousness is the consequence of the presence of

[91] Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.60.
[92] Ibid., p.64.

motion in the body of a living organism. Under this theory it would follow that if a member of the plant kingdom came to possess the ability of autonomous motion, it would result in the development of a conscious presence. Indeed, this scenario has found a real life expression in the case of sea squirts (*Ascidiaceae*) or tunicates. The sea squirt makes the evolution from a stationary plant (an arm feeder, primitive sessile) to an active, multi-cellular creature with a central nervous system and a brain-like ganglion. The transition is made for the sake of motricity (to find a suitable location for the proliferation of the species).[93] What I would like to suggest here is that what has often been interpreted as merely a correlation between the presence of auto-motion and consciousness is actually a case of causation; stated simply, motricity in a bodily organism jars the presence of conscious awareness into existence.

If body schema is innate, the apparent infinite regress between outward perception and the egocentric organization of the body dissolves. Perception in the world is organized according to the egocentric awareness of the body. In first perception this egocentric awareness may be limited to subconscious body schema or extended to include proprioceptive awareness. Over time, however, outward perception will find itself grounded in a much more complex nexus of both non-conscious body schema and conscious body image. At the same time, the complexity of egocentric awareness, as it expresses its full nature in body image, is based on the egocentric framework of outward perception. The presence of body schema removes the threat of an infinite regress

[93] "The lesson here is quite clear: the evolutionary development of a nervous system is an exclusive property of actively moving creatures." Rodolfo Llinas, *I of the Vortex: From Neurons to Self*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001), p.17. For more on sea squirts go to www.animalnetwork.com/fish/aqfm/1997/.

underlying perception because body schema is neither perspectival nor egocentric. Moreover, body schema can serve as the basis for that which is egocentric and perspectival by providing the ground for perception and self-awareness. It goes without saying that this understanding of body schema breaks with the traditional view, shared by James and Merleau-Ponty, which maintains that both body schema and body image depend on conscious experience for their development. Body schema introduces the possibility for preconscious bodily orientation and information including, but not limited to the intercommunication of the senses.

According to Merleau-Ponty, infants do not possess the neurological development necessary to have a body schema, because such a schema can only be developed through experience. He also believes that experience is first introspective before it turns to external perception.[94] Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty maintains that motor experience and perceptual experience are dialectically linked. Although motor experience is not accredited with the advent of consciousness, the transition between automatic and intentional movements (in his words concrete and abstract movements) constitutes the transition from passive existence (an almost vegetative state referred to as being-in-itself by Merleau-Ponty) to the birth of the conscious subject (or what Merleau-Ponty calls being-for-itself). Motor and perceptual experiences contribute to the dialectic that produces the synthesis of the body's self-awareness, which, for Merleau-Ponty, spans both body schema and image. Because Merleau-Ponty does not make the distinction

[94] "As soon as there is consciousness, and in order that there may be consciousness, there must be something to be conscious of, an intentional object, and consciousness can move towards this object only to the extent that it 'derealizes' itself and throws itself into it, only if it is wholly in this reference to . . . something, only if it is a pure meaning-giving act. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 121.

between preconscious body schema and conscious body image, he seems inclined to view the relation between consciousness and the body as a reciprocal dialectic. The shortcoming of this view is that it creates the tension between consciousness and the body previously mentioned: internal perception appears to be a prerequisite for the development of external perception and external perception appears to be a prerequisite for internal perception. Merleau-Ponty also fails to provide an account for what, exactly, prompts or causes the transition to take place between passive, vegetative-like being-in-itself to active, conscious being-for-itself. According to Merleau-Ponty:

> If 'abstract' movements are possible, in which consciousness of the starting and finishing points is present, we must at every moment in our life know where our body is without having to look for it as we look for an object moved from its place during our absence. Even 'automatic' movements must therefore announce themselves to our consciousness, which means that there never occur, in our bodies, movements in themselves. And if all objective space is for intellectual consciousness only, we must find the categorical attitude even in the movement of grasping itself. Like physiological causality, arrival at self-awareness has nowhere to start. We must either reject physiological explanation or admit that it is all-inclusive—either deny consciousness or accept it as comprehensive. We cannot relate certain movements to bodily mechanism and others to consciousness. The body and consciousness are not mutually limiting; they can

be only parallel.[95]

The tension between the body and consciousness dissolves, I suggest, with the introduction of body schema as a form of preconscious bodily awareness.

The introduction of a preconscious body schema provides us with a third option in the debate between experiential knowledge and innate ability. The body is predisposed to develop consciousness and bodily awareness due to the information it possesses concerning its spatial orientation and the interconnection of its senses in response to the affordances of the world. On the one hand, egocentric space precedes experience insofar as it precedes conscious experience. On the other hand, egocentric space is a product of experience insofar as it is the result of the experience of an inter-sensory body. The foundation for consciousness and body image awareness are solidly provided for by the experiential reality of a mobile body in the world. The ability which allows Molyneux's man to identify the difference between the sphere and the cube is the same as the neonates' ability to successfully mimic a facial expression: in each there is an organization inherent in the body that is predisposed to synthesize sensory information in terms of the inter-sensory whole of existence. Just as the baby does not need to be taught how to translate visual information into tactile expressions, Molyneux's man should not require education on the translation or inherent connection between haptic and visual information. The positing of body schema guarantees that egocentric space is the same across the sensory modalities because conscious awareness is not required to make the connections between what we take to be discrete sensory modalities.

[95] Ibid., p.123-4.

I believe Merleau-Ponty would be amendable to this addition as he alludes to something like body schema when he talks about the body "felt from the inside":

> A baby of fifteen months opens its mouth if I playfully take one of its fingers between my teeth and pretend to bite it. And yet it has scarcely looked at its face in a glass, and its teeth are not in any case like mine. The fact is that its own mouth and teeth, as it feels them from the inside, are immediately, for it, an apparatus to bite with, and my jaw, as the baby sees it from the outside, is immediately, for it, capable of the same intentions. "Biting" has immediately, for it, an intersubjective significance. It perceives its intentions in its own body, and my body with its own, and thereby my intentions in its own body.[96]

As previously mentioned, Merleau-Ponty did not believe an infant possessed the ability for facial recognition until around fifteen months of age. Although he denied that the neonate has a basic proprioceptive, tacit, pre-reflective awareness from the start, he does believe that when the ball of consciousness gets rolling—around a year of age—it is deeply intermodal and intersubjective. The senses work in unison to the point of being indistinguishable from one another in the wholeness of experience. Although Merleau-Ponty's account of original or first perception has been superseded by modern neuroscience, his central account pertaining to the nature of perception is rich with insight and relevance concerning the intermodal nature of the senses and the intersubjective nature of experience.

[96] Ibid., p.352.

The infant's body image takes form through the relation and interaction between the baby's own proprioception and the perception of the other's face. Merleau-Ponty tells us,

> The visual and motor systems speak the same 'language' right from birth. It is not, as the traditional view would have it, a matter of gradually developing a translation process between initially independent spaces—a visual space, a lived proprioceptive space—that function independently and are coordinated with growth and experience. Rather, information picked up by the separate sense organs is represented with relative precision within a common 'space' that is already intermodal.[97]

The proposal of sensory intermodality speaks to the wholeness of experience: the sight of biting speaks directly to the feel of biting, causing the baby's mouth to open. The baby identifies both the visual gesture of biting demonstrated by the other, while identifying and attributing the intention to bite to the other. In both physiological and psychological attributions, the baby naturally internalizes the external, perceptual experience of the biting gesture, making sense of it within its own framework of body motions and intentional states. Experience is deeply empathetic in nature: the senses do not learn to communicate to each other through experience, they do so innately. The separation of the senses and the problem of other minds are intellectual achievements of abstract thought, not initial conditions for experience. Speaking to the intersubjective nature of

[97] Ibid., p.80.

experience, Merleau-Ponty says,

> Between my consciousness and my body as I experience it, between this phenomenal body of mine and that of another as I see it from the outside, there exists an internal relation which causes the other to appear as the completion of the system. The other can be evident to me because I am not transparent for myself, and because my subjectivity draws its body in its wake.[98]

The other is the "completion of the system" because perceptual experience is communal.[99] We need others to guarantee the meaning of the world. Just as the presence of language can be pointed to as evidence against solipsism—we cannot be solipsists because we have language, which presupposes a community—we can point to perceptual experience to vanquish all threats of solipsism. Perception is meaningful because of the richness of the "I" that does the perceiving. This richness is not built upon sensory data stripped of psychological information and intentions. The "I" is not merely a product of introspection or perceiving a world of sense data. The richness of the "I" and the body image that contributes to it owes its conception to the direct perception of psychological states, intentions, and affectations in the world of others. I learn about myself by looking out to the other. I feel my body from the inside, but the other supplements this

[98] Ibid., p.352.

[99] The mirroring process that takes place between the infant and the other need not be based on the recognition of equality, or the ability to "equate" its body with the body of the adult. It may be the case that this "equivocation" is actually a metaphorical mirroring. The baby need not know that he is a human like the adult it sees, rather there could be a conversion process going on whereby the baby internalizes the gestures it sees and relates them to its own body. Arguably this is exactly what is going on when an untrained dolphin mimics the arm action of a human by moving a corresponding flipper in a similar fashion. The inclination towards metaphorical identification is what links us to animals and nature.

knowledge with information on what the body is like from the outside, the perspective of our own bodies that is usually obscured from us. Similarly, the most private affective states we experience when introspecting take shape and become meaningful for us as a result of learning about the presence of those states in others, which means learning what words like "sad," "angry," and "hopeful" mean. My introspective knowledge of myself is formed and meaningful because of extrospective, intersubjective, perception. Initial perception is not based on objectification, but rather the identification and manifestations of behavior. When I perceive another person in the world, they are not merely sensory data for me, they are instantiations of behavior that mark my sensory perception of them.

> The other is not shut up inside my perspective of the world, because this perspective itself has no definite limits, because it slips spontaneously into the other's, and because both are brought together in the one single world . . . In so far as I have sensory functions, a visual, auditory and tactile field, I am already in communication with others taken as similar psycho-physical subjects.[100]

Merleau-Ponty describes a vortex that forms around the perceived body, for the embodied perceiver is also the perceived. The other shapes my knowledge of self by instantiating behavior, but also by engaging me and serving as a "theatre" for my elaboration. Exposure to others is therefore reciprocal: in exposing the other, the self is similarly exposed to the other. I believe this is the intersubjective aspect of experience Gallagher is referring to when he says: "body schemas, working systematically with

[100] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.353.

proprioceptive awareness, constitute a proprioceptive self that is *always already* 'coupled' with the other."[101] Unlike Merleau-Ponty, Gallagher maintains that the intermodal visual-proprioceptive/sensory-motor linkage between others and ourselves is innate and immediate: we find ourselves thrown into a world of others. The neonate's ability to imitate the facial gestures of another indicates that the neonate has an innate inclination towards expressive behavior, which, in turn, indicates that there is an innate anticipation of intersubjectivity. In order for any behavior to be "expressive," it must be performed and received by another. Therefore, in a very Confucian sense, we are who we are by virtue of the relations we have with others. And, in a very phenomenological sense, the world is what it is by virtue of our ability to experience it and ourselves through the behavior of others. Rooting the other in the heart of perception and hence egocentric space renders Campbell's main objection to a positive response to Molyneux's question inconsequential. It was previously stated that there is no reason to suppose, as Campbell does, that the affordances provided by deictic and intrinsic points of reference cannot be derived from the affordances that provide for the perspective of egocentric space. Now, however, with the inclusion of the perspective of the other into the very heart of perception, there is every reason to believe that the affordances provided by deictic and intrinsic perspectives are actually *essential* to the configuration of egocentric space.

[101] Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, p.81.

### 3.2.3 From Sense to Sense: the Conception of Meaning

In taking up Molyneux's question, Evans sought to prove that the different senses confront the same shape properties in the same ways, but Campbell found this approach to be focusing on the lesser of two major problems. The real philosophical challenge invoked by Molyneux's Question, according to Campbell, is to provide an account for how we confront and grasp properties, like sphere and cube, in the first place. What, in other words, is the basis on which we ascribe shape properties to objects? How do we make the transition from sensory data to categorical property identification in one sense, let alone among many? Questions like these strike at the heart of perception and the phenomenological process that leads to the introduction of concepts, which capture and categorize the sensations of experience.

According to Merleau-Ponty, there cannot be perception in the absence of meaning; even elementary perception is already charged with meaning. Moreover, to envision a transition from perception to meaning is to misunderstand the nature of perception. In Merleau-Ponty's own words,

> In actual perception taken at its origin, before any word is uttered, the sign offered to sense and the signification are not even theoretically separable. An object is an organism of colors, smells, sounds and tactile appearances which symbolize, modify and accord with each other according to the laws of a real logic which it is the task of science to make explicit, and which it is far from having analyzed

completely.[102]

Sensation is not pure impression, Merleau-Ponty tells us in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, to sense is to collide with qualities, like soft and red, but these qualities are not sensations, they are sensible qualities that belong to objects, not consciousness. Sensible qualities, themselves, are things, not merely things in or for our consciousness. Perception gives us the sensible qualities of objects in the world, but we take these qualities and mistakenly attribute them to the nature of perception. Instead of understanding the perceptible qualities of things in the world through the act of perception, we end up attempting to understand the act of perception through the perceptible qualities of things. "We make perception out of things perceived . . . and since perceived things themselves are obviously accessible only through perception, we end by understanding neither."[103] Therefore, according to Merleau-Ponty, we never experience sensation, we only experience sensible things. The determinate qualities of things have taken the place of subjectivity. Revealing the true nature of subjectivity requires going back to the means by which consciousness came to have its particular object, the means that enabled consciousness to first grasp an object with determinate qualities.

Philosophers and scientists are often mistaken about the determinate qualities of objects, tending to err in the extremes of under-determination or over-determination. In attempting to purge all ambiguity from the nature of determinate qualities, these thinkers'

[102] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.38.
[103] Ibid, p.5.

elide real objects of knowledge in favor of idealized forms, when in reality there is always "a depth of the object that no progressive sensory deduction will ever exhaust."[104] Quality is not an element of consciousness, an incommunicable impression, but rather an object for consciousness endowed with meaning. Furthermore, this meaningful object for consciousness, i.e. quality, is never fully developed and determinate. The indeterminate provides the atmosphere that gives rise to qualities. Merleau-Ponty likens this atmosphere to a viscosity, thick with latent meaning: "we must recognize the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon . . . it is in this atmosphere that quality arises . . . its meaning is an equivocal meaning; we are concerned with an expressive value rather than with logical signification."[105] In sum, first we need to abandon the belief that we know what perception is, that our perceptions *have* qualities and come to realization that these qualities do not belong to our perceptions, but rather to objects in the world. Quality, it turns out, is not an element *in* consciousness, but rather an object *for* consciousness; qualities are not private, incommunicable *impressions*, they are objective *meanings*. Next, we need to admit that quality is never experienced directly: consciousness is always consciousness *of something* and this something does not always turn out to be an identifiable object; the objective meaning of quality, therefore, is never fully developed or determinate.

Qualities are objective meanings in the world that are indirectly experienced by us because they are always qualities of some-*thing* that encompasses other qualities and may not even be fully determinate or identifiable. I can see blue in a rainbow, a book cover,

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[104] Ibid., p.216.
[105] Ibid., p.6.

or an ocean, but I can never experience blue directly. Moreover, the quality of blue is always affected by the thing that has it as well as the other sensory qualities that I happen to experience at the same time with it. The empiricist position that claims the different senses must learn to inform one another over time couldn't be further from the experiential truth. Not only do the senses communicate directly, but all our sensory experience is inter-modal from the start. I am tempted to say that it is not even possible for any quality, any objective meaning in the world belonging to an object, to be perceived by one sense only. It would help if we started to think about perception with the same holistic approach that is now popular in the culinary arts. No longer is taste thought to be a sense that stands on its own. Taste not only owes a great deal to smell and texture, but even appearance and sounds (e.g., the cut of sushi or the sizzle of fajitas). The culinary arts have long since discovered that one of the best ways to heighten a particular quality is to selectively emphasize the qualities accompanying it.

Qualities play off one another in the world. There is a large disparity between the sensible characteristics of things as we experience them and the objective qualities of things in the world. Red and green in combination give the impression of brown or gray. Sometimes we experience things to have qualities that depart from our actual experiences of them. For instance, the color of the paint on the wall appears to be a single unified color despite the fact that lighting and perspective change the hues that reach my eyes from the center of the wall to its extremes. Moreover, because of the structure of my eye, the color of the wall before me should vary according to the concentration of cones on my retina and have a blank or dark spot in the middle. In these cases, and innumerable others like them, "the 'sensible' cannot be defined as the immediate effect of

an external stimulus."[106] In reality, the breakdown of sensations can only come after perception, as the accomplishment of mental abstraction. Sensations, therefore, are the products of perception, not its starting place. In order to understand sense experience we must dive into the pre-reflective realm that is the viscosity of meaning, the positive presence of indeterminacy.

Perception should be thought of in terms of a direction, rather than a primitive function, and sensations as various forms of behavior, rather than a single state or quality. Perception could be likened to a form of interpretation, where sensations belong not to our felt experience, but rather the conceived effects of objects acting upon our bodies. We don't begin with sensations and end with meaning, rather we begin in the viscosity of meaning and through the processes of distillation and abstraction we end with sensations; Molyneux's question was flawed from the start by reversing this order. The question presupposes that we begin with sensation and build up to experience, but this approach would never lead anyone to see. On the contrary, we always being with the wholeness of experience and it is only through the accomplishments of the power of abstraction in the human mind that we can ever arrive at a conception of pure sensation. The question errs by assuming that Molyneux's man attaches the concept of "spherical" to a tactile sensation, as if the sensation of spherical were an object *of* perception, when in reality "spherical" is a quality that is an object *for* perception that belongs to the sphere (not a private sensation). Obviously there is no reason to think that there would be any transparency between the mental abstractions of sensations. Therefore the philosophical import of Molyneux's question must rest on the ability of a previously blind man to

[106] Ibid., p.8.

recognize the presence of qualities, like spherical, *in the world*.

Lived experience abides by a logic of organic wholes, the senses modify and accord with one another as the body immerses itself in the world of the visible. At the origin of perception there is no distinction between objects of perception in the world and the significance of these objects in the mind of the viewer. As was previously stated, the separation of the senses is the product of a mental abstraction in an attempt to intellectualize perception. Merleau-Ponty tells us that the separation between perceiver and perceived, between the subject and the objects of perception, is also a creation of abstraction. The perceiver is not entrusted with the task of "making sense of the world," on the contrary, the body and the world work together to provide consciousness with an already complete logic of meaning. The logic of meaning in the world that my body is a part of and conforms to, unfolds for perception objects of intersensory significance. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body

> Holds things in a circle around itself . . . things are an annex or prolongation of itself . . . vision happens among, or is caught in, things—in that place where something visible undertakes to see, becomes visible for itself by virtue of the sight of things; in that place where there persists, like the mother water in crystal, the undividedness of the sensing and the sensed.[107]

To possess a body is to possess a canvas where the perceptual unfolding of the world can

[107] Mearleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p.163.

take form. Intersensory things can only be rendered meaningful by an intersensory body. The body is a sensory whole; the division of the senses into sight, touch, smell, and taste do not capture the fullness of experience. For this reason we should think of perception as a direction, a way of being accompanied by a particular behavior. For example, *sour* is not merely a taste that occurs in isolation in our experience. The way sour acts on the body can have a color, smell, feeling, and shape. The quality of sour engages the entire body and relates it to the logic of the world. In short, I am no more a composite of five senses somehow co-existing on a shared substrate than the lemon I perceive.

Merleau-Ponty tells us that when he considers his perceptions from the inside, he discovers "one single, unlocalized knowledge . . . [and] there is no such difference between thinking and perceiving as there is between seeing and hearing."[108] Our bodies are simultaneously subjects and objects of perception; we live in a world of experiential wholes. All the divisions' philosophers make in attempt to capture the true nature of perception—from the separation of the perceiver and the perceived, the external object and the internal impression, to the different forms of sensation—only serve to carry us further from the truth that is the logic of meaning in the world. Our way of thinking about perception has imposed intellectual limitations on perception, stripping the richness of perception into separate thoughts falling under isolated fragments of experience we have come to call our "senses." The obscured reality, Merlau-Ponty tells us, is that "the sight of sounds or the hearing of colors come about in the same way as the unity of the gaze through the two eyes."[109] The body is a synergetic system interpreting the effects of

[108] Mearleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.213.
[109] Ibid., p.234.

being acted on by a meaningful world of intersensory significance, not a collection of discrete, adjacent organs. The ability to see sounds or hear colors has only recently been recognized by scientists. Commonly referred to as synesthesia, the crossing over of one sense into another is considered to have its origins in a neurological abnormality, not the structure of the world, but the abilities of Daniel Kish and Ben Underwood (among others) are now challenging this conclusion. These congenitally blind individuals have demonstrated the ability for humans to "see" the world using echolocation. In Merleau-Ponty's rubric, they have directed themselves towards a previously overlooked form of behavior for realizing the intersensory significance that underlies the logic of meaning in the world.

All too often, we obscure the meaning of the sensible in favor of an intellectual analysis that turns perception into an interpretation of signs. And judgment, the transcendental activity of perception grasped from within by authentic reflection, is reduced to an activity of drawing conclusions to create the illusion of fully determinate perception in the face of ambiguity and impoverished retinal impressions. Perception has been mistaken as a construction of judgment and the fact that it is always already bound up with a larger whole endowed with meaning has been ignored. Concerning the real function of judgment in perception, Merleau-Ponty considers a piece of wax:

> The analysis of the piece of wax means, one may say, not that there is a reason hidden behind nature, but that reason is rooted in nature; the 'inspection of the mind' would then be, not the concept gravitating towards nature, but nature rising to the concept . . . Perception would be a judgment, which, however, is unaware

> of the reasons underlying its own formation, which amounts to saying that the perceived object presents itself as a totality and a unity before we have apprehended the intelligible law governing it, and that the wax is not originally a pliable and alterable bit of extension.[110]

Instead of striving to separate the mind out of nature, our efforts to understand perception and concept origination would be better served if we focused rather on how the mind functions in response to, or an extension of, nature. The picture we should be drawing is not one where the conceptualization of the mind is directed towards nature, but rather where the order inherent in nature gives rise to the concepts in the mind. The success or failure of Molyneux's man does not depend on his intellectual ability to extend concepts to completely new applications (an activity more appropriate for a poet), but rather his ability to perceptually experience the world with the aid of vision. The concepts will come of their own accord; concepts like "cube" and "sphere" provide a modality for our experience and comprehensive hold on the world.

We are now in a position to respond to what Campbell referred to as the "real question" underlying Molyneux's problem: the basis on which we acquire and ascribe concepts to our experience. Although the work of Merleau-Ponty suggests a particular approach towards developing a full-blown theory of concepts, the most detailed account I have found for concepts exemplifying the phenomenological conclusions drawn thus far comes from the work of Jerry Fodor. Fodor advances an explicit theory of concepts in accord with Merleau-Ponty's account that roots concepts in phenomenological

[110] Ibid., p.41-2.

experience. Under the designation of Informational Atomism, Fodor provides a non-cognitivist account for how concepts are acquired and formed. According to this account, having a concept is not like coming to have a specific knowledge or learning a definition, but rather entering into a specific experience. Concept possession is not a "learning that," but rather a "learning how:" how to relate the mind to the world in such a way that a particular concept comes to have the content that it does. According to Fodor, "having a concept is something like 'reasoning to' the property that the concept expresses."[111] We can say, to use Fodor's example, that to identify something as a doorknob is to have an experience that brings to mind the property that prior experiences have typically mediated with stereotypical doorknobs. Thus, is it by virtue of association between current experience and past experiences that the mind comes to resonate with a particular concept. According to Fodor,

> What makes something a doorknob is just: being the kind of thing from experience with which our kind of mind readily acquires the concept DOORKNOB. . . and, conversely, what makes something the concept DOORKNOB is just: expressing the property that our kinds of minds lock to from experience with good examples of instantiated *doorknobhood*.[112]

Divorcing himself form a lineage of philosophers who strive to augment the technical classification of concepts, Fodor wants to establish a psychologically robust, vagueness-

[111]Jerry Fodor, *Concepts: Where Cognitive Science Went Wrong*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.137.
[112] Ibid., p.137.

tolerant theory of concepts that likens all concepts to appearance properties. By grouping concepts with appearance properties, Fodor is able to skirt the host of problems associated with definitions, both real and nominal. Of course, this association also implies that many of our newfound appearance concepts are not sensory concepts, an implication that coheres with Merleau-Ponty's insistence that qualities should not be confused with sensations.

Fodor tells us that concepts are like stereotypes, and what makes something fall under a particular concept is the fact that it strikes us as being similar to other experiences that bring a particular concept to mind, but what serves as the basis for determining this similarity? Obviously in a theory that denies innate ideas, being "similar" to a doorknob cannot be determined by comparing a current experience of a doorknob with an ideal or essence of doorknobhood. Similarly, there is nothing that all instances of red have in common over and above our taking them to be instances of the color red. So, how is a comparison to be made between one instantiation of a concept and another? Appealing to other properties merely shifts the burden to providing an account for how and where the concepts of these other properties originate. Distinguishing himself from Quine, Fodor states:

> I'm no empiricist. . . Accordingly, I can appeal to the doorknob stereotype to say what 'similarity to doorknobs' comes to, and—since 'the doorknob stereotype is independently defined—I can do so without invoking the concept DOORKNOB

and thereby courting platitude.[113]

Fodor, therefore, shores up his account by appealing to other properties associated with the stereotype doorknob and deems this account immune to the dilemma of empiricism—which is hard pressed to provide an account for "doorknob" without appealing to the concept doorknob—and hence fall into the trap of innate ideas.

Because concepts are not acquired inductively, the experience that is the relation between the mind and the world in concept acquisition is not akin to causal or inductive reasoning, which also explains how concepts can be psychologically primitive without being innate. According to Fodor, "all that needs to be innate for RED to be acquired is whatever the mechanisms are that determine that red things strike us as they do; which is to say that all that needs to be innate is the sensorium."[114] Having a property is constituted by the fact that things with this property reliably strike us under certain circumstances as having this property. Properties, therefore, are mind-dependent, but this does not mean they are ontologically second-rate. Properties are qualities belonging to things, not consciousness, but properties are also mind-dependent insofar as the order inherent in nature gives rise to the crystallization of certain properties for our particular kinds of minds. Therefore, what we take to be laws about things in the world like doorknobs are really only laws about "our kinds of minds."[115] In this respect, Fodor would like to persuade us to abandon all of the former concerns we have come to associate with concepts, like nominal definitions, real essences, and metaphysical

[113] Ibid., p.145.
[114] Ibid., p.142.
[115] Ibid., p.147.

ultimates.

Fodor is an advocate for the direct perception of concepts as stereotypical appearance properties and opposed to the claim that there is anything like innate ideas or universals guiding this perception. Yet I cannot help but wonder if this account of concept acquisition is really incompatible with a theory of universals. One conspicuous absence in Fodor's theory is the role memory must play in perpetuating these conceptual stereotypes over time. It seems that an important aspect of my current experience with a doorknob would be constituted by memory and not perception, which leads one to wonder if there is more going on here than merely a perceptual experience between the mind and the world. In short, it seems that some form of universal has slipped back into the picture. This may not, however, be as devastating as Fodor feared. For instance, Arindam Chakrabarti defends a theory of universals that makes them worldly properties accessible to direct perception, rather than weird thinkable forms only knowable a priori or as innate ideas. According to Chakrabarti we directly perceive universals; our sense organs actually access them in experience. Seeing a universal is not an act of remembering, but rather recognizing. Although both depend on memory, Chakrabarti assures us "the former takes the form: 'That past a was F', whereas the latter takes the form: 'This present b is the same F as that.'"[116] Unlike the Platonic conception of universals, where universals do not need their exemplifiers in order to exist and are actually considered to be "more real" than their exemplifiers and are, moreover, "remembered" through anamnesis, the conception of universals Chakrabarti advances is

[116] Arindam Chakrabarti, "On Perceiving Properties" in *Universals, Concepts and Qualities: New Essays on the Meaning of Predicates*. Edited by P. F. Strawson and Arindam Chakrabarti, (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), p.313

focused on the ability to perceive universals in their many instances or exemplifiers. Chakrabarti tells us:

> When I eat a particular mango I clearly recognize that besides its own unique determinate taste—this one may be a bit tart, with a sweet aftertaste—it does have a generic determinable mango-taste. . . In that case, I must taste a universal in a particular too. . . Why not?[117]

At the end of the day, "perception" is another word for the effect objects with qualities have on the body. The effect that objects and qualities have on me will depend, in part, on my past experiences with these objects. In this way, memories, as well as imagination, often color our perceptions. Merleau-Ponty's account of perception lends itself to the perception of universals where traditional theories of perception would not. Because it is nature that rises to the formation of concepts, and sensory experience and signification are inseparable, the currency of universals need not be learned in order to be an elementary part of perception. Universals are perceptible because the nature of our experience is never as stripped down as philosophers tend to imagine. As Chakrabarti aptly puts it, "the very idea of pre-conceptual non-predicative perception is highly suspect."[118] On this point, Merleau-Ponty would definitely agree: perception always marks an interaction with meaning. The proper connection to draw between the two meanings of the word "sense" does not take the form of a transition or translation from

[117] Ibid., p.318.
[118] Ibid., p.312.

one type of sensing to another (i.e., from perceptual sensing to conceptual sense), but rather a common grounding (conceptual sense lies at the heart of the embodied nature of perceptual sensing).

### 3.2.4 Anticipation and Affect

The theory of perception developed thus far has focused on the body, motion, exposure to others, and the origination of concepts, but two essential elements remain that need to be incorporated into a comprehensive account of perception: prediction and emotion. In this last section I will discuss the contributions of these functions in perception, while attempting to forge some common ground between the phenomenological account of perception developed in this chapter and a few of the theories pertaining to perception that are gaining currency in neuroscience today.

The neurologist Rodolfo R. Llinás states quite clearly that the main goal of the brain is intelligent motricity. This claim accords with what we have already established from a phenomenological approach, namely that the presence of movement marks the presence of consciousness. Llinás also holds that "underlying the workings of perception is prediction, that is, the useful expectation of events yet to come . . . [moreover] prediction, with its goal-orientated essence, so very different from reflex, is the very core of brain function."[119] Anticipation and prediction are essential in understanding how

[119] Rodolfo R. Llinás, *I of the Vortex*, p.3.

perception anticipates and receives the world. We anticipate our perception of the world, predicting both the nature and the forms our experience will take. For instance, the hand that reaches out to catch a butterfly takes on an appropriate butterfly-catching posture or gesture well before actually initiating the catching. In this sense, getting ready to catch a butterfly is akin to entering into a particular dispositional state. Perception is like a direction: an orientation towards, and receptivity for, a particular meaning exemplified by certain qualities in the world. The positioning of my hand does not owe its conception to a private sensory impression I have of the butterfly, but rather it is the butterfly itself that directly acts upon my body, causing my hand to make the particular gesture that it does.

Preparing to catch a butterfly is merely one illustration of how the body actively organizes sense experience and movement in relation to pragmatic concerns. How we experience the world depends, not only on what sensations and qualities are present in a given situation, but also on the pragmatic concerns we project onto a given situation. As Gallagher explains:

> The fact that I may feel the object as hot rather than as smooth, for example, will depend not only on the objective temperature of the object, but on my purposes . . . my body meets stimulation and organizes it within the framework of my own pragmatic schemata.[120]

Understanding anticipation is necessary in constructing an accurate picture of perception. The neurologists tell us that brain function relies more on active prediction than reception

[120] Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, p.142.

of the world and that it is this forward-orientated anticipation of experience that creates our sense of agency in the world. Anticipation not only focuses our attention to be more receptive to certain qualities than others, it actually edits which qualities will be acknowledged at all. In part, the editing device of anticipation is the result of evolutionary necessity, if we assumed a receptive position instead of a forward-looking orientation towards the world, the sheer amount of stimuli bombarding our bodies would be overwhelming, making it all but impossible to devise intentional actions. This is an important point to keep in mind when considering the position of Molyneux's man: he expects the acquisition of vision to *add to* his pre-established understanding of the world, not open a portal to a completely different realm. The anticipation must be that the power of vision will only add to the inter-sensory whole of experience. The suggestion that Molyneux's man would take a purely passive, ignorant approach to the perceptual contents of vision—possibly comparable only to the way Husserl might try to bracket off the phenomenological contents of experience—is nothing short of pure fantasy. The safer bet to make would be that he would be anticipating reality, expecting to see the concepts and objects he has already come to know and associate with his intentions and purposes in the world.

On a biological level, the ability of the brain to predict experience has been explained by Llinás as the outcome of a holistic effort on behalf of numerous brain cells. Every cell in the brain records information in a slightly different way, as if they each had a personality of their own. The characters of the different cells reveal that each one has a unique view of the external world. It is through a consensus from the multiplicity of perspectives that we get a function that serves to predict what is going to happen before it

happens. Prediction, therefore, is the formulation of a sensorimotor image in the contextualization of the world. Another name for the central role of prediction in our connection and interaction with the world can most aptly be captured in the abstraction we call the "self." The self is the seat for intelligent motricity, but not every movement of the body is the outcome of intentional orchestration. A great part of the time we rely on fixed action patterns, or FAPs for short, that are "sets of well-defined motor patterns, ready-made 'motor tapes' as it were that, when switched on, produce well-defined and coordinated movements: the escape response, walking, swallowing, the prewired aspects of bird songs, and the like."[121] FAPs make navigating the world possible, by narrowing the number of choices and decisions that need to be made from moment to moment, freeing the self to focus instead on the more important decisions involved in managing behavior.

Through synthesizing information from the senses, the self anticipates what is about to happen in the world and what bodily activity will provide the most appropriate response. Moreover, Llinás tells us that before we can successfully anticipate the world, we must first internally emulate it, a process that enlists the assistance of universals:

> Premotor constructs, fleetingly gathered and dissolved functional patterns of neural activity, must emulate external reality in order to determine the consequences of their movements . . . The properties of this external world, universals, must somehow be embedded into the functional workings or neuronal circuitry of the brain . . . Such internalization, the embedding of universals into an

[121] Ibid., p.133.

internal functional space, is one of the essentials of brain function.[122]

This conception of universals is compatible with the theory of universals proposed thus far and contributes to a fuller picture of universals as mind-dependent yet ontologically grounded principles of organization for a perceiver in the world. Moreover, it seems Llinás would side with Chakrabarti with regard to the central role of universal concepts in our way of experiencing the world. According to Llinás, the world acts on the self to promote the recognition of concepts, which lead to the development of universals by conjoining repeated exposure with memory. Universals, in turn, enable the self to make informed decisions for successful action based on prediction. In short, emulating reality is a prerequisite for coordinated, directed motricity and the introduction of universals make the emulation of reality possible.

The final consideration Llinás would want us to include in a theory of perception would be the influence of emotion on perception. Contrary to what we may think, or may want to believe, the self is not a logical reasoning machine: our emotions play a huge role in determining our actions and may even influence our perception of qualities. According to Llinás, even motor FAPs are accompanied by a well-defined emotional component and even "something as insignificant as a mosquito bite or a spider wandering over your surface may evoke not just a sensory response, but actually a brief emotional state."[123] Sensory input is amplified into an emotional state in order to set clear contexts for behavior. Gallagher also speaks to the influence of emotion on perception in the

[122] Llinás, *I of the Vortex*, p.55.
[123] Ibid., p.158.

following observation: "it is not that a man sees a woman and then decides whether she is sexy; vision is already sexually informed. . . Cephalus's problem (or virtue if you value platonic relationships) is that his perception is impoverished."[124] Just as my interests and anticipation can affect how I perceive a particular situation and the qualities I register, my emotional state and associations can radically alter the contents of my perception. In this regard emotion can be thought of as a sixth sense. The qualities I perceive belonging to the objects in the world are not limited to the way they strike me in terms of appearance, smell, taste, sound, and feel. It is not incorrect or merely figurative to say an empty room, piece of music, or musty smell can be sad. Sadness is a quality that can belong to an object to the same degree as red or sour.

The implication of the association between emotions and qualia brings us to the conclusion that perception is essentially an aesthetic activity: not only are the contents of our experience influenced by our preferences and tastes, so is the objective world. The greater part of this influence takes place on a non-conscious level, which explains why it is so hard to discover one's own biases and inclinations. In addition to coloring how we perceive the world around us, the association between affective states and perception also implies our behavior is deeply modulated by psychological states and events.

At the end of the day, neuroscientists like Llinás pose a direct challenge to empiricism, favoring genetic inheritance over traditional *tabula rasa* theories of learning from sensory experience. Llinás maintains that a big part of how we experience the world is hardwired in our genetic code; we are predisposed to identify the presence of

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[124] Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, p.151. Cephalus: Greek God married to Procris and subsequently kidnapped by Eos. Despite her attempts at seduction, Cephalus never succumbed to Eos's charms. He never "saw" her in a romantic context.

certain concepts or universals in the world. Llinás would agree with Fodor that concepts arise from the unique way we relate to the world and can therefore be characterized as psychologically primitive. We neither learn nor can we unlearn to perceive qualities like "green." Expanding on this point, Llinás says:

> If one takes into consideration the fact that perception itself—through *any* sense modality—has become the elaborate process we see now through the course of evolution, then the most parsimonious view is that sensory experience, qualia, *must* be primordial in the global organization of nervous system function . . . In fact, qualia must represent a significant and influential drive throughout evolution.[125]

Qualia, according to Llinás, are judgments or assessments of sensory information that serve as the basis for the predictive nature of the self and promote the ascription of a certain FAP or intentionally directed movement. Llinás tells us that qualia are the "ultimate predictive vectors that recycle/re-enter into the internal landscape of the self . . . they *are* the 'ghost' in the machine and represent the critically important space between input and output, for they are neither, yet are product of one and the drive for the other."[126] Qualia, therefore, are abstractions arising from the unity of experience, which separate out the different properties of perception. Llinás conception of qualia clearly resonates with Merleau-Ponty's account of the inseparability of sense and signification at

[125] Ibid., p.203.
[126] Ibid., p.221-2.

the origin of perception (the sensor and the sensed). From this consideration of qualia, the proper question to pose to Molyneux's man should not be whether he possesses the ability to translate and apply concepts acquired through other senses to his faculty of vision, but rather whether he possesses the power to resist and prevent the conceptualization of his visual perception.

To the degree that the self has a hand in determining the appearance of reality, it is accurate to say that an innate aesthetics conditions experience. The text of the world can be credited with writing itself and its author into being. The range of possible perceptual experiences in the world is indefinite. What we take to be reality, or the visible as Merleau-Ponty would say, is always a limited expression of the possibilities underlying reality, or the invisible. In addition to anticipation and affectation, imagination also plays a huge role in determining the unity of consciousness, aesthetic judgment, and empirical knowledge. Perception is an aesthetic activity, the unique product of the relation between us and the world, influenced by our emotions and leading to the formation of our concepts. Concepts are at once directly perceived and mind-dependent. On the one hand, nature itself rises to concepts in the presentation of qualia. On the other hand, our affective states and emotions function like an inherent aesthetic filter in determining what qualia will occupy the dominant roles in determining our experience in the world.

## 3.3 Chapter Conclusion: The Significance of Seeing

Molyneux's problem challenges many of our common assumptions about vision by asking us what it would mean to see without possessing any understanding of what we see. The conceptual challenge of accounting for what has often been termed "first perception" takes on additional weight when asked in the context of an adult as opposed to a newborn and draws attention to the fact that it does not make sense to speak of vision without understanding. On a fundamental level, seeing is always and already conceptual. Just as we would say someone has not succeeded in reading something if they fail to grasp the meaning of the printed words, we need to clearly state that someone has failed to see if they cannot, on some level, grasp the content of what it is they "saw".

Although Evans is correct when he says that affordances ground egocentric space, the full picture is actually much more recursive than he originally thought. There is only one experiential space that underlies all the senses; not only are the senses intermodal, but the actual nature of experience is itself intermodal. Shape concepts arise out of experience; they do not appeal to different egocentric spaces: the "sphere" that is the object of my visual perception is the same as the "sphere" of my haptic perception. The senses communicate directly with one another, integrating information in a single egocentric spatial framework. Egocentric space is neither purely innate nor learned from experience, but rather the reciprocal product of an embodied self that is at once sensing subject and sensed object: a light penetrating the world of things as well as an opaque thing caught up in a world of things. Ultimately, the self and the world are co-creators, and embodied reality is a product of the conditions of the mind undergoing a synthesis

with the conditions of reality.

Therefore we can conclude, contra Locke, that the senses are unified in perception and that the separation of the senses into different forms of sensation is nothing beyond an intellectual abstraction. We are also in a position to reverse Berkeley's thesis—that concepts are strictly tied to the sensory modality in which they arise—and assert that it belongs to the nature of concepts to apply across the different sensory modalities. This capacity has commonly been captured in what we refer to as "the metaphorical extension" of a concept, which brings up an additional worry, namely determining whether the trans-modality of concepts is responsible for the trans-modality of sensory information or whether the trans-modality of sensory information is responsible for the trans-modality of concepts. In other words, is Molyneux's man able to identify the cube and sphere based on his knowledge of the concepts "cube" and "sphere," where it is the intellectual nature of concepts that deserves the credit for his success, or is Molyneux's man able to identify the difference between the cube and sphere because his concepts of "cube" and "sphere" were initially introduced to him through an experience that was rich in visual implications and hence responsible for forming concepts of "cube" and "sphere" that are applicable across the senses? If the latter, then his success rests on the trans-modal quality of his tactile perception, which provides him with information concerning the visual implications of the objects he encounters. Of course, this is the conclusion of the current investigation, which has found that the affordances in the world determine our orientation in the world (not the reverse). And, because the affordances in the world (the ways in which the world rises to concepts or is recognized as possessing meaning) ground, and are not grounded by, egocentric space, egocentric space can provide a shared

concept of space across the different sensory modalities. The real evidence we have for the existence of a single egocentric space that spans the senses comes from the discovery that, in addition to a body image, we are all in the possession of a body schema. The presence of a body schema is the presence of a preconscious organization inherent in the body that is predisposed to synthesize sensory information in terms of the inter-sensory whole of existence.

The seeds of perception can be located in the preconscious body schema. Kant's a priori conditions for experience inherent in the mind and Evans' direct communication of the senses both fall under the umbrella of body schema. Information picked up by the separate sense organs is represented within a common space that is already intermodal. Once again, it is only in abstract intellectualization that we can tease all these aspects of experience apart. Moreover, my perspective of the world has no definite limit; it slips into the perspective of the other. We are always in communication with others as similar psycho-physical subjects. The separation of the perceiver from the perceived, therefore, is also the product of an intellectual abstraction that allows us to ask if it's the same "sphere" we see and touch. Ultimately, we are not a collection of organs, but a synergistic system in the fullness of experience, which reveals things as sensory wholes.

It is necessary to keep in mind that there is always ambiguity in the determination of objects. Qualities are expressive values that are objects for consciousness endowed with meaning and they are always somewhat indeterminate. Using the same concept in relation to different senses is not to employ different applications of the concept, but rather to assume different perspectives on the same concept. Just as one can vacillate between two or more alternative meanings of a passage or a sentence, one can find the

contents of perception to be objectively ambiguous. What this means is that direct visual access to meaning need not access an exclusive singular meaning. Qualities are not elements *in* consciousness, they are objects *for* consciousness: objective meanings that belong to objects in the world. Concepts, therefore, originate in the world, not a metaphysical inheritance of innate ideas. Concept possession should not be likened to a "learning that," but a "learning how," where the self learns how to relate to the world in such a way that it comes to have the meaning and significance of expressing perceivable qualities and properties. Meaning, concepts, and universals are not products of our language, they are essential ingredients in the way we experience the world, a way of experiencing the world that clearly lends itself to the further development of linguistic systems of meaning.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the ties between perception and language, in particular speech, run deep. The theory of perception hereby developed already carries many implications for a theory of language. The body, Merleau-Ponty tells us, is itself an expression of speech. Words have meanings, they are not merely the envelopes for thought, as the empiricists would have us believe. Speech should not be likened to the clothing for thought, but rather its body; speech does not transmit thought, it accomplishes and completes it. In the words of Merleau-Ponty: "The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning is the world."[127] Perception and language exist in tandem. The spoken word, like perception, can best be compared to a direction, an orientation towards and reception of a meaning-laden world. Moreover, consciousness, and the language that structures it, is generated out of movement and dependent on exposure to others (both

[127] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.184.

exposure of oneself and exposure to the behavior of others). In the words of Gallagher,

> The relation between embodiment and language . . . is a self-reciprocating, self-organizing one only if there is another person. . . The body generates a gestural expression. . . It is, however, another person who moves, motivates, and mediates this process. . . To say that language moves my body is already to say that other people move me.[128]

We do not own language, it owns us; we are always already within language. To perceive is to take part in a conceptually structured world where concepts are the modality for experiences' comprehensive hold on, and active involvement in, the world. The far-reaching capacities of language may eventually transcend embodiment, but this should not make us lose sight of the fact that language also depends on the body. The creation of meaning is rooted deep in the world.

The power of abstraction has not only given rise to the ability to separate out the properties of things from things themselves, but also the ability to assign constant linguistic markers to different aspects of intentionally. In this light, language comes about as the result of the generation of premotor imagery that allows for the abstraction of universals (via the abstraction of the properties of things from the things themselves). This is the insight which led Llinás to conclude: one, that "abstract thinking must have preceded language during evolution, and two, that the premotor events leading to expression of language are in every way the same as those premotor events that precede

[128] Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, p.129.

any movement that is executed for a purpose."[129] These conclusions bring to the fore, once again, the common origins and structures of perception and language.

This chapter began with the objective of developing a theory of perception that would bring to the fore the reading-like elements of vision, but I would like to end with a few allusions to the possible implications this theory of perception may have on the perception-like elements of reading. Perhaps instead of bringing seeing closer to reading, our efforts would be better spent bringing our conception of reading closer to our understanding of perception. Sensory experience is indistinguishable from significance; meaning emerges from deep within the world. Seeing, therefore, shares a great deal in common with reading. Like reading, seeing is the accomplishment of a mediated conceptual synthesis between the text (of the world) and the self. The positive content or meaning that results is neither the sole property of the world/text nor the perceiver/reader, but rather the creative recursive synthesis between the two. Perception has been mistaken as a construction of judgment at the expense of the fact that it is always already bound up with a larger whole endowed with meaning.

What if language can be accurately characterized as a gesture towards a meaningful world? Perhaps then it would be revealed that the world rises up and directly causes the body to respond with words in a fashion that parallels the ability of a butterfly to act on the body causing a particular gesture of the hand. Could it be that just as seeing is loaded with inter-sensory conceptual significance, reading also comes with similar inter-sensory information? Can simply seeing a word make you hear it? Can simply hearing a word make you encounter a concept? Are the meanings and sounds of words

[129] Llinás, *The I of the Vortex*, p.228.

tied to their appearances or is the connection merely due to arbitrary convention? Does the way we experience the world radically differ between the literate and illiterate? And lastly, now that we have established the significance underlying the fact that the same thing can be both touched and seen, it is time to turn our attention to the act of reading to determine the significance of what, exactly, it means when we claim the same thing can be both seen and read.

# CHAPTER 4
# READING

## 4.0 Introduction: From Perceiving to Reading

The previous chapter dedicated to perception sought to establish how seeing gives way to conceptualization. Perception, I argued, is based on the body, initiated by movement, developed through exposure to others, and enriched with anticipation and emotional feedback. The "conception" of meaning in perception, therefore, is at once the origin of meaning in the world and the acquisition of concepts. Concepts rise up out of the world, are mind-dependent, and yet ontologically grounded in experience. Perceptual experience is always meaningful because it cannot exist without some level of conceptualization. Even in the first moments of neonate perception, visual information exhibits a certain degree of order in an egocentric space, which may not be recognized to be egocentric given that the concept of ego is a much later arrival on the scene. The first concepts we learn come directly from experience, but how do these concepts come to be associated with words? The newborn baby obviously lacks words, but nonetheless has some basic concepts. Concepts, under the theory I am advancing, are synonymous with organized perceptual experience. Therefore, what is the relationship between concepts and the words that represent them?

In addition to making sense of sensation, conceptual experience carries with it a *compulsion* for representation. The baby not only sees the face before it, the baby automatically begins to represent or mirror the characteristics of the face it sees on its

own face. If it belongs to the nature of concepts to inspire representation, could it be the case that the introduction of linguistic signs (i.e., words) to represent concepts is a natural progression in the conceptualization and organization of our communally structured world? Because of the way we are predisposed to experience the world, language can be seen as a natural modality of the human body designed to lend symbolic representation to the logic of the world. Could it be, therefore, that we were born not only to perceive, but to read?

## 4.1 Learning to Read

"We were never born to read," Maryanne Wolf proclaims in her book *Proust and the Squid*. The act of reading is nothing short of miraculous, she tells us, but there is a sense in which we are predisposed to read insofar as "we come into the world programmed with the capacity to change what is given to us by nature, so that we can go beyond it."[130] Learning to read demands nothing short of a radical restructuring of the brain and yet the brain is genetically poised for exactly the sort of restructuring influence that a breakthrough like the development of written language would demand. Reading is certainly one of the most remarkable developments in human history. It's also a relatively new development, which has not only reshaped our society and lives, but even the organizing principle of our brains. What is perhaps most remarkable about our ability to read, however, is that we must discover it anew with each generation. There is not a genetic predisposition that lends itself to reading. While the subsidiary activities that contribute to reading, like vision and speech, are genetically organized, the ability to apply these facilities in the culminating activity that is reading is the hard-won accomplishment of each and every individual who has ever wrestled with the written word and won access to its secrets.[131]

Leaning to read is not like learning to tie ones' shoes, although the two are often learned around the same time in childhood. Unlike learning how to tie one's shoe, there

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[130] Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), p.5.
[131] Ibid, p.11.

is not a discrete moment wherein one learns how to read. Reading is an applied skill that requires cultivation over time; the gradual nature of increasing competence makes it difficult to determine which point someone can be said to possess the ability to read. With this in mind, how might we go about testing someone's reading ability? Should we ask the person in question to read a particular passage out loud? Although this may seem to be a reliable strategy, unfortunately the ability to read out loud does not adequately demonstrate that someone actually possesses the ability to read. The ability to read out loud merely demonstrates knowledge of the correlation between phonemes and letters or the correspondence between written and spoken words. The ability to read out loud does not guarantee any degree of understanding of what has been read by the "reader." It is perfectly conceivable that, despite the fact that the person in question seems, by all outward appearances, to be completely proficient in reading he or she may, nevertheless, lack any understanding of what it is they have read. For instance, I am capable of reading Sanskrit out loud—running my eyes over the *Devanagri* script while locating and sounding out the words—but I rarely understand what the words mean while I'm articulating them. Knowing how to translate the written word into the spoken word is, therefore, neither a sufficient nor necessary condition for instancing a genuine occurrence of reading.

Distinguishing genuine instances of reading from verbally articulating or sounding out words becomes even more muddled when the target language to be read is the same as the reader's natural language. One is tempted to say that anyone proficient in spoken English who is also proficient in reading English passages out loud would necessarily represent a genuine instance of reading. But I think we need to reserve some

skepticism even in cases like these. It could be that the passage is so difficult that, despite being able to read out loud, the "reader's" experience of the passage is akin to a jumble of meaningless words leaving the reader completely at a loss for the meaning of the passage. Moreover, it is possible to imagine a situation where the passage is relatively simple in structure and meaning and, hence, would be easily understood by the subject if someone were to vocalize the passage, but is nevertheless obscure when the subject attempts to read it. Unfortunately this scenario is all too common among individuals who struggle to establish competence in reading. From an observer's standpoint, it seems like the entirety of their attention and mental faculties have been dominated by the articulation of the passage, without a modicum of attention to spare for the contemplation of its meaning. Because so much of the subject's attention and time is engaged in sounding out the words, there is little time or attention left over for prosodic elements or understanding what has been read. For reasons like these, reading cannot be conflated with the mere ability to vocalize a passage. We need an account of reading that adequately captures the ability to read with understanding, what Wolf refers to as the decoding phase. Moreover, we also need an account of reading that affirms the legitimacy of silently reading to one's self.

Could the essence of reading lie in knowing the connection between the meanings and the written appearances of words? At first glance, reading seems to be clearly linked to knowing the meaning of words. On closer inspection, however, the association between word meaning and written appearance cannot provide the building blocks for developing a thorough account of reading because it is perfectly possible to know all the words in a passage and fail to understand the meaning of the passage. The hermeneutical

dimension of reading in a particular historical time and cultural space should not be underestimated when it comes to the profound effects these aspects have on a reader's comprehension. Besides, if knowing how to read can be reduced to being able to identify words and their meanings, then the question would arise as to how many words one would be required to know.

Returning to the previous example of Sanskrit, I can teach you how to read a simple sentence in Sanskrit by teaching you the words of the sentence, what they sound like and what they mean, so you can successfully read the sentence out loud with a full understanding of what you are reading. More likely than not, this will be the only sentence you will be able to read in Sanskrit, but would this justify the assertion that you can read Sanskrit? If not, then we are left with a critical mass problem in terms of determining how many words one must know in a particular language before they can claim reading competency in that language. At the other extreme, it is also common for someone to succeed in reading a passage for comprehension without having prior knowledge of all the words it contains. The extension of one's vocabulary in this way is a common outcome of reading in context. Thus, it is equally possible for someone to fail to comprehend what they have read despite knowing the words or succeed in comprehending what they have read without knowing all the words in the passage.

What is perhaps most surprising about the nature of reading is that even the basic connection between words and comprehension becomes problematic when we investigate the matter closer. What are the basic building blocks of reading: letters, words, clauses, sentences, or larger sections of text? Common sense would dictate that we must read letters before we can read words and words before we can read sentences; the image of

small children, who “read” through the letters of each word before subsequently identifying the words themselves comes to mind. Of course, this is not how we all read. On the contrary, most competent readers only need to see a few letters in a word before they identify it, while others focus on the appearance of the word as a whole, the impression it creates via the combination of its letters, without actually registering their individual identities. Let us return for a moment to the illustration of my teaching you how to read a Sanskrit sentence. What is perhaps most remarkable about this example is that I can teach you how to perform this action, which by all appearances constitutes a genuine instance of reading, without having to teach you the Devanagri alphabet! Not only would you lack the knowledge of how the individual letters sound, you would lack the ability to even identify where one letter ends and another begins. And yet, can you still imagine having the experience of reading the sentence? I’m tempted to think that you would.

Finally, if there remains any doubt that reading seems to supersede the recognition of individual letters, then there are individuals who skip entire words or strings of words when they read. Speed readers are supposed to absorb entire lines of text while only focusing their eyes on two points in the line. Obviously these readers are taking in a supervening structure, which by-passes both letters and words to focus on the impression of words in groups. Therefore, is it possible that someone who is focusing on each and every letter in order to construct each and every word and someone who glances at the overall impression created by strings of words can both be engaged in the same activity of reading? If the essence of reading pertains neither to speed nor points of focus (letters, words, or lines), then what, exactly, does the ability to read hinge on?

If the essence of reading resists reduction to either vocalization, letter identification, word identification, or word meaning, then what *is* reading? Does the key to reading rely entirely on the derivation of meaning from writing? Even this is problematic, for how can we externally validate an individual's understanding? Would it suffice if they could repeat what they have read verbatim? Would they need to translate this content into their own words in order to demonstrate competency? Or would answering a series of questions demonstrate their knowledge of what they have read? The problem with all of these suggestions is that they are indirect means of getting at reading. They don't test reading skills directly, but rather other abilities, like retention, rephrasing, and question answering, which are supposed to indicate the presence of competent reading. The problem, of course, is that these routes tell us more about the ability of an individual to summarize or answer questions than they do about the ability of an individual to read.

Obviously there is no way to learn or prepare for all the sentence combinations you will be exposed to over the course of your life. Possessing the skill of literacy is not like maintaining a registry of words and/or sentence meanings. We are constantly reading new sentences we have never seen before. Even common words and phrases can take on entirely new meanings when used in different ways or contexts. Reading is not just a skill that can be mastered; by contrast, it is an applied skill that requires continual application. Our ability to understand innovative uses of language reveals how tentative, open, and creative our relationship with language really is. This is why it is so difficult to program a computer to converse like a human being: computers cannot be programmed to accommodate the vastly malleable ways we use language.

### 4.1.1 Making Familiar the Unfamiliar

Wittgenstein's famous maxim claims meaning is use and, indeed, we are constantly expanding the realm of meaning through new, often metaphorical, applications of words. In what may seem to be counter-intuitive, the elaboration of meaning depends a great deal on the ambiguity and fluidity of language and meaning. Common words can take on uncommon meanings when strategically combined in innovative ways. If meaning thrives on ambiguity and the play of words to create new avenues for meaning, then what are the respective roles of novelty and familiarity in reading? Clearly reading requires a degree of familiarity with language and the written word, but due to the tendency of reading to produce novelty, is there a point at which too much familiarity can be detrimental to one's capacity to read?[132] Wittgenstein hits on this issue when he asks us to consider whether we can read something known to us by heart:

> Try this experiment: say the numbers from 1 to 12. . . Now look at the dial of your watch and read them—What was it that you called "reading" in the latter case? . . . That is to say: what did you do, to make it into reading?[133]

I believe the point of this experiment is to demonstrate that it actually takes a great degree of effort to read the numbers on a watch without resorting to simply reciting them from

[132]In Book III of the *Rhetoric* Aristotle recognizes that a speech can be too "clear" and thus boring, and he recommends using "strange" linguistic forms—figures of speech, loan words from other languages, etc. to keep audiences on their toes.
[133]Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §161.

memory. Or conversely, that it takes no effort at all and thus doesn't qualify as "reading." It seems as though an additional degree of visual concentration is needed to make the difference between reading and reciting. The fact that greater acquaintance with something can make it harder to read seems to indicate that there is a sense in which reading depends on unfamiliarity as well as familiarity.

In terms of the earlier example involving the Sanskrit sentence, in order to really feel like you can read the sentence you need to familiarize yourself with the appearance and sounds of the words as well as their meanings and how these meanings fit together to form the meaning of the whole. I want to say you can have a genuine experience of reading this sentence when you can see or hear the meaning in the words as your eyes trace over the page and your tongue articulates the sounds. If such a large degree of unfamiliarity can be overcome to produce a genuine experience of reading, then why is it so difficult to experience the sensation of reading something extremely familiar, like the numbers on your watch or the words of a regularly recited prayer? Tons of extra attention is required to stay engaged in the task of reading something we know by heart without reciting it from memory. Familiarity, therefore, seems to tip the scale of reading back again; most of the time increased familiarity corresponds to an increase in the ease of readability, but an excess of familiarity can actually decreases the ease of readability.

Not only is the degree of familiarity troublesome for an account of reading, so is establishing the degree of attention or focus required. The radical suggestion can even be raised that reading need not be a *voluntary* act. At one extreme, it seems to require extra effort and concentration to read, instead of recite, the numbers on a watch, while, at the other extreme, reading can seem extremely hard to avoid. I fear I may be more

susceptible to this than most, but whenever I find myself in a room with an English sign, I almost inevitably discover I cannot *prevent* myself from reading the sign every time my eyes wander in its general direction. It is as though the words have the power to *impose* themselves on me, forcing me to read them. My familiarity with written English allows me to read the sign at a glance, almost effortlessly, without intending to; I hear the words of the sign speak themselves in my head. The seemingly automatic tendency of the written word to translate itself into a spoken word is called the alphabetic principle, a principle which underlies the ability for all of us to read. Stanislas Dehaene and his colleagues argue:

> our ability to recognize words in reading uses the species' evolutionarily older circuitry that is specialized for object recognition . . . just as our ancestors' capacity to distinguish between predator and prey at a glance drew on an innate capacity for visual specialization, our ability to recognize letters and words may involve an even further in-built capacity that allows "specialization within a specialization."[134]

If Duhaene is correct, then perhaps I have restructured my brain in learning to read to the extreme that letters and words have imposed themselves onto my innate ability for instantaneous object recognition (i.e., automaticity). What is perhaps more striking is that it's not just the appearance of words that I have become acutely sensitive to, but also the sounds of words. My automatic recognition for the written word invokes the sound of the

[134]Stanislas Dehaene quoted in Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p.12.

spoken word in my mind, thus demonstrating that linguistic awareness involves the automatic ability to connect visual appearances with auditory qualities.

On the one hand, it seems as though reading has become an inescapable element of my experience in the world. On the other hand, there are instances in which my seemingly innate reflex to read whenever faced with the presence of the written word does not exercise itself. I can look at a number of things with writing on them like the face of a watch or a stop sign without reading and hence without hearing the numbers or the word "stop." In these cases, it is as though the intense degree of familiarity I have with these things has rendered them silent. In a similar vein, Italo Calvino remarks on the ability to resist reading through the cultivation of indifference to the written word in his novel *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*: "I've become so accustomed to not reading that I don't even read what appears before my eyes. . . it's not easy . . . the secret is not refusing to look at the written words. . . on the contrary, you must look at them, intensely, until they disappear."[135] As previously mentioned, my ability to resist reading the written word is limited to just few common objects, but of course there was also a time before words imposed themselves on me like they do now.

Before I learned how to read I perceived the written words on things like cereal boxes and storefronts in a completely different way. Even my relation with the spoken word was different. Arguably, before being introduced to reading, children do not possess the concept of a word. According to Wolf, the cognitive realization that everything has its own name usually come around eighteen months of age, but the

[135]Italo Calvino, *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*, (Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1979), p.49.

realization that words themselves are linguistic units does not come until much later. Despite the fact that most children use spoken language from an early age, their orientation to the words they speak changes when they learn how to read. The words on a soda can or above the doors of a storefront are most likely experienced by pre-literate children as belonging to the properties that visually define those things. I speculate that the way children experience the world of signage is similar to the way I can look at a stop sign without reading the word "stop." I do not experience the word on the sign as I usually experience words, it does not force itself upon me, but rather recedes into the appearance of the sign, becoming a property of the thing, not the presence of an independent linguistic meaning-bearing unit. David Olson remarks on this phenomenon: "When pre-reading children "read" logos such as "Coke" or take the inescapable golden arches as "McDonalds" it is unlikely that they take the emblem as a representation of a word rather than as an emblem of the thing.[136] I believe the phenomenon Olson wishes to point out is that pre-literate children first come to recognize words like "coke" or letters like the "M" on McDonald's not as words and letters, but rather as symbols that represent things. Where adults would distinguish between the branding capacity of a particular font and the neutrality of the underlying words or letters, the child sees only the branding and identifies the underlying word or letter with the appearance properties of the thing. Remarking on this phenomenon, Wolf goes on to say:

> Many prekindergarten children and most kindergarten children recognize the

[136]David R. Olson, *The World On Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 71.

> shapes of very familiar words such as "exit" and "milk", and often the first letters of their own names . . . it doesn't matter that some children may insist that "Ivory" says "soap."[137]

Much like our token-reading ancestors, this stage in child development recognizes letters and words as token-symbols for things. According to Wolf, this is a representation of the logographic stage of child development where symbols are tied directly to concepts instead of the sounds in words.

A strong case can, therefore, be made that the intuitive connection children draw between words and things can best be described as a form of metonymy, where images or signs are somehow seen as embodying the things for which they are images or signs.[138] The first forms of written communication for most children are pictures. One can imagine that in a child's mind the scribbles on the page constitute direct representations of things in the world. With this in mind, it should come as no surprise that children also seem to intuitively confuse words with things or expect them to directly represent things or properties of things in the world. Olson points out: "if non-reading pre-school children are given a pencil and asked to write 'cat' they may write a short string of letter-like forms. . . if then asked to write 'three cats' they repeat the same initial string three times."[139] Although children will learn that words are not representational when they are taught to read, it is all too likely that they will never learn that the same holds true for

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[137] Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p.94.

[138] If children recognize the meaning of images because of their contiguity with the objects the child recognizes, then it would be a case of metonymy. If it is because the images are part of the object, then it would be an instance of synecdoche.

[139] Olson, *The World On Paper*, p.76.

images. In many instances, the "representational" power of images is equally symbolic and conventional as the representational power of linguistic signs.

Learning how to read changes the way we see our own language. In general, illiterate people do not possess the same understanding of words as literate people. I realize conflating between preliterate children and illiterate societies is dangerous, if not downright offensive, but nevertheless I wish to reiterate Wolf's point that learning how to read changes one's relationship to language. In particular, illiterate individuals lack the understanding that words are made up of sounds that can be broken up and rearranged.[140] Upon learning to read, words are experienced as things in their own right and the structure or syntax of language is made explicit in a different manner than it formerly was in speech. According to Wolf, "learning the alphabetic principle changed the way the brain performed not only in the visual cortex, but also in regions underlying auditory and phonological operations such as perception, discrimination, analysis, and the representation and manipulation of speech sounds."[141] Writing presents us with a window into the language we speak; a chance to analyze and improve upon the linguistic structure of our language that the spoken word cannot.

Thus, far from being the representative of speech and the spoken word, the written word actually serves as a guiding influence for the structure and further production of speech. Both Aristotle and Saussure had it wrong when they said, respectively: "written words are the signs of words spoken" and "the sole reason for the

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[140] Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p.151.
[141] Ibid, p.151.

existence of [writing] is to represent [speech].”[142] The truth of the matter is that the written word is not the representation of speech, but rather it is speech that has come to be representative of the written word. As Wolf puts it:

> Knowing “what’s in a word” helps you read it better; reading a word deepens your understanding of its place in the continuum of knowledge . . . this is the dynamic relationship between the brain’s contribution to reading and reading’s contribution to the brain’s cognitive capacities.[143]

We confront the written word with an extensive knowledge of spoken language and, in the process of achieving competency with written language, we end up altering our experience of language in general, including the way we regard and use spoken language.[144]

### 4.1.2 The Look and Sound of Language

What relation holds between the visual appearance and sound of a word? Does the former cause the latter? Wittgenstein reminds us that the appearance of words often have as profound an imprinting effect on us as their sounds. I cannot see or even think of

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[142]Aristotle, “De Interpretaione” in *The complete Works of Aristotle, the revised Oxford translation Vol. 1.* Jonathan Barnes ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1.4 – 1.6 and Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co.,1995), p. 23-4.
[143] Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p.223.
[144] According to Wolf, learning to read not only changes the way we speak, it changes the way we think. See Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p.65.

the written word “cat” without hearing the enunciation of the word in my mind. Both the sound and the appearance of the word are tied to my knowledge and understanding of it. These properties are at once fundamental constituents to my understanding of “cat” and subject to an enormous degree of variation and particularity. Our minds are not like locks that are opened by the appearance of a particular word; we are able to recognize words despite great variations in appearance, from extreme fonts to strange handwriting. So what is it about the appearance of words that causes us not only to hear them in our head, but to recognize them so readily, despite great discrepancies in appearance?

It would seem the childhood inclination for metonymy that confuses words with the properties of things in the world takes on an adult version that locates sound among the qualities belonging to the appearance of a written word. Just as some people swear that they can smell sandalwood by just looking at a picture of it and other people claim they can feel vibrations in their fingertips just by hearing the screech of fingernails on a chalkboard, could it be that the visual appearance or shapes of written words possess the power to influence us, causing us to hear them in our mind? This possibility provokes the further question of whether this compulsion towards vocalization is an outcropping of the actual role and function of words or merely a feature of human behavior that has come to be correlated with written words, but is not caused by them.

Weighing in on this riddle, Wittgenstein claims that letters *guide* us:

> It would never have occurred to us to think that we *felt the influence* of the letters on us when reading, if we had not compared the case of letters with that of arbitrary marks. And here we are indeed noticing a *difference*. And we interpret it

as the difference between being influenced and not being influenced.[145]

Of course, not all languages have an alphabet that corresponds to phonetic sounds. The components of Chinese characters, to mention one example, are far from arbitrary marks, and yet they were not originally designed to represent phonemes. Readers of Classical Chinese do not experience a phonetic code underlying the presentation of characters that functions like a counterpart to letters in words. On the contrary, in this tonal language, the association between the written and spoken forms of a word must be learned directly through experience.[146] Is, then, learning Chinese so different from learning one's a-b-c's? According to Wolf, it is: "the alphabet-reading brain differs substantively from that of the earlier logosyllabary reader."[147] The alphabet reader reads the sounds of spoken language where the logosyllabary reader (e.g., Chinese or Sumerian) reads ideograms of concepts. Where alphabet writing systems lead the reader directly back to the spoken word through the direct representation of phonemes, non-alphabet characters require their readers to first identify the concept and then retrieve the sound of the word associated with this concept. Fittingly, more areas of the brain are required to perform the latter operation. It would stand to reason, therefore, that written language may not "act upon" the Chinese reader in the same way it does on the English reader. In other words, one would not expect that Chinese characters would strike their readers as *imposing* their vocalizations. In both approaches to written language, however, it is through experience

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[145]Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §170

[146]Olson references "the finding by Read, Zhang, Nie, and Ding (1986) . . . that Chinese readers of traditional character scripts could not detect phonemic segments whereas those who could read Pinyin, an alphabetic script representing the same language, could do so." Olson, *The World on Paper*, p.86.

[147] Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p.61.

that we learn to become uniquely sensitive to the power or guiding influence of written language, regardless of whether it assumes the form of letters, words, pictograms, or characters. Wittgenstein reminds us: "Every sign *by itself* seems dead. . . *What* gives it life?—in use it is *alive*."[148] In the end, the power of language and the written word to impose itself upon us is derived from acquaintance and use.

Consider the phenomena of synesthesia: the most common form of which is number/color synesthesia whereby numbers are consistently experienced in conjunction with particular colors. The neurological explanation for this condition is that a "cross-wiring" has occurred between the number and color areas of the brain (areas, which are, incidentally, located adjacent to one another). The current speculation is that the cause for this condition is genetic, but the genetic inheritance does not consist in additional connections between colors and numbers, but rather a deficiency in passing down the "pruning genes" that weed out these connections. If this speculation is correct, then perhaps human beings have lost an innate ability to experience numbers in color as a consequence of evolution. For the purposes of the current discussion on how the visual effects of signs influence their meaning, it is significant to note, following V. S. Ramachandran, that "it is not the numerical concept that derives the color but the visual appearance of the number."[149] Synesthesates do not see Roman numerals in color; only the appearance of Indian or Arabic numbers triggers a color response. Neurologically this makes sense because the appearances and abstract concepts of number occur in different areas of the brain, with only the former adjoining the color region. Therefore, to

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[148]Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §432.

[149]R.V. Ramachandran, *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness*: *From Impostor Poodles to Purple Numbers*. (New York: Pi Press, 2004), p.69.

be precise, synesthesates do not conflate numbers and colors, but rather the *appearances* or *impressions* of Indian or Arabic numbers with colors.

The presence of synesthesates in the world can be held up as evidence that the human brain is set up in such a way to "see" and experience connections between the different senses. According to Ramachandran,

> There is a pre-existing, non-arbitrary translation between the visual appearance of an object represented in the fusiform gyrus and the auditory representation in the auditory cortex . . . a synesthetic cross-modal abstraction is already going on, a pre-existing translation, if you like, between visual appearance and auditory representation.[150]

In fact, almost all of us exhibit synesthetic tendencies between the appearance, sound, and meanings of words. Just think about the way we use different scripts and fonts to convey information. It's hard to deny that the visual attributes of different fonts play a role in affecting or coloring the meaning of the words that appear in them. For instance compare the following: (1) SHAKY, (2) Shaky, and (3) SHAKY. Doesn't the font change the feeling of the word? Can you deny that the "feeling" you have when reading these different fonts directly contributes to your perceived meaning of the word? Could it be the case that every sentence has its own character, given to it by its own unique appearance and contextualization? From the unique combination of words to the handwriting or font they appear in, each sentence occupies its own unique spot or—what

[150]Ibid, p.77.

is perhaps more likely—enjoys its own multitude of expressions in the world. Even fonts have taken on lives of their own, evoking everything from brand names to specific time periods to emotional dispositions.

Ultimately learning to read is a question of learning to see in a new way. A pre-reading child cannot "see" the meaning in the words she beholds. For her words are, at best, properties of the things that exhibit them or, at worst, so many meaningless marks on a page. Just as the child is limited in how she perceives the written word, so too is the experienced reader, albeit in a different fashion. The experienced reader has lost the ability of the child to look at words without hearing them silently ring out. Our lives are so enmeshed in the written words that we have become powerless to resist them. It takes a tremendous effort to achieve the sort of indifference and resistance to reading that Italo Calvino boasts. For most of us, focusing merely on the written presentation of a word is challenging because our minds have become so accustomed to skipping over the visual presentation of symbols and jumping directly to their meaning. A case in point: the current author is a poor proof reader of her own drafts because she often fails to notice the letters or words she has written and instead skips directly to their meanings. Although counter-productive when it comes to editing, the tendency of language to promote its own oblivion is, according to Merlau-Ponty, one of its greatest qualities:

> My eyes follow the lines on the paper, and from the moment I am caught up in their meaning, I lose sight of them . . . The paper, the letters on it, my eyes and body are there only as the minimum setting of some invisible operation . . . Expression fades out before what is expressed, and this is why its mediating role

may pass unnoticed.[151]

In the case of written words, we hear them and we know them in a deeply meaningful way, but do we still possess the ability to really *see* them? Learning a language with a different script from our native language can re-acquaint us with what it's like to see words, once again, without reading them. Arguably even this exercise will ultimately fail, for in order to see the mark as a word, and not a mess of meaningless lines, a degree of familiarity needs to be established, but of course it was establishing familiarity that got in the way with our ability to *see* the marks in the first place.

Written words represent meanings and sounds of words, but could it be that the visual presentation of the written word is *itself* a representation tied to the meaning of sentences and words? According to Wittgenstein, "If it is asked: 'How do sentences manage to represent?'—the answer might be: 'Don't you know? You certainly see it, when you use them.' For nothing is concealed."[152] The use of "see" in this quotation is interesting and seems to suggest that the written form of language is one more way for the drawing out of meaning to take place. Language represents in terms of standing in for concepts, but even the appearance of the words are not empty, the appearances of the words themselves are charged with representational meaning. Perhaps this is a carryover from the power of the concepts to represent, the result of an acquired ability to see representational power in linguistic signs, or a manifestation of the inter-sensory nature of concepts.

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[151] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.401.
[152] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §435.

## 4.2 Understanding: From Part to Whole and Identity through Difference

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato addresses what at first appear to be two separate topics: (1) the nature of knowledge and (2) the nature of reading. The fact that Plato chose to address these two issues in the same dialogue reveals that he considers them to be deeply connected. In order to answer the question of why Plato would seem to promote an association between the activities of reading and knowing, we need to look into how an account of reading might be central or parallel to a general account of knowledge.

Plato's account of reading and linguistic meaning is based on a distinction between primary elements or simples, and complexes. There are many different levels on which the relation between simples and complexes can be analyzed. For instance, the relation can be considered in the transition from sensations to perceptual experience, from letters to words, or from words to propositions. The intention underlying Socrates' investigation into the relation between simples and complexes is to discredit the common assumption that complexes and simples differ in terms of knowability.

Simples are commonly taken to be perceivable but unknowable. Plato goes on to say that the primary elements that comprise all things cannot be accounted for, only named. Nothing can be said about primary things whereas accounts can be given for the things composed of them (complex things). As stated in the *Theaetetus*: "Just as the things themselves are woven together, come to be an account . . . a weaving together of

names is the being of an account."[153] Elements are supposed to be perceivable but unknowable, while complexes are knowable, expressible, and judgeable. Meaningful words are composed of meaningless letters, while the meaning of a sentence supersedes the meanings of the words that compose it. Therefore, it's one thing to say that the meaning of a sentence cannot be reduced to the meanings of the words that comprise it, while it's another thing entirely to say we can know the meaning of a sentence without knowing the meaning of its words; and yet, don't we maintain something exactly like this in the case of words and letters? How is it that we come to have meaningful words distinguished by unique combinations of letters (i.e., parts), without attributing any meaning to these parts? Stated somewhat differently: how can the meaningful arise from the meaningless?

In pointing out the uneasy marriage between epistemology and language, Plato was arguably the first philosopher to implicate the presence of what has come to be known as the hermenutical circle. We are now in a position to make sense of the connection Plato wants us to draw between epistemology and reading. In reading we begin with meaningless letters and end with meaningful sentences. With the passage of every line we leap from meaninglessness to knowledge, from merely seeing letters to reading sentences. In the end, however, reading bottoms out in seeing, for without the letters there can be no words and without the words there can be no reading. Similarly, knowledge bottoms out in the vacuity of its own origin of meaninglessness. Even the words and sentences that go into this observation are subject to the same critique. This irony prompts Socrates to make the subtle observation: "we have, as hostages for the

[153]Plato, *Theaetetus*, John McDowell trans., (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1973), p.95.

theory, so to speak, the models which it used in saying all those things."[154] In other words, the theory that claims letters cannot be known, only complexes (words) made with those letters find form in its subject: it is a theory about letters, words, and meaning built from letters, words, and meaning.

If the commonly accepted account of simples and complexes is valid, then it would follow that a complex, like a syllable, must either be no more than its elements or letters, or it must be something over and above its elements. Despite the fact that no account can be given for letters, accounts can be provided for syllables (e.g. the syllable "Om" is comprised of "o" and "m"). In order to know a syllable, one must know the letters which comprise it, but this means the elements must be known before the complex can be known. So, perhaps a syllable is not its letters, but rather something that has come into being out of them, with a form of its own and a separate identity comprised by its letters. If the syllable (complex) comes into being (supersedes) the combination of letters (elements), then it would not be a complex, but an element or simple. If a complex is not reducible to its elements, then it cannot have elements as parts. Finally, if the complex is the same as the sum of its parts, it can be no more or less knowable than they are. Thus, we cannot say the complex is knowable and the elements are not.

Socrates asserts that we know something not only by knowing its parts, but by how it differs from other things. By comparison, Ferdinand de Saussure remarked that the identity of a phoneme can only be determined by its difference from, or opposition to, all other phonemes. Because the "same" phoneme assumes different sounds when it is pronounced by different people, phonemes cannot be identified by comparing individual

[154]Ibid, p.96.

utterances to one another or to a prototypical form. Rather, phonemes must be identified in the contrast of difference that becomes apparent when one phoneme is compared or measured against all others. This approach can be categorized as isolating identity though contrast or opposition. Similarly, on the level of words, the meaning of a word is largely a product of contrasting the word with others, thereby providing a contextualization of meaning.

If knowing how a word differs from other words belongs to the account of knowing the meaning of a word, then how can we ever manage to know any words at all? A thing does not contain the negation of what it's not alongside the sum of its parts; if it did, there would be an infinite number of parts to each and every thing. The alternative is to return to the letters of the alphabet, which are limited and clearly known. To know something by the sum of its parts is to make a correct judgment about that thing. By contrast, to know something by how it differs from all other things is to give an account of that thing. Only in the latter do we come to have knowledge about that thing where previously there was only judgment. Correct judgment, in itself, is not sufficient for establishing knowledge; I can know all the parts of my father's face, but without knowing how they differ from other faces I do not know the unique particularity that is my father's face. Knowing how *x* differs from all other things presupposes I know all other things and part of what it means to know other things is to know how they differ from *x*. In this way, acquiring knowledge presumes already possessing knowledge. Learning something new means learning what things make up that thing and how that thing differs from all other things. Knowledge, therefore, becomes impossible because in order to gain knowledge you must already be in possession of correct judgment and knowledge!

What at first appeared to be a solid area for inquiry—how reading gives way to meaning—has lapsed into complete obscurity. Socrates waxes poetic on this matter: "Now that I've got close to what we're saying, Theaetetus, as if it were a picture with shading, I simply can't understand it, not even a little; whereas, as long as I was standing some distance away, it seemed to me that there was something in it."[155] Plato's analysis of knowledge also sheds light on one of the main questions of this chapter: what is the difference between someone who is reading and someone who is just pretending to read?

Real reading requires the ability to identify and string together in a systematically apt way, individual words and successfully associate them with their intended meanings. To know a word is to know (1) its meaning and (2) how it differs from all other words. Of course, underlying the ability to identify words is the capacity to identify individual letters. The alphabet is exhaustive at 26 letters, so in knowing what letters comprise a word, we know what letters it excludes. At the same time, on the level of words, knowing the meaning of a word does not (directly) entail knowing all the other words and meanings it excludes (this is not, however, to say we can't get there eventually with help from the hermenutical circle). What does it mean to accurately grasp letters? Surprisingly, naming letters is no different from successfully pretending to read, as it does not extend beyond the level of the signifier to reveal semantic content or the signified. Ultimately, the basis for reading turns out to be nothing more than merely seeing.

In short, the dilemma arises that learning how to read presupposes already knowing how to read. Knowing one word presupposes knowing how that word differs

[155]Ibid, p.106.

from all others. This, in turn, presumes knowledge of all other words as representative of what that particular word is not. Of course, no one's linguistic knowledge is complete, and yet most of us succeed in speaking or reading or both. How is this possible? Consider an analogous situation in mathematics: we have limited knowledge of numbers in their particularity and yet we generalize over them, to the point of categorizing infinite sequences. What allows us to do this is found less in the individual nature of numbers than the conceptual basis that founds our understanding of number: a property of the whole that transcends our knowledge of its parts. In the context of language, perhaps what the *Theaetetus* is alluding to is how we are able to acquire knowledge or say meaningful things without the foundational knowledge of all the elements underlying the words and statements we speak or of the differences between all the words and meaning we use. Stated somewhat differently, the miracle of reading is that we are capable of meaningfully categorizing and manipulating a system of difference from a vantage point of radically incomplete knowledge of those differences.

Alternatively, perhaps it is possible to read the comparison between reading and knowing in the opposite extreme, so that Socrates is saying something essentialist about meaning: that there is something inherent in the being of words so that they have particular characteristics which guarantee that they will function in a particular way. We cannot imagine another number sequence: e.g., it is essential to the property of nine that it is equal to the product of three times three. Likewise, could it be that there are essential characteristics inherent in our linguistic system or a necessity underlying the characteristics of our words and the ways they interact? In the section that follows, I will consider the suggestion that there is something to "get right" in the use of language that

shares the same sort of necessity discussed in the first chapter in conjunction with artistic creativity.

### 4.2.1 Meaning and Musicality

As children we learn the alphabet, we identify the different letters and learn how to tell them apart. Similarly, Socrates points out, "at the music teacher's, to have learnt perfectly was nothing but being able to follow each note and say which sort of string it belonged to; and everyone would agree that notes are the elements of music."[156] The connection Socrates seems to be pushing for is between notes in a music and letters in language. If we follow the parallel between notes and letters, the implication would be that there is nothing more to knowing the compounds (music, language) than knowing the elements (notes, letters) that form them. No sooner does Socrates draw out the parallel between language and music then he undercuts his own suggestion by asking if we believe "that anyone has knowledge of anything when the same thing seems to him sometimes to belong to one thing and sometimes to belong to another or when he judges that the same thing sometimes has one thing belonging to it and sometimes another?"[157]

Obviously language depends on the letters and phonemes that serve as its medium for communication in writing and speech, but what do these elements tell us about the nature of language? Certainly we cannot come to understand a sentence by merely

[156]Ibid, p.101.

[157]Ibid, p.104.

accounting for the letters it employs in its construction, which might lead us to think the comparison between music and language is ill-founded. Socrates was not the only philosopher to see a parallel between music and language, however, and in particular a connection between musical meaning and linguistic meaning: both Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty did as well.

I would now like to consider how our orientation to language would change if grasping a sentence was like grasping a musical tune. Perhaps grasping the sense of language has nothing more to do with individual letters than grasping the sense of music has to do with individual notes. There seems to be a sense in which understanding a sentence entails grasping something substantial and *external* to the sentence in our understanding, but the same is not commonly believed to be true of music. Reflecting on this bias, Merlau-Ponty points out that we tend to think language is more transparent than music:

> The meaning of a sentence appears intelligible throughout, detachable from the sentence and finitely self-subsistent in an intelligible world, because we presuppose as given all those exchanges, owed to the history of the language, which contribute to determining its sense. . . In music, on the other hand, no vocabulary is presupposed, the meaning appears as linked to the empirical presence of the sounds, and that is why music strikes us as dumb.[158]

If, however, it can be shown that there is nothing exterior to language that is conveyed

[158] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, p.188.

when we grasp a meaning, then the rupture between language and music would begin to heal. In each the form and content would be co-determinative; the content that is communicated and the meaning that results would be inseparable from the empirical presence of the language or music itself.

"Meaning is use," Wittgenstein tells us, and the assertion rings true, for we all have lived to experience how words evolve to take on new connotations and meanings as a result of novel applications. Language is a like a living organism, dynamic in its identity and allegiances. If, however, meaning really is use, then how can we instantly experience the meaning of a word when we read a sentence? It would seem meaning must be something other than use for, as Anscombe points out,

> If the meaning is the use we make of the word, how can I grasp it in a flash? . . . For use is something extended in time . . . so what I grasp in a flash must, must it not, be something different from use: the whole use of a word cannot come before my mind in a flash.[159]

If meaning is use, and a single word has many uses, then the meaning of a word cannot be grasped in a flash because it should include many applications, not just one, and yet, when reading a passage, the comprehension of meaning seems to be instantaneous. Anscombe, therefore, concludes that meaning must be something other than use. Wolf, however, disagrees. According to her:

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[159] G.E.M. Anscombe, "Wittgenstein: Whose Philosopher," in *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays*, A. Phillips Griffiths ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.3.

> When we read a simple word like "bug," we activate not only the more common meaning (a crawling, six-legged creature), but also the bug's less frequent associations—spies, Volkswagens, and glitches in software . . . your brain doesn't find just one simple meaning for a word; instead it stimulates a veritable trove of knowledge about that word and the many words related to it. . . The richness of this semantic dimension of reading depends on the riches we have already stored.[160]

On a practical level, it seems fantastic to suggest that we process through all the meanings and associations we have for each and every word when we read something. It is hard to reconcile this suggestion with the instantaneous character that can accompany reading comprehension. Surely the mind is not like a tabulating machine, running through all possible meanings and implications of each and every word we encounter as we read through the contents of a page?

Perhaps the real problem lies not in the difference between understanding meaning as use or in a flash, but rather in how we conceive of word meaning itself. I would like to seriously propose that the different meanings of "bug" mentioned above are not separate meanings and separate uses of different words that share the same spelling, "bug," but rather all applications that stem from the same, extremely rich and varied concept belonging to the concept "bug." If I am correct, then we would need to completely rethink what we have hereto explained away as the metaphorical extension of a concept and develop a much richer comprehensive understanding of concepts in its

[160] Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p.9.

stead. In the last chapter I ventured to show that concepts emerge from the wholeness of experience and are pregnant with meaning that spans the senses: they contain their own metaphorical extensions that are not incidental or extrinsic to them, but rather essential in making them what they are. Like the two senses of the word "sense," the apparently distinct "deep's" of "deep ocean," "deep emotion," "deep voice," "deep blue," and "deep winter," all fall under the same elastic, but integrated, concept of "deep." Therefore, in reading a sentence we are not running through every application or association a word may have—a seemingly impossible task—but rather accessing and building from a core, unified bank of meanings we have for each word that is expansive and indeterminate enough to accommodate a huge range of applications. We need not "hit upon" the correct meaning of a word, because words do not stand in for collections of severed meanings. On the contrary, despite the seemingly different uses and connotations, the meaning of the word is actually integrated so that all the implications of the word accommodate it's every application.

Could it be that our real problem in the way we think about reading is that we are constantly looking too far outside the text, as if meaning was some sort of infinite web of relations and associations that must be accounted for before one can be said to understand even a simple sentence? Understanding cannot be merely equated with a mental process. Understanding is more akin to entering a circumstance that allows one to carry on. It's not about single words, it's about context, and it is the context that justifies the assertion that one has understood and is able to go on. I believe this is what Wittgenstein is getting at when he asks us to consider that:

> What we call "understanding a sentence" has, in many cases, a much greater similarity to understanding a musical theme than we might be inclined to think. But I don't mean that understanding a musical theme is more like the picture which one tends to make oneself of understanding a sentence; but rather that this picture is wrong, and that understanding a sentence is much more like what really happens when we understand a tune than at first sight appears. For understanding a sentence, we say, points to a reality outside the sentence. Whereas one might say "Understanding a sentence means getting hold of its content; and the content of the sentence is *in* the sentence."[161]

What if the content grasped in understanding a sentence is nothing more than the sentence itself? The notes in a tune become significant by the role they play in the tune; we do not seek meaning outside the music? Perhaps understanding a sentence is nothing more than grasping a linguistic harmony, which is identical to itself. Consider an analogous example using color. To understanding the meaning of "red" is to experience a red thing. The meaning of the experience is in the experience itself; the content or meaning of red grasped is identical to the experience of red. On the one hand, red is grasped directly; the meaning is in the color itself. On the other hand, there is nothing that is red independent of context. The same light wave or object in the world may appear red in one context and brown or grey in another. The emergence of red requires certain circumstances and a certain orientation on behalf of its viewers. Color, like music

[161]Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1958), p.167.

and linguistic meaning, is relational in its identity. To grasp a meaning that is identical to itself is to grasp a meaning determined by its context.

The experience of reading has an intimate character that is not unlike the intimate character that accompanies listening to music. Music is often discussed as an experience because of the nature of our personal involvement with it. I believe what Wittgenstein is suggesting is that reading has a similar effect on us: it is a perceptual experience that engages our bodies and our minds, forming a concrescence of meaning that can only be captured in specific terms as "I read *this*." The singularity in our experience of reading is connected to the sense in which understanding music entails understanding why a particular work could not have been otherwise. With this in mind, Wittgenstein points out, when "we speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. . . (Any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another.)"[162] Linguistic compositions can share a deep affinity with musical compositions, especially in their capacity to capture sentiment or meaning in such a way that nothing could be changed and we cannot imagine it being at all different.[163] Thus one can make the seemingly paradoxical claim that personalization and necessity work together to provide for the conditions for the work to emerge: if how a sentence or musical piece feels to me is essential to its meaning, then its intimacy must paradoxically be part of its objectivity.

What are the implications of taking seriously the suggestion that understanding what you read is akin to understanding what you hear when you listen to music? If

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[162] Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, §531.

[163] This point touches on what the New Critic Cleanth Brooks called "the heresy of paraphrase": poetic expression cannot be states otherwise without destroying their integrity as poetry.

grasping the meaning of a sentence does not involve accessing some underlying meaning behind the words, directing me to some realm of meaning beyond the words, then it must involve a particular degree of contextualization. According to Anscombe, "if there has to be anything 'behind the formula' [a formula you may use to continue a series] it is *certain circumstances* which justify me in saying I can go on—when the formula occurs to me."[164] Understanding in both reading and listening to music, therefore, requires a certain orientation.

We all recognize that there cannot be music without sound, so why have we been seduced into accepting the idea of thinking without words? The reason, according to Merlau-Ponty is that "speech implants the idea of truth in us as the presumptive limit of its effort. . . It loses sight of itself as a contingent fact, and takes to resting upon itself."[165] Words, like notes in music, unfold over time to set the stage for significance. There is nothing more than the music or the words, nothing behind or external to them, they communicate directly. If there is anything behind the words in a passage or the notes in a score it would be an expectation for how they should continue. When listening to music you can somewhat anticipate what will come next, this is because harmony can only have so many variations. Likewise, when you read a text your understanding at any point anticipates parameters for the next meaning to unfold.

Understanding as use, understanding in a flash, and understanding musically are not three separate incommensurable accounts of understanding, but rather three aspects that contribute to what it means to "understand." Understanding is all of this.

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[164]G. E. M. Anscombe, "Wittgenstein: Whose Philosopher," p.7.

[165] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.190.

Wittgenstein tells us: "to understand a sentence means to understand language . . . to understand a language means to be master of a technique."[166] Whether it be "mastering a technique," "getting it right," "singing on key," or "keeping true to the rhythm," it is clear that linguistic understanding and aesthetic understanding are deeply entwined for Wittgenstein. He even goes on to say that "understanding a musical phrase may also be called understanding a *language*" and "speech with and without thought is to be compared with the playing of a piece of music with and without thought."[167] Just like a musical work, what the sentence tells me is its own nature, structure, affiliations, and implications. And just as musical understanding can be captured as a feeling that must be experienced first-hand, so too linguistic understanding can be captured as a dispositional state that must be felt and experienced first-hand. To understand a linguistic or musical work is to experience the feeling of that work, to enter into the dispositional state of understanding that particular work.

According to Anscombe, "there are experiences connected with reading, but 'reading' is not the name of any of them."[168] Similarly, there is a variety of experiences connected with an occasion of understanding, but 'understanding' is not the name of any of them. Just as there is nothing that is *believing* that can be separated out from the content of what one believes and there is nothing that is *perceiving* that can be isolated from the content of what one perceives, there is nothing that is *reading* that can be differentiated from the content of what one reads. Reading is more akin to a dispositional state than an activity. As we search for what is accomplished in the act of reading we end

[166] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §199.
[167] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, G. E. M. Anscombe trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), §172 and *Philosophical Investigations*, §341 respectively.
[168] Anscombe, "Wittgenstein: Whose Philosopher?" p.7.

up with only the content of what has been understood from our experience with the written word. Similarly, understanding is not something I have, like fingers, which can be counted off or located. Understanding is a state I can enter into given the proper circumstances, something that overtakes me, like a disposition. Understanding and meaning are things we have or *experience*, not unlike the way we experience music. In each, understanding cannot be separated out from our experience. This is why a word becomes a mere sound and meaningless when it is repeated quickly ten times over, why there is something to do if I ask you to say the word "till" and mean it as a verb, and why reading "with feeling" has the power to change our perception of a poem.[169] The experience of meaning also accounts for the profound sense in which we can experience the "soul" of a musical work by listening or the "soul" of a written work by reading.

### 4.2.2 An Anti-Foundationalist Conception of Reading

What is the relationship between the conceptualization of the words we see, on the one hand, and the conceptualization of the things we read, on the other? Plato's account of the transition from sensation to meaning departs from the empiricist account in that he does not attempt to explain how bare sense-data could build up to something deserving of the term "meaning." Beginning with the ground of pure sensation, the empiricist is hard pressed to explain how meaningful content can take form. Perhaps reading, like seeing, is bound up in the wholeness of experience that does not yield itself up to a foundationalist account. This would explain why Plato chose to include a

[169] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 214.

consideration of reading in an anti-foundationalist account of knowledge, but how can a proper account of reading be anti-foundational when we are not born to read in the same way we are born to see?

As we discovered in the previous chapter, sensations are not the staring points for perception, but rather the ending points of a highly abstract intellectualization. In perception we come to know objects in the world, not isolated sensations. This is why we should answer Molyneux's question in the affirmative: Molyneux's man is not comparing two disparate sensations (a task at which he would undoubtedly fail), but rather identifying an object by the inter-sensory significance of the properties that ground his knowledge of that object. The nature of human experience is rich with cross-modal associations and molded by our emotions, affective states, and anticipations. Following Merleau-Ponty, at the origin of perception, there is no distinction between objects of perception in the world and the significance these objects have in the mind of the observer. All too often, the infusion of meaning into the sensible has been obscured by philosophers in favor of an intellectual analysis that turns perception into an interpretation of signs. Perception has traditionally been misconstrued as a construction of judgment, grossly overlooking the fact that perception is always bound up in a larger whole endowed with meaning. Reason is rooted in nature, not the mind. Concepts are not products of the mind gravitating towards nature, but rather how the mind functions in response to, or as an extension of, the order inherent in nature giving rise to the concepts of the mind.[170]

[170] "One may say, not that there is a reason hidden behind nature, but that reason is rooted in nature, the 'inspection of the mind' would then be, not the concept gravitating towards nature, but nature rising to the concept." Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Colin Smith trans., (New York: Routledge,

Similarly, an investigation into the nature of reading should not begin with the presence of ink marks on paper with the hopes of building up to linguistic meaning. Much like Zeno's hare that will forever trail the tortoise by half a length, we will never reach an understanding of reading if we try to get there through ink marks, letters, or even words. Reading is a comprehensive experience that has been obscured by the fact that we are not born to read like we are to see. Because we teach children the ABC's before we teach individual words, before we teach reading groups of words together, we have fallen into the trap of thinking that reading can be dismantled into its subsidiary parts and thereby exposed to reveal its true nature. We may not have been born to read, but in the process of learning how to read we have significantly changed our brains; this is why a foundationalist approach to reading only makes sense from the perspective of the nonreader. Just as Molyneux's man is unlike the baby due to the fact that living in blindness causes a reorganization of the brain, a literate individual is significantly different from an illiterate one. Molyneux's question must remain hypothetical because anyone who has lived the first part of their lives with blindness no longer has the biological capacity to "open their eyes" and see for the first time. Likewise, anyone who has mastered fluency in reading no longer has the biological capacity to see the written language in the absence of conceptual meaning.

The mental capacities of the sighted and the blind, or the reader and the nonreader, are simply different. This is not intended to be a value claim. As many blind individuals will attest, the absence of sight does not have to be regarded as a deficiency because in the absence of sight other faculties are developed, like the ability to "see"

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1962), p.234.

through sound or touch, that are never accessed in those with the faculty of vision. We are wise to suspect that the same has been the case with reading. Certainly this is what Socrates was so weary of and what oral cultures like the Orthodox Indian tradition guarded so heavily against. My intention is not to make a value judgment about the reading brain in comparison to the non-reading brain, but rather to say that we cannot explain how the reading brain works and functions by looking to the nonreader. A change occurs in learning how to read that cannot be undone and arriving at an understanding of what this change entails has been greatly hindered by focusing on the nonreader instead of the fluent reader. Herein lies a key point of divergence between visual perception and reading.

One of my objectives in the previous chapter on seeing was to put to rest a theory of "first perception" that builds up from discrete sensations to the wholeness of experience. We do not build up to the richness of our visual perception, I argued. The same, however, does not appear to be the case for our experience of reading. Unlike seeing, we must learn to read. An accurate picture of perception cannot begin with sensations and end with meaning, but we have been led to believe an accurate picture of reading should do just that. In the last chapter I argued that an accurate account of seeing demanded an account of what actually occurs, or does not occur, in "first perception." I would now like to make a contrary claim about the nature of reading, namely that an account of reading should not be built on, or serve as an extension of, what actually occurs in the first instances of learning how to read. Despite the great disparity in origins, in both seeing and reading we encounter the wholeness of conceptual meaning directly in our experience, rather than building up to the meaningful from discrete

sensations.

Seeing and reading are always conceptual; neither can occur in the absence of understanding. In the beginning of the *Theaetetus*, Socrates asks: "Do you suppose anyone has any understanding of the name of something, if he doesn't know what that thing is?"[171] Stated somewhat differently, how does knowing a word differ from knowing the meaning or referent of that word? What is involved in understanding words? Does knowing the name of something presuppose knowledge of that thing? And how do concepts or things in the world size up when compared to the words that represent them? In order to be meaningful, a word must perform the function of signifying a particular referent. The nature of this referent, however, is not always clear. Although it is fairly straightforward to claim that understanding "apple" presupposes some idea of a particular fruit, this line of reasoning tends to break down when we ask what knowledge words like "it," "of," "similarity," and "infinity" refer to.

It is hard to imagine that all conceptual knowledge is rooted in perception or that all concepts can be likened to appearance properties. With what sense organ do we perceive concepts like "being," "sameness," "likeness," "beauty," "goodness," or "evenness?" It is tempting to think that there must be some things the mind comes to consider by means of itself separate from the things the mind comes to consider via the sense organs. Obviously thinking far exceeds the conceptual limits of perception. We possess innumerable concepts that are not the products of direct perception. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the real limits of our world are, as Wittgenstein famously said, the limits of our language. Through language and discourse with other

[171]Plato, *Theaetetus*, p.8.

people, our world is able to take on new meaning.

Comparing the mind to an aviary, where bits of conceptual knowledge fly around like birds, Plato likens the accumulating knowledge of words to the addition of birds in one's aviary. Drawing a particular item of knowledge to the fore of one's mind through the use of words, therefore, would be analogous to catching a bird in one's aviary. Accounting for how this is accomplished, however, is not so easy. Could it be that a particular item of knowledge can be retrieved with the correct words, like getting a bird to come when its name is called? If knowledge is retrieved by correctly employing words, then do these words have to be exactly the same as the ones expressed when the knowledge was acquired or can there be some leniency in word choice? For instance, if someone were to ask me who wrote *Huckleberry Fin*, I would have to approach my aviary and call out: "who is the author of *Huckleberry Fin?*" The question then arises, which, if any, bird would come to this call. Would I retrieve "Mark Twain," "Samuel Longhorn Clemens," or "the author of *Tom Sawyer*?" Would it depend on how I originally learned about the answer to this question? Stated somewhat differently, what, if anything, allows the different words I have stored in my brain to cross-reference one another?

In response to these types of worries, Plato tells us "there are two kinds of catching: one before one has come to possess a thing, in order to get possession of it, and the other when one possesses it, in order to get hold of what one has possessed for some time and have it in one's hands."[172] In other words, the problem of determining how word meanings are recalled from memory is separate from the problem of how it is we

[172]Ibid, p.89.

come to possess the ability to read in the first place.

Ultimately the search for epistemological foundationalism in perception and language fails. Contrary to common belief, sensations are not the primary building blocks of perception; rather perceptual experience is presented as a rich whole and sensations are merely mental abstractions from knowledge derived from the whole of experience. Despite the fact that they appear to be the simples underlying that which is complex, sensations are not actually prior to experience and word meaning is not prior to linguistic meaning. In the words of Merlau-Ponty:

> The act of speech is clear only for the person who is actually speaking or listening; it becomes obscure as soon as we try to bring explicitly to light those reasons which have led us to understand thus and not otherwise. . . We can say of it what we have said of perception and what Pascal says of opinions: in all three cases we have the same miracle of an immediately apprehended clarity, which vanishes as soon as we try to break it down to what we believe to be its component elements.[173]

The richness of reading cannot be broken down to sentence meaning, word meaning, phonemes, or letters. Like visual perception, reading occurs in the experiential context of a rich meaningful whole.

Before concluding his anti-foundationalist discussion of knowledge and reading, Socrates uses his old "midwife to ideas" line on young Theaetetus, which makes me

[173] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.391.

wonder if we should take him by his word when he says he needs other people in order to give birth to new ideas. Is it possible that Plato is putting forth a form of refutation of a private language argument? Socrates tells us he needs a community with which to create and share new meaning; the words he uses and his conceptual progress depend upon a communal language. Socrates cannot give birth to his own philosophical insights for fear of spinning his own wheels into unintelligibility, a problem all philosophers face, but may be particularly more poignant for one who never commits his thoughts to paper. The genesis of meaning, it would appear, requires the presence of others.[174] Just as the neonate requires the presence of another for the sake of mirroring behavior, the success of language requires the presence of a community to guarantee meaning. In the end, neither visual perception nor language would be possible without the collaboration of others.

[174] Along these lines Saussure notes that the linguistic deck is stacked—a language precedes any individual speaker whose experience of "meaning" is possible only within that preexisting system.

## 4.3 Re-Reading and Variations among Readings

In a philosophical inquiry into the nature of reading it seems appropriate to digress for a moment to consider the unique challenge of accounting for multiple readings of the same text. Most of us have experienced the phenomenon of re-reading a text to discover that our impressions of the text have changed greatly between readings. I would like to take a moment to consider how the interpretation of textual meaning can vary over time and with new instances of reading. In addition to looking at the relationship between a text and its readers I would also like to consider the relationship between a text and its author. The goal of this section is to determine whether the conceptual meaning we derive from reading shares the same objective or public character as the conceptual meaning we derive from visual perception and, furthermore, if it turns out that textual meaning is grounded in an objective reality, does this textual reality owe its conception to the author(s), the reader(s), or both?

Using Saussure as a launching platform, Spivak compares the identification of a phoneme through contrast with all other phonemes to the similarity in two different readings of the same book. From the perspective of a one-to-one comparison, the two individual readings may sound different, like different pronunciations of the same phoneme, but, when compared to readings of different texts, they can be clearly identified as sharing a central subject matter. Thus the identity of any two readings of a text can be best described through difference. In Spivak's own words: "the book is not repeatable in its 'identity': each reading of the book produces a simulacrum of an 'original' that is itself the mark of the shifting and unstable subject . . . using and being used by a language

that is also shifting and unstable."[175] Moreover, as the preface writer for Derrida's Grammatology, Spivak locates herself in a unique interim position between different readings of the text, namely hers and those of future readers.

Language is alive in use, but use is always in a process of change and becoming, a fact that is perhaps most clearly evident in younger generations. Because of the "shifting and unstable" characteristic of language, and for that matter our own conceptions of self, there is a sense in which every reading is a new reading. Not only does a reader need to be prepared to bridge time, culture, and place gaps between themselves and the original context in which a text was written, but, in re-reading a text, a reader needs to be prepared to bridge the interpretive gap that occurs within themselves. The truth of this insight is clearly evident in cases where we re-visit novels which we had previously read as children. Our re-reading of a work can depart greatly from our original reading despite the fact that the language of the text has remained exactly the same. What has changed is our relationship to the language we read. In remarking on this phenomenon Spivak goes on to say:

> There is, in fact, no "book" other than these ever-different repetitions: the "book" in other words, is already a "text," constituted by the play of identity and difference. A written preface provisionally localizes the place where, between reading and reading, book and book, the inter-inscribing of "reader(s),"

[175]Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's preface," in *Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. xii.

> "writer(s)," and language is forever at work.[176]

On the one hand, the text is always open and never stale. Because it belongs to the living essence of language to mutate and evolve, our relation to the text is always going to have an element of novelty to it. On the other hand, it would be a grave mistake to stress the novelty of reading to the point of dissolving the identity of the text. It is important to keep in mind that even radically different interpretations of the same text have more in common with one another than interpretations of different texts.

In advocating for the "opening" of the text, Derrida is not advocating for reading and interpreting a text in any conceivable way. On the contrary, Derrida is committed to upholding the possibility of critically reading a text in an intellectually responsible way. Critical reading should strive to produce a signifying structure for the work at hand. This signifying structure is the mark of intentional meaning structures within language. Language is, for all of us, a system that precedes our introduction to it and runs on logic and laws which are its own. The idea that we inherit a language that is not of our making implies that all authors are constrained by the language they use. What the critical reader should seek to produce is a signifying structure which revels in the degree to which the author was in control of the meaning of the text. According to Derrida,

> The writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. . . He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system. . .

[176]Ibid, xii.

> And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses.[177]

Ideally, the signifying structure critical reading should strive to produce will provide insight into the degree to which the author commanded, or was commanded by, language in the production of meaning.

Obviously critical reading cannot consist in merely reproducing the intentions of the writer or the specific relation they had with language and it's meaning at the time they composed their text. At the same time, attempting to recreate or at least acknowledge what the author was attempting to communicate in a text protects us from falling into countless possible senseless interpretations. Thus a double commentary is created from the considerations of (1) the efforts of the author to find the words to express him or herself and (2) the efforts of the reader to use these words to reconstruct the intentional efforts of the author. Although critical reading cannot rest on the level of this double commentary, it nonetheless does have a place in critical reading. This is an important point to make and one which has all too often been denied by Derrida's own readers, despite the fact that he explicitly states the contrary:

> This moment of doubling commentary should no doubt have its place in a critical reading. . . To recognize and respect all its classical exigencies is not easy and

[177] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gyatri Chakravorty Spicvak trans. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), p.158.

> requires all the instruments of traditional criticism. . . Without this recognition and this respect, critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything. . . But this indispensable guardrail has always only *protected*, it has never *opened*, a reading.[178]

The real question for critical reading is: how can we open a text to new readings without abandoning the guardrail preventing us from reading the text in any way whatsoever? In reading we must resist the temptation to separate the intentions and meaning of the author from the meaning of the text. Doing so results in either (1) a text that disconnects language from use, and hence has a life entirely of its own, or (2) a world of meaning outside of language. In terms of the latter, this would be like asserting that the text is providing a portal to a metaphysical realm of meaning outside, or underlying, the word. The form this external significance can take can vary from the referent of a historical time, or person, or the significance and impact of a particular psychological state. We should never attempt to separate the world of language from the world of living, feeling, and thinking human beings.

The proper way to read a book does not consist in attempting to reproduce what the author intended to convey in the selection and use of his words. At the same time, despite the fact that we are not aiming at reproducing the relationship between the author and the language he employed, we should look at the language to see how steadfast it is with respect to how it can be interpreted and understood. Derrida seems to assert that the craftsmanship of the text will testify for itself. I believe this is the sense in which Derrida

[178]Ibid, p.158.

intended his now infamous statement "*il n'y a pas de horstext*" to be read. The reality of human psychology, history, and thought are inseparable from language. Far from a theory of language that places reality or "the real" outside of the word, the truth of the matter is that not only has the real always found expression in the symbolic, but the only reason why we even have a conception of the real outside of language is because language itself has provided us with the possibility of structuring this insight. Of course it's not really an insight at all, as any appeal to the outside of language is created by language and only makes sense within language. The illusion of an outside to language can only be seen from the perspective of the inside. According to Derrida, "there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement."[179] In order to precede responsibility, our reading must remain within, and be intrinsic to, the text.

The goal of the reader, therefore, is to expose the core grammatical structure of the text, the beginning and end of the text. At once the navel of meaning and the root of ambiguity, this is, according to Spivak, "the moment that is undecidable in terms of the text's apparent system of meaning, the moment in the text that seems to transgress its own system of values."[180] The critique of the writer also holds for the reader. There is not textual meaning on the one hand and my understanding of it as reader on the other. "Reader as writer" means the reader has the same connection with language as the writer.

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[179]Ibid, p.159.

[180]Spivak, p. xlix.

This revelation does not change our relationship to the text; it just brings it into proper focus. Reading must be aware of the penchant for texts to efface themselves, drawing our attention away from the text towards what appears to be signified content outside of itself. Recognizing this tendency of the text marks it's failure and the success of reading to focus on the text and not beyond it. This brings us back to the analogy between reading and listening to music and the degree to which understanding a text is like understanding a musical score. There is nothing more than the words and their composition in relation to one another, there is no transcendental signified lurking outside or behind the words.

Reading a text engages the imagination and perception of the reader. Just as personal affectations and anticipations can effect visual perception, they can also affect the experience and content of reading. The text presents the reader with a pattern, a structure to guide the imagination to grasp a particular meaning. The meaning of a text is a dynamic happening, the reader receives meaning by composing it. In the words of Wolfgang Iser in his book *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response:*

> It must be borne in mind that fictional texts constitute their own objects and do not copy something already in existence. For this reason they cannot have the total determinacy of real objects, and, indeed, it is the elements of indeterminacy that enable the text to "communicate" with the reader, in the sense that they induce him to participate both in the production and the comprehension of the

work's intention.[181]

This is not, however, to imply that the experience of a text is private or arbitrary. We bring our own private experiences, associations, emotions, and expectations into both perception and reading, but there remains, nevertheless, a fundamental level of the given in both. In perception, it is the world itself that rises to the formation of mind-dependent concepts. In reading, the text rises up to its own intersubjectively verifiable instructions for meaning-production. The meaning of the text is limited by the text and by a common language that details the ways in which sentences can be determined.

Reading shares with perception the same focus/field quality: what we take away from any particular situation or textual reading will be, for the most part, a reflection of where we have directed our attention. In terms of the transfer of meaning from a text to a reader, this requires not only the focus of the reader, but also accessing the reader's faculties of perceiving and processing. The reader is the one who chooses what to focus on, where to aim attention, and what aspects to recall from memory. Thus, in many ways, the meaning of the text is a synthesis of the reader's doing. This is why we can always go further in reading. In the end, there is the text, our reaction to the text, and an additional apperceptive awareness, which takes as its object both the text and our reaction to it. The so-called meaning of the text is to be found neither in the text nor our reaction to the text, but rather our awareness of both taken in combination. In the words of Iser:

As we read, we react to what we ourselves have produced, and it is this mode of

[181]Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response,* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p.24.

> reaction that, in fact, enables us to experience the text as an actual event. We do not grasp it like an empirical object; nor do we comprehend it like a predicative fact; it owes its presence in our minds to our own reactions, and it is these that make us animate the meaning of the text as a reality.[182]

As I previously mentioned in the second chapter, I believe the power of an artwork, in this case, a literary work, to affect us in a manner that feels so personal and private it actually recommends the objective status of meaning in art. Neither the author nor the reader is dealing in the unique conditions of a private language, rather both are accessing a common pre-established semiotic system of meaning that has come to shape our way of life. Both author and reader must make use of intentionality and imagination in the extension of new meaning. The text, therefore, is the product of the co-creative efforts of both author and reader.

The meaning we gather from the text is as much about the positively construed content that represents the given of the text as it is about the negatively construed content that represents what is not given in the text. The blanks in a text serve to guide the reader. According to Iser, the gaps or blanks in the text are:

> The hollow form into which the meaning is to be poured, and as such they bring about the process, unique to literature, whereby knowledge is offered or invoked by the text in such a way that it can undergo a guided transformation in and through the reader's mind. It is through the blanks that the negations take on their

[182] Ibid, p.129.

> productive force: the old negated meaning returns to the conscious mind when a new one is superimposed onto it; this new meaning is unformulated, and for precisely this reason needs the old, as this has been changed by the negation back into material for interpretation, out of which the new meaning is to be fashioned.[183]

Much like the imaginal margin discussed earlier, the gaps in the text evidence not our own lack of knowledge of a text which is, in itself, definite, but rather our full knowledge of a text which is indefinite. The gap or indeterminacy in the text is a positive presentation of an absence and it is this absence that engages the imagination in the further production of meaning.

To read is to affect a signifying synthesis: reading generates its own consciousness and serves as an intermediate between pure signification and the imagination. Consciousness, infused with intention and imagination, slips into the words and we become aware of it as an objective property of the words themselves; the writing on the page confronts us as an objective sphere of signification. In the words of Sartre, "to read is to realize contact with the irreal world *on* the signs."[184] The irreal world we access through reading is neither a world of perception nor mental images; rather it is the world accessed through the collaborative efforts of perception, intention, and the imagination to see and confer meaning on the words themselves. This collaborative effort occurs not only within myself as reader, but also between myself and the author of the

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[183] Ibid, p.217.
[184] Sartre, *The Imaginary*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.66.

passage I've chosen to read. The moment I choose to read any text I enter into a world of human intentions of which these words are a product. As a reader, I no longer encounter the presence of the written word purely in terms of its perceptual qualities; I do not begin with the appearance of the writing and build up to the meaning of what they represent via the cooperation of my imagination participating in a signifying synthesis. On the contrary, even in my initial perception, the writing is given as representative and posits a world of human intention that beseeches my cooperation in the generation of meaning aimed at grasping a universal form or possibility.

## 4.4 Chapter Conclusion: The Significance of Reading

The significance underlying the claim that the same thing can be both seen and read does not rest on the trivially true fact that I can alternatively see and read the written word. In the last chapter I strove to show that concepts come directly from the world itself; concepts are mind-dependent, ontologically grounded products of the recursive creative synthesis that occurs between the self and the world. Concepts, I argued, are synonymous with organized perceptual experience. The significance of seeing is expressed in orientating oneself toward the world in a certain way, directing oneself or assuming a dispositional state, like a gesture, that facilitates the grasping of meaning. If the significance of seeing, therefore, can be epitomized by the fact that seeing a sphere provides us with the concept of a sphere, then the significance of reading can be epitomized by the fact that seeing "sphere" provides us with the concept of sphere. In seeing, concepts arise directly out of the world and in reading, concepts arise directly out of words.

This chapter has attempted to answer two essential questions: (1) how concepts come to be associated with words and (2) how reading is able to give rise to meaning. In the process of investigating these questions a fundamental disparity quickly became evident between the way fluent readers and nonreaders orientate themselves toward the written word. Learning to read can be a difficult thing, a fact that makes sense when we fully appreciate how radical and life altering the effects of reading really are. In learning how to read, we actually restructure the organizing principle of our brains. How, exactly, this is accomplished is as much a mystery as how it is we learn to use language in the

first place, but, in the case of reading, the mystery goes even deeper. We have a genetic predisposition for language use, but there is no such predisposition for reading. Reading, therefore, is perhaps the greatest victory humankind has ever won over nature.

Providing an account for what constitutes a genuine instance of reading is an enormously difficult task. We cannot read without understanding, but there is also a sense in which the act of reading is itself the act of understanding. Like perception, the essence of reading does not lend itself to a foundationalist account. Moreover, perceptual experience finds, at its heart, a compulsion for representation or mirroring: the baby not only sees the face before it; it reproduces that face on its own. In order to provide an account of reading we need to detail the ways in which reading a passage influences and accompanies an impulse for representation or mirroring. To read a passage is to assume a gesture, a dispositional state that is unique to the content of what has been read. Because the content and the form are the same, there is a sense in which we represent or mirror the words in the act of reading them.

Reading depends on both familiarity and unfamiliarity: reading marks the transition from occupying our own dispositional state to assuming a gesture-like dispositional state that originates not from us, but from the presence of the written word on the page. In order to successfully read something we must be receptive to the words, allowing them to overtake us. Of course, not all readers are equally receptive. At the extreme, some readers are so receptive to the influence of the written word that they cannot fail or resist the impulse to read when in the presence of the written word. Like a baby mirroring a face before any conceptions of self-awareness can intervene, these readers slip into assuming the gesture of the written word before they realize what they

are doing. Words, it would appear, carry their own need to be *heard* or, more precisely, *felt*. Just as the characteristic form of music used in horror films can immediately possess us with a deep creepy feeling, the written word can immediately possess the reader with an affective experience of meaning. This fact is often overlooked because the experience of reading is rarely as shaking and acute as the experience of listening to a horror film soundtrack, but both share the same quality of induced experiential meaning. In the words of Merleau-Ponty:

> The word is indistinguishable from the attitude which it induces, and it is only when its presence is prolonged that it appears in the guise of an external image, and its meaning as a thought. Words have a physiognomy because we adopt towards them, as towards each person, a certain form of behavior which makes its complete appearance the moment each word is given.[185]

Like perception, reading should be compared to a direction, a gesture, or a behavior towards the world. We do not read the visual presentation of ink marks on paper, we read presentations of behavior in the dynamic fullness of the linguistic act. The mere appearance of written language holds the ability to influence us. Of course the form this influence can take may vary between alphabetic and logosyllabary writing systems, but in each the influence is like an acquired expression or form of synesthesia.

At this point it seems appropriate to address what appears to be a tension in my own writing about reading. I have repeatedly said that in reading form is identical to

[185] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.235-6.

content: reading and understanding are inseparable. At other times, however, I've made a different claim, namely that in reading form often disappears in the face of content to the point of being completely overlooked and forgotten, as instancing the self-obliterating nature of reading. I will now attempt to reconcile these two seemingly conflicting accounts. The discrepancy, I believe, stems from two different forms of *seeing*. The seeing engaged in reading is not the same seeing we find engaged in visual awareness of the world. A shift has taken place. The ordinary form of visual seeing disappears in the occurrence of the second form of literary seeing.

I can see the words or I can read them. The second action is not added to the first; it is a separate action entirely. In reading, to see is to see meaning, reading-seeing does not see words, but rather their meanings; the form and the content are the same. In a very real sense, we *see* the way sentences manage to represent, as Wittgenstein suggested. Conversely, to see the words without reading them is to undergo a purely visual experience. This form of visual experience is completely absent in the act of reading, which creates the impression that we have somehow "lost sight" of the words in our haste to immerse ourselves in their meaning. The two forms of seeing share the common capacity to convey conceptual meaning by assuming a direction, disposition, or gesture towards the world. The difference, however, originates in the forms of meaning or significance these behaviors take.

The two forms of seeing discussed above are not unlike the two forms of seeing Sartre distinguished in relation to viewing a portrait of Pierre. According to Sartre, the portrait presents its viewers with two possible experiences: one can either see the painting or one can see Pierre. In the former, the object for visual perception is the play of paint

on a canvas. In the latter, it is Pierre himself, the man. The latter experience, of course, is not a purely visual experience, it is an imaginary synthesis that supersedes the visual. The two experiences are more antithetical than oil and water, the only mixing they ever admit occurs in our own confused reflections. Likewise, I can either see the words or I can read them, I cannot do both. In reading them, I experience a signifying synthesis that is not continuous with visual perception. Teaching someone to read, therefore, consists not in teaching them how to see the words on the page, but rather in how *not* to see the words on the page.

Meaning is not built-up out of phonemes, words, or even sentences. In reading we leap directly from the meaningless to the meaningful, finding ourselves thrown into a meaningful whole. Just as we do not build up to meaning in perception, we do not build up to meaning in reading. The paradox, of course, lies in how anyone ever comes to possess the ability to read in the first place and whether this skill can actually be taught. For the fluent reader, understanding the meaning of the written word is a form of contextualization within the realm of differences that ground linguistic meaning and provide the atmosphere or content that makes anticipation and continuation possible. In the same way listening to a musical work is experienced privately as providing a meaning that is uniquely its own, every instance of reading has its own unique character and embodies its own novel experience.

The experience of reading has a personal character to it that parallels the intimacy of listening to music. In both we experience a complete absorption in meaning. Perhaps there is not a fundamental difference between different forms of expression, be it reading a book, looking at a painting, or listening to a sonata. Music is not dumb in comparison

to language, both are creative expressions identical to themselves and for each form and content are the same. This is why we experience the personal, affective phenomena of "understanding in a flash" and are hard pressed to explain the nature of what it is we have understood aside from pointing back to the thing itself. By contrast, the conception of "meaning as use" comes from the idea that to understand is to understand how the current segment of meaning fits into the larger whole (e.g., how a sentence relates to the paragraph) as well as our ability to proceed.

Understanding is an experience, which is perhaps best characterized by the ability to proceed. Understanding is about context, getting it right, *feeling* it as one would a dispositional state or a gesture. Of course we can make comparisons between my feeling of sadness today and my feeling of sadness a week ago, and sometimes these will seem so close we will be pressed to tell them apart aside from the fact that they are temporally separate. The same applies for multiple readings of the same text. The "rose" that "is a rose" is not the same "rose" that "is a rose" from one line to the next in Gertrude Stein's poem. Each utterance endows the words with a new character. Just as no musical theme can be replaced by another, no two performances of the same theme are identical to one another. Every musical performance corresponds to its own unique experience in the listener. The same is true for reading. No single sentence can be captured in the same way in a different form, and no two readings of the same sentence, over time or across individuals, are ever going to be completely the same. This is why different people can have different experiences of meaning while reading the same text and why the same individual can have different experiences of meaning between separate occurrences of reading the same text.

The essence of reading and listening to music is orientation. The orientation required to access musical meaning is obviously listening, the orientation required to grasp linguistic meaning in words is either listening or reading. It is interesting to note that there are two different senses of listening at play here, neither of which is the common understanding we attribute to the word. Briefly, just as seeing paint on a canvas, seeing Pierre in the portrait, and the seeing that is engaged in reading are three different senses of seeing, listening to sound, listening to music, and listening to speech are three different senses of listening, be it, respectively, a creative synthesis between the body and the world, an imaginative synthesis between perception and the imagination, or a signifying synthesis between signs and referents.

Because of the contextual nature of reading, any attempt to provide a foundationalist account beginning with the appearance of ink marks on paper and building up to what it means to grasp meaning from the written word will necessarily fail. I also want to make the radical suggestion that we cannot understand reading by investigating what occurs when one is learning how to read. Of course the fact that we must learn to read fundamentally distinguishes reading from perception, but once we learn to read, *everything changes*. The act of reading only makes sense to the one doing the reading and then it's completely transparent. As soon as we try to pick apart the experience that is reading it slips through our fingers.

I have already hit upon how there can be variation in separate readings of the same text between multiple people and for the same person, now I wish to re-invoke the second chapter and discuss how the intentions of the author to communicate are represented and conveyed through the written word. Like seeing, reading requires the

presence of the other. In the case of reading, however, the presence of the other is not merely needed for mirroring behavior and orientating oneself in the world. In the act of reading, the reader is able to directly access the intentional content of another. Reading is a co-collaborative effort between author and reader. The indeterminacy of the text prompts the participation of the reader. Both author and reader must participate in the creation of meaning by accessing their intentionality and imagination.

Reading is a signifying synthesis that generates its own consciousness and has the ability to open new worlds, or in the words of Sartre, an *irreal* world. This *irreal* world is a world of human intentions that afford the possibility to directly engage meaning and other minds. Ian McEwan, speaking from the voice of the narrator in his novel *Atonement*, provides an account of reading as a form of *telepathy*:

> By means of inking symbols onto a page, she was able to send thoughts and feelings from her mind to her reader's. It was a magical process, so commonplace that no one stopped to wonder at it. Reading a sentence and understanding it were the same thing; as with the crooking of a finger, nothing lay between them. There was no gap during which the symbols were unraveled. You saw the word *castle*, and it was there . . .[186]

In reading the form and the content are the same; to read is to understand, to assume an orientation towards meaning. For a literate person, to see words in a sentence is to *see* their meaning. Like gesturing, to read is to assume a dispositional state: the form of the

[186]Ian McEwan, *Atonement*, (New York: Doubleday, 2001), p.35.

gesture and the content to be conveyed are the same, to see it is to understand it.

# CHAPTER 5
# SEEING-AS AND READING-IN

## 5.0 Introduction

In 1988 the artist Xu Bing débuted an instillation artwork entitled the "Book from the Sky" in Beijing, China. An artwork that was designed to unfold with the experience of the viewer, the first impressions afforded by the work at a distance reveal a room displaying a library of pages, scrolls and printed panels. A new visitor would likely find the room heavy with the presence of so many words and the appearance of so much being silently said. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the "Book from the Sky" it is not what it appears to be: the thousand plus symbols that comprise the book merely *simulate* the appearance of Chinese characters. In themselves, the symbols are *meaningless*.

An innovative and fascinating work, the "Book from the Sky" plays on the tension between seeing and reading. It is virtually impossible to "see" the work without "reading" meaning into it. The work is initially "read" as displaying Chinese characters and, by extension, the authorial intention to convey a particular semantic content. The presentation of so much text in conjunction with the expectation that writing elicits an appeal to be read, can mentally overwhelm viewers of the "Book from the Sky." The impossibility of the task, however, clearly presents itself to both Chinese and Western viewers in the size of the text and the distance from which it must be viewed. Thus, long before the discovery is made that the text is illegible, dispelling initial expectations, the "Book from the Sky" reveals itself as a book designed to frustrate the intentions of its

readers. The Book, therefore, presents its audience with a purely *visual* presentation of an excess of linguistic meaning.

For all audiences, Western and Chinese alike, the work demonstrates how different the perception of language is from the perception of other visual objects. Even with the knowledge that the characters are meaningless and hence the Book a visual work, it is nearly impossible to see the work without simultaneously seeing the presence of linguistic meaning. In short, the work refuses to remain on the level of the "purely" visual. I imagine the experience of a literate Chinese person viewing the Book would be akin to my own unnerving and frustrated efforts to read in my dreams: unnerving because there is a level of recognition for the printed script and frustrated because despite ardent efforts to read the script the words never emerge or, more precisely, *show themselves*. Significantly, in my dreams my failure to read is never experienced as a shortcoming of my linguistic knowledge, but rather as the failure of my eyes to correctly see and "make sense" of what it is I'm seeing.

In itself, the "Book from the Sky" is merely a collection of ink marks on paper. These ink marks become the "Book from the Sky" through the collaborative efforts of Xu Bing and the audience. In order to be seen and experienced as a book, a collaborative effort is required on behalf of Xu Bing and the audience. First Xu Bing had to create a work that would be suggestive or representative of being a book and then the audience had to be receptive to this suggestion and further collaborate in recognizing this representation as a book. The "seeing" of the Book on behalf of the audience, therefore, is part *making* and part *discovery*. In seeing it as a book, the audience makes it into a book and *discovers* the identity of the artwork as a book already there. What the Book

reveals is that certain marks of ink on paper can betray an intention that can be traced back to the artist who made them and invoke the participation of the all those who see them.

The “Book from the Sky” demands to be seen-as a book and the presence of linguistic meaning and authorial intention are read-in to this appearance. In this sense, the “Book from the Sky” finds good company among other artworks: seeing and reading are everywhere deeply connected in our experiences, but nowhere do they inter-penetrate each other to the extreme that they do in the case of artworks. Every work of art demands to be both seen and read: the appreciation of art involves the co-creative efforts of artists and audiences and the synthesis of intention and imagination.

## 5.1 I See What I Read

The preceding investigation into the nature of seeing (chapter three) set out to demonstrate that the creation of meaning is rooted deep in the world: it belongs to the nature of human beings to perceive and experience a meaningful world. The subsequent investigation into the nature of reading (chapter four) set out to demonstrate that the introduction of reading has the power to change the nature of the human being and, by extension, the nature of the meaning that is simultaneously created and discovered in the world. A gestalt shift occurs when one becomes a fluent reader that cannot be undone: readers take on a new perspective; they "see" the world in a new way, a way that includes the ability to directly see meaning on words. The visual implications of reading go beyond merely seeing linguistic meaning on the visual appearances of words to imagining the content of what those words represent. Therefore, there is a very real sense in which we *read* images and objects in the world.

The same thing can be both seen and read: learning how to read is learning how to see—immediately and directly—new forms of significance. Of course there are different forms of seeing: ordinary visual perception of things in the world (e.g., seeing a painting), imaginative seeing (e.g., seeing Pierre in the portrait of Pierre), and signifying seeing (e.g., seeing "Pierre" so that Pierre comes to mind). Although no one would deny that reading involves seeing—unless of course one is reading Braille, in which case reading involves touching—I want to suggest that the type of seeing required by reading is not the same kind of seeing we use every day to navigate the world. The difference between the form of seeing involved in reading and the regular form of seeing we more commonly

think of can be compared to the difference in seeing between an individual who sees colors and one who is colorblind. Certainly both individuals are gaining visual information from the world, but the difference between them lies in the way and degree to which they are able to *sense* and make *sense of* the world.

Seeing an actual ball in the world is not a sign for the concept ball, but seeing a painting of a ball or the written word "ball" can be seen as signs for the concept ball. Unlike seeing, at the basis of reading there is an act of deciphering: a making intelligible of signs or ciphers. Among the many things we decipher are brush strokes, words, and signs. In some things, like calligraphy, more than one form of deciphering takes place at once. The philosophical interesting question, however, is whether the act of deciphering is done with the *eyes* or the *mind*. The traditional conception of reading places the act of reading in the mind of the reader: according to this reasoning, the difference between readers and nonreaders has nothing to do with the eyes and everything to do with the mind. It is precisely this type of thinking that I would like to challenge.

The "Book from the Sky" possesses the unique ability to bring the visual experience of language back into focus by disrupting the expectations of its readers to access a linguistic content. Normally, when we read a book we become absorbed in the content and lose sight of the form the content assumes. Even when we do take a moment to appreciate the form, we direct our focus to the linguistic form or construction of a particularly well crafted selection, not the *visual* form or presentation of the passage. Thus, despite our effort to appreciate the form, we never leave the realm of content. Very few writers succeeded in drawing our attention to the actual form of the language we read (e. e. cummings and some graffiti artists come to mind as obvious exceptions). In part,

this is because as readers we have developed a form of aspect blindness, to borrow a term coined by Wittgenstein, for the form of our natural language, skipping directly to the meanings underlying the presentations of the words. As nonreaders we possess a different form of aspect blindness that prevents us from sensing the presence of linguistic meaning at all.

The "Book from the Sky" presents us with the opportunity to divorce form from content, so that we may experience the feeling, embody the behavior, and assume the gesture of orientating oneself in the presence of linguistic meaning in the absence of any linguistic content. Most interpreters of the Book speculate on how the experience of viewing the Book varies between Western and Chinese audiences. Although I can imagine that the experience of viewing the Book might be more intense for a native Chinese reader because of the quality of illusion it can inspire, I think the more significant division between viewers of the Book actually occurs between literate and illiterate audiences. The significance of the Book would not be the same if it were printed in a real language. My experience as someone who does not read Chinese standing before the "Book from the Sky" is different from what my experience would be if the Book was printed in Chinese. Granted, on an elementary level I'm denied access to the linguistic contents of both, but the significant difference is that there is *something* to *be denied access to* in the case of the Chinese whereas the "Book from the Sky" neither promises nor denies access to anything other than itself. Although I possess the knowledge that the characters before me are meaningless, I nevertheless cannot curb my experience to exclude the perception of being in the presence of linguistic meaning. If I was actually in a room filled with Chinese characters, my perceptual feeling would be

justified. The "Book from the Sky," therefore is able to draw my attention to the *purely visual* experience of linguistic meaning by creating a complete disconnect between my experience and the object of my experience.

In the second chapter I made the claim that to confront a work of art is to confront a possibility and that it was the indeterminacy in artworks that engaged the imagination of their audiences and promoted the recognition of the work as an intentional object. Perhaps the most poignant example of the importance of indeterminacy can be found in the instance of metaphor. The signifying synthesis that occurs when one reads and grasps a metaphor consists in making present something that is absent. The positive construal of a specific absence that takes place in grasping a metaphor finds its closest equivalent in the quality of a particular feeling. When I read a metaphor I do not attempt to cash out its meaning in terms of a fuller literal expression, rather I experience the *feeling* of its implied significance. This feeling has been described by Casey as the "thetic" character of a work, which directly connects with the existential status the audience posits for that work. Similarly, both Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty compare aesthetic appreciation and linguistic understanding to occupying a particular behavior, experiencing a feeling, or entering a particular dispositional state.

The "Book from the Sky" is like a metaphor insofar as it is designed to make present a particular absence and the feeling of this absence. The characters that comprise the Book do not aim at, or point to, anything outside of themselves. What the characters signify is the presence of linguistic form in the absence of linguistic content and brings to our attention the presence of a great ambiguity or indeterminateness. The Book, therefore, does more than just illustrate the claim that the meaning of a text or work of art

is always there and identical to the work itself; it makes the further claim that the meaning of the work is there not only in the work itself, but in its *presentation*.

Reading is not just something the mind does with the content it sees, reading constitutes a new way of seeing entirely. The "Book from the Sky" reveals the purely visual aspect of this seeing. This is the closest reading ever comes to regular seeing: this is a reading that excludes all linguistic meaning, but is nevertheless accessible only to readers. Thus, at the most elementary level, the signifying synthesis that is reading consists in the visual perception of a surplus, or what is to say the same, an absence, of linguistic meaning. Reading, on this level, is a visual phenomenon characterized by a particular feeling or quality that can be compared to a sixth sense. To read is to gain access to a new form of perceiving, an additional sense or means of accessing meaning in the world. Like feeling what it means to be hopeful, frightened, or sad for the first time, feeling the presence of linguistic meaning represents the expansion of not just the repertoire of affective states, but of the world. After all, as McDowell so ardently strove to prove, affective and aesthetic properties do not just exist in our minds, in a very real sense they are parts of our world.

A parallel can be drawn between seeing linguistic meaning and seeing the backsides of objects. Even with one eye closed I cannot experience objects in my visual sphere as two dimensional surfaces, despite the fact that this is how they are presented to my retina. On the contrary, because of my embodied experience in the world, I have come to perceive the backsides of objects. The three-dimensionality and the ubiquitous presence of the backsides of objects have come to shape the way I see the front sides of things. My embodied experience of space and my knowledge based on my movements in

the world has supplemented the contents of my vision to the point that my vision has become permanently altered. Similarly, once we become readers we cannot stop seeing the backsides of words. It was Saussure who first compared the structure of a word to a coin: one side signifier, one side signified. I find the analogy particularly apt, for in addition to functioning like currency, words are like coins in that we are constantly dealing with their backsides (i.e., the signified) as well as their fronts (i.e., the signifier); one always implies the other.[187]

Unlike images, words are not supposed to be representative; they are supposed to perform their aiming through signification. But there are times when words can function as representations of the objects they signify. When the "physiognomy" of a word becomes representative of the subject it signifies, a "contamination" occurs, in Sartre's language, where words take on the role of representatives: "the word often plays the role of representative without ceasing to play the role of sign and we are dealing, in reading, with a hybrid consciousness, half-sign and half-imagining."[188] In short, Sartre is pointing out that language has imbued itself onto our world to the extent that images have come to possess linguistic tendencies and words have come to possess representative tendencies. The signifying synthesis involved in reading overlaps with the imaginative synthesis involved in some instances of seeing.

It is generally recognized that form can animate content. For example, the appearance of writing influences the meaning of what is read. The same principle comes into play in the faculty of taste, which is why the presentation of a dish can genuinely

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[187] Similarly Nietzsche in "Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense" also likens metaphors to coins.
[188] Sartre, *The Imaginary*, p.67.

alter its taste. What is often overlooked, however, is that the influence between form and content goes both ways. Content can also animate and affect form. When we read we *perceive* the thoughts, meanings and significances that animate what is read. In the same sense in which someone can wear their heart on their sleeve, written language can wear its meaning. The thoughts, meanings, and significances that animate what is read is are not merely thought in reading, they are *seen*. Illustrating this point, Ian McEwan in his novel *Atonement,* describes the jarring experience of a twelve year old girl upon seeing the word "cunt" for the first time:

> Naturally, she had never heard the word spoken, or seen it in print, or come across it in
>
> asterisks. No one in her presence had ever referred to the word's existence, and what was more, no one, not even her mother, had ever referred to the existence of that part of her to which—Briony was certain—the word referred. She had no doubt that that was what it was. The context helped, but more than that, the word was at one with its meaning, and was almost onomatopoetic. The smooth-hollowed, partly enclosed forms of its first three letters were as clear as a set of anatomical drawings. Three figures huddling at the foot of the cross.[189]

What McEwan poetically captures in the above quotation is the profoundly visual relation we have with linguistic meaning. We read not just the meanings of words, but also their appearance properties and presentation. If seeing can be interpreted as understanding—

[189] Ian McEwan, *Atonement*, p.107.

such that one cannot be said to see unless they possess some degree of understanding for what it is they see—understanding can likewise be interpreted as a form of seeing, so that one cannot be said to understand unless they possess the ability to see that which they claim to understand. Stated somewhat differently, understanding language requires form and structure, a presentation that is either visual or auditory, which is to say a presentation that can cross over all the senses.

The affordances of the world present us with the experience of the world as an intersensory whole. With all the senses acting together in the fullness of meaning and significance it is no wonder that linguistic meaning has taken on appearance properties in addition to auditory and affective properties. The ability for fluent readers to "see" linguistic meaning in the visual presentation of words is a natural extension of an evolutionary selection that maximizes brain conservation by binding simultaneous perceptual activity to produce the perceptual unity of cognition. Similarly this is why, Llinás explains, "this book you feel in your hands, this voice that seems to be reading to you, the sense of the chair around you, all seem as one event, occurring now."[190] The simultaneity of action can be likened to an orchestration of the different senses, without which the self would be left fragmented and unable to reconcile the vast array of sensory impressions of any given moment.

Language is a conventionally constructed system of signs, but this in no way limits its ability to become part of our world. Iconic signs and figural representations are also conventional, a fact that is often overlooked because figurative representations tend to seem transparent in terms of what they reveal. One visit to the children's section in a

[190] Llinas, *I of the Vortex*, p.250.

bookstore, however, should provide us with ample reason to challenge this common assumption. I find it striking how stylized and downright bizarre some children's book illustrations are. It's amazing that very young children can make sense of these images without extensive training in abstraction and expression, and yet they do just that. Not only can the child perform the complex translations required by these abstract images, but we have come to think of this as a natural expression of children's capacity for representation recognition.

Children must first learn how to make sense of representative drawings. Once they do, however, the ability to see in this way becomes an intrinsic part of how they view the world. Similarly, reading changes the way we experience the world and access the interconnection between the senses. For some individuals, reading may seem anything but natural, but similarly for most of us the ability to "see" though hearing or touching or "hear" though seeing or touching would seem anything but natural as well. Despite the fact that it is hard for most of us to even imagine what it must be like to possess these capacities, it is important to recognize that the individuals who naturally come to acquire these abilities possess the same basic biological equipment as ourselves.

The picture theory of language fell out of fashion because no linguistic description is fully capable of mirroring the world, but we have since discovered that pictures are no more capable of providing a faithful reflection of the world. The structures of pictures and words will never conform to the structure of the world, but this is not the failure of linguistic descriptions and pictures, but rather of our own assumption that there is some single thing to conform to that is the structure of the world. Instead of focusing on the ways pictorial representation can be regarded as radically distinct from

language, it may prove more insightful to focus on the degree to which pictorial and linguistic representations are continuous with one another. When the complexity of seeing—which involves the reflection of the other, concept origination, anticipation and emotion—is compared with what we assume the complexity of reading to be, the similarity between the two quickly becomes apparent.

The division between words and images, the literary and visual arts finds its basis not in any essential difference between words and images, but rather in the ideology of our culture: an ideology (or functioning aesthetics) that serves to determine the structure of our world, a structure that serves to further reflect the degree to which aesthetics determines metaphysics. Words possess the power to open worlds and, in this way, reading can be likened to listening to music or looking at paintings. Neither reading nor listening to music nor looking at painting can be explained by a foundationalist account, in all of them we find ourselves already caught up in the wholeness of a creative, imaginative, and intentional experience.

Ultimately no privileged position can be accorded to any of the various modes of artistic expression. Despite our biases, no mode of expression is uniquely endowed with the ability to express truth. "Speech is as dumb as music, music as eloquent as speech," says Merleau-Ponty. He then goes on to add: "expression is everywhere creative, and what is expressed is always inseparable from it. . . There is no analysis capable of making language crystal clear and arraying it before us as if it were an object."[191] Expression is always creative and its content is always wrapped up in its form. We are no more capable of exhausting the meaning of a musical work than we are a painting or a novel.

[191] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.391.

We experience the meaning of music directly with our senses. The same is true when we read. In both there is a collaborative effort between the artist and the audience. In order to be expressive, a work of art must strike the senses of an audience in a particular way and the audience must be receptive to the medium that supports that particular form of expression.

## 5.2 I See/Read What the Artist/Writer Intended/Imagined

To read, just as to perceive, is to assume a particular form of behavior or gesture in relation to the world. Both perceiving and reading are integrated processes in which the text—of either the world or page—is not so much copied as composed. We adopt towards words as well as the world. The physiognomy of the words on the page or the world around us is directly connected to the behaviors we assume in their presence. To grasp meaning in the world is to assume a gesture directing oneself toward a particular meaning in the world so that things come to have the meaning that they do. Just as the hand that reaches out to grasp the butterfly has already taken on a characteristic butterfly-grasping gesture, the reader who engages the text takes on the characteristic attitude and behavior that is indistinguishable from the meanings of the words on the page. The meaning and the attitude that linguistic meaning induces are inseparable. In the words of Merleau-Ponty, "Words have a physiognomy because we adopt towards them, as towards each person, a certain form of behavior which makes its complete appearance the moment each word is given."[192] Neither perception nor reading is based on passive reception. Both require active participation in the form of receptivity, reflectivity, and anticipation within a larger whole already endowed with meaning. In perceiving, we participate in the composition of the text of the world and in reading, we participate in the composition of the text of the written word. In both seeing and reading other people play an essential role.

In this section I intend to highlight the direct connection between form and

[192] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.235-6.

content in seeing and reading as it plays out in the connection between the intentions and imagination of the artist/writer and the viewer/reader such that the object (meaning/intent) "created" by the author/artist is also independently read/viewed by the reader/viewer. Artworks are always equally created and formed. The ambiguity inherent in the nature of the object endows it with an ontological ambiguity that elicits participation and co-creative energies from the audience. Sense experience is always indivisible from making and discovering meaning. With the addition of reading to the possible forms of making and discovering meaning, reading has come to interpenetrate the other senses in the wholeness of our experience.

The signifying synthesis that takes place in the act of reading is not unlike the synthesis that takes place in the act of looking at artworks: both presuppose a world of human intentions. The act of seeing does not begin with isolated sensations and build up to visual experience in the world. Rather all seeing takes place within the contextual whole of a meaningful world. Likewise, reading a book does not begin with individual letter recognition or word meanings and build up to semantic meaning. Reading, like seeing, always takes place within the larger contextualization of a perceptual and linguistic whole: the influences of the other senses in conjunction with the influence of other linguistic factors contribute to the meaningful whole that is the reading experience. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that when looking at even the crudest representative stick drawing of a man running, I do not begin with a mess of black lines on paper and build up to an image of a man running. On the contrary, the first thing that grabs my attention is the presence of the man running. Sartre, in his typically elegant way, captures this experience:

> When I look at a drawing, I posit in that very look a world of human intention of which that drawing is a product. Someone drew these lines, in order to form the image of a runner. No doubt, for this image to appear, the cooperation of my consciousness is necessary. But the artist knows this, counts on it; the artist solicits this cooperation of my consciousness via the black lines. We must not believe that the lines are given to me first, in perception, as lines pure and simple, to be given afterwards, in the imagined attitude, as the elements of a representation. In the perception itself, the lines are given as representative.[193]

It takes an extra amount of focused attention in order to see the visual presentation of the lines on the paper instead of the representation of the man running. Likewise, I do not posit the hand of the artist as an afterthought to my perceptual experience; it was there from the start.

Exactly how it is that we can immediately and directly see not only the thing that another wishes to represent, but also the intentions of the other to represent it is, in the words of John Searle, one of the biggest philosophical problems of all time:

> The central problem of the philosophy of language is to explain how the physical can become intentional, how the mind can impose intentionality on objects that are not intentional to start with, how, in short, mere things can *represent*. All forms of intentionality are under an aspect or aspects of the things represented.

[193] Sartre, *The Imaginary*, p.35.

Nothing is ever represented *tout court*, but only under some aspect or other.[194]

Our understanding of the world is, in great part, a reflection of our agency in the world. I have said many times that the affordances of the world ground egocentric space, but another way of expressing this insight is to say that intentionality itself is grounded in the world, not merely the realm of human agency. Returning, once again, to the example of the hand that reaches out to grasp a butterfly by displaying a quintessential butterfly-grasping gesture, the intentional formation of the gesture is not caused by the individual doing the grasping, but rather by the affordances of the world or, more specifically, the butterfly.

Intentionality can be found in the very fabric of the world itself. The affordances of the world act directly upon our bodies, immediately and without the need for further reflection by us. How we experience our environment is greatly determined by the activities it leads us to perform. The intentionality inherent in the affordances for action is itself present in the world. Thus the butterfly has the affordance to be grabbed, and the intentionality behind forming the proper physical motion needed to perform the grabbing is located in the world. I am not the cause of my hand forming the proper grasping posture; it is the butterfly that is the cause. My *hand sees* the butterfly and responds appropriately.

The world solicits our agency in particular ways and discourages it in others. To perceive, just as to read, is to respond, immediately and unreflectively, to the affordances

[194] John R Searle, "*Las Meninas* and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation," in *The Language of Images*, W. J. T. Mitchell ed., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.251.

that are present there in the world before us. Intentionality can be found in the physical world independently of human minds and agency. Sean Kelly further remarks on this point:

> A full account of the phenomenology of object perception requires me to say that I experience the world and its objects as intentional . . . so too, the overall style of a thinker's thought guides and directs him as if from afar . . . his thought is guided by something outside himself to which he is responsible, something that knows his subject better than he.[195]

If intentionality can be located in the structure of the world, guiding us with respect to the affordances in the world and our agency therein, it should come as no surprise that the presence of intentionality in a work of art or literature can be put there by an artist or writer and reveal a universal form or prototype.

When investigating the role of artistic intention in the creation and interpretation of works of art, Wimsatt and Beardsley directed their attention to the autobiographical information and various statements of intention that artists tend to make concerning their work. Due to problems of inconsistency between artists and critics and, in many instances, a dearth of information detailing artistic intention, Wimsatt and Beardsley concluded that neither the interpretation nor the evaluation of a work of art should take into account the supposed or reported intentions of the artist(s) responsible for the creation of the work. I have said before that I believe Wimsatt and Beardsley were

[195] Sean Dorrance Kelly, "Seeing Things in Merleau-Ponty," in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen eds.. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.28.

looking in all the wrong places when they searched out reliable sources of artistic intention. What an artist knows or can recount concerning her intentions are irrelevant. So too is all biographical information we may possess about any given artist or author. What *is* relevant, however, is what that particular artist or author has *done*. The work of art itself must hold all the answers.

To see what the artist has accomplished in making the work, or what the work has managed to become, is to appreciate the presence of artistic intention. In the words of Stanley Cavell, "What counts is what is *there*, says the philosopher who distrusts appeals to intention . . . yes, but everything that is there is something a man has *done*."[196] The intention of the artist is clearly evident in the presence of the work of art because it is the artist who is responsible for that presence. We live in a world populated with human intention at every turn. There is no escaping this world and we have never known anything else. From the first moments of life we began mirroring other people in our immediate vicinity. We learned how to perceive and embrace our unique form of embodiment by modeling the behavior of others. This is why we cannot help but see the man running in the stick figure and why it takes a tremendous amount of effort to bracket off this experience to simply see the figure as a collection of so many oddly shaped dark lines. The intention to be seen as a man running lies in the figure itself, it belongs to the object in the world, but it was put there by the person who drew the figure.

The intentionality we encounter when we appreciate a work of art belongs to the thing that is that work of art and is co-determinative with what the artist has accomplished in bringing about a particular work. The complex object that is the work of

[196] Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.236.

art elicits the behavior of its audience just as the butterfly acts on the body to cause a particular butterfly-grasping gesture. In both instances, the *intentionality belongs to the object in the world, not the observer or the creator*. Like butterflies, artworks act upon us and cause us to orientate ourselves and perceive them in certain ways.

When a work of art is as complex as a film, it's easy to fall into questioning the degree to which an audience's behavior and perception can be accounted for by the influence of the film and what degree the viewing experience reflects a particular audiences' unique contribution to the feeling and meaning of the artwork. On the one hand, intentionality belongs to the object that is the artwork in the world, an object that would never have existed if it wasn't for the intentions and actions of an artist. Moreover, because of the way we have been brought up to perceive, as audience members we are particularly receptive to the influence of an artwork's intentionality, making us perceive it in a certain way. On the other hand, all works of art require the co-creative efforts of artists and audiences in order to become what they are. Obviously the creative acts of artists and the perceptual receptivity of audiences make up the greater part of these co-creative efforts, but are there also creative efforts on behalf of the audience that can outstrip both the creative efforts of the artist and the intentional import of the artwork? In other words, can the creative endeavors of an audience to read significance into a work surpass the intentional significance of the work itself?

It is important to recognize that the "interpretation" of a work of art can, and often does, slip into becoming its own unique art form. When the creative efforts of the critic outshine the clearly embodied significance of the artwork, the result has more to do with the novel creation of the critic than the perceptual reception of the artwork. In a way, the

efforts of critics and connoisseurs to read meaning into artworks for the sake of illuminating their significance and status as intentional objects has actually had a negative impact on the general recognition of artworks as intentional objects embodying their own sources of significance. Blurring the boundary between artwork and criticism has had the unfortunate effect of creating the impression that artworks cannot speak for themselves. The voices of critics have overwhelmed the voices of artworks and because the contents of many critiques can be considered works of art in themselves, the effort to access a work of art via critical interpretation can often have the unwanted consequence of replacing one work of art with another.

Of course not all criticism is engaged in the endeavor of creating a new work of art. It is also possible to read-into a work of art and find things that the artist has managed to put there without even knowing it. The key, therefore, in determining whether or not a critique departs from a work of art comes not from the degree to which the artist of the work agrees with the critique, but rather from the degree to which the artwork clearly embodies and reflects the claims made by the critique. Along these lines, Susan Sontag in her essay against interpretation claims that "transparence is the highest, most liberating value in art—and in criticism—today . . . transparence means experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are."[197] Accessing art requires a receptivity that begins as a natural reflection of our way of being in the world, but it can also be developed over time as we become more sophisticated in our ways of seeing. Criticism has its place and should be valued in its own right, but criticism should never be confused with or offered in exchange for a work of art.

[197] Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation" in *Aesthetics*. Susan Feagin and Patrick Maynard eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Turning now to a concrete example of transparence in art and criticism, I would like to take a moment to consider the following quotation detailing Cavell's experience of discovering a reference to the myth of Philomel in Fellini's film *La Strada*:

> I may want to say: Fellini didn't intend the reference, but, being an artist he did something even better; he re-discovered, or discovered for himself, in himself, the intention of that myth itself, the feelings and wants which originally produced it. Or I may simply say: So it wasn't intentional. I shall be surprised, perhaps led to go over his work again to discover whether I still find the connection as powerful as I did at first; perhaps it is merely a superficial coincidence, and blocks me form a more direct appreciation. But if I do still find it useful, I shall still use it in my reading of the film, not because his intention no longer guides me, but because what it does is exactly guide me (as it guided him). To say that works of art are intentional objects is not to say that each but of them, as it were, is separately intended; any more than to say a human action is intentional is to say that each physical concomitant of it is separately intended.[198]

The point Cavell is making is an important one: not every aspect of a work of art need be mentally intended and planned out by the artist in order for every aspect of a work to be considered intentional. Returning for a moment to the distinction Anscombe drew between intentional action, intentions in action, and expressions of intention, the point Cavell is making is that an artwork can be intentional without having to conform in every

[198] Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, p.236.

detail to either an artist's intention in acting or expression of intention. On the contrary, the particular form that an artwork assumes is itself a reflection and embodiment of intentional artistic action. Moreover, in Cavell's account a deeper suspicion is also revealed, which supports the universal object theory of artistic creativity: the idea that there was something there guiding Fellini's action, something he may not have even been consciously aware of, but which he nevertheless intuitively sensed or hit upon in the making of his film.

Instead of referencing the Philomel myth, Fellini recreated it. He discovered it afresh by recovering the emotion, intention, and significance of the myth. Fellini's use of the myth is clearly his own and cannot be exchanged with other expressions or accounts of the myth, but we can also imagine other instances where an exchange between two works of art could occur. Music comes to mind as the most obvious candidate for the possibility of this type of rediscovery. It's quite conceivable that the same piece of music could be created by different people at different times and in different parts of the world without any influence permeating from one composer to another. Not only can we conceive of the same work being created by two separate individuals, more likely than not the musical works would be exactly the same, without a note of variation between them. At first glance, this last claim might strike us as more improbable than the first, but *if* we grant the first (that two composers could stumble upon the same work), then the second proposal (that the two works would be identical) should seem to follow naturally (not just technically by virtue of what it means to be two instances of the same work). I believe this thinking is correct and, moreover, reveals a deep, often obscured, truth about how human beings access and express meaning in the world. I imagine Fellini struck

upon the Philomel myth intuitively, as an elegant and poignant way of capturing the sentiment and significance he wished to convey in his film. Similarly, I can imagine my two composers would create exactly the same work because each of them would be under the guidance and direction of the work, which dictates its own necessity and being.

The universal object theory of creativity uniquely accounts for the sense of discovery that occurs when an artist orients herself towards creating and grasping a particular work of art. Not only does the universal object theory provide a point of comparison (even if that "point" is nothing more than a feeling or orientation) for what it means to "get it right" for a particular work, it also provides a common point of access for multiple individuals to grasp and judge the degree to which a work of art has gotten it right. For instance, when Xu Bing set out to create the "Book from the Sky" he began a journey. The road he followed was paved with communally shared sources and expressions of meaning; a virtual thoroughfare merging perceptual and linguistic encounters with significance. What he was looking for on this route was an opening for a previously unrealized possibility. Xu Bing realized this possibility in creating the "Book from the Sky," but the possibility preceded its actualization and was supported by well-trodden paths of human meaning-making. Audiences attending the installation for the "Book for the Sky" recognize this by collaborating with Xu Bing and the Book in the production and communication of a particular feeling and significance.

## 5.3 Conclusion: Seeing-As and Reading-In

The dichotomy between seeing and reading, which paints a picture of seeing as a passive activity and reading as an active, constructive activity is simply false. Seeing is almost as constructive as reading, which is to say reading is much more passive than we think. How we visually experience the world is a result of how our bodies interact with the affordances of the world. Likewise, what we linguistically experience in reading is a result of how our bodies interact with the affordances of language and the written word. Because we have been raised to learn how to read, we have affectively modified our brains to perceive complex linguistic meaning on signs.

For the fluent reader, reading has more in common with seeing representative images than most of us are inclined to suspect. Because of the complex signifying nature of our being in the world we have come to see the resemblance between images and things. For the reader, the written word has joined the class of things that possess visually representative properties. In learning how to read we have learned how to see new forms of significance in the world, a significance that has deeply embedded itself in the world and entangled itself with the other senses. The ability to see the tactile qualities of a cube in its visual presentation is not unrelated to the ability to see the auditory qualities of "cube" in the visual presentation of the written word. Not only is there a close connection between the appearance, sound, and feelings of words, there is a close connection between words and their meanings.

The signifying synthesis that takes place in reading and the imaginary synthesis that takes place when we see the subject depicted in a representative drawing are deeply

entwined. In each, the activity takes place not merely in the mind, but the body. I previously stated that the most elementary level of reading could be found in the purely visual perception of linguistic meaning, a visual grasping that leads to the felt presence of an absence or access of meaning. This level of awareness, albeit purely visual, is also solely accessible to readers; a nonreader cannot perceive, feel, or relate to the presence of linguistic meaning in this way. Most of us were born to visually perceive, but none of us were born to visually perceive like this; as readers we have developed a sensitivity to the presence of linguistic meaning and its visual implications.

In a very significant sense, it is the body and not the mind that encounters the signifying synthesis of reading or the imaginary synthesis occasionally involved in seeing. It is the body that meets and receives the direct connection between the visual presentations and meanings of words or the direct connection between the visual presentations and analogons of paintings. Grasping the meaning of a written passage or a work of art is like assuming a particular dispositional state. Language and art *move* us in a very literal way; they affect us and cause us to take on new behaviors. In each there is always movement and an affective response—be it movement in the body with proximity to the artwork or the eyes across the page; both necessarily take place within the larger whole of perceptual experience. Like perception, reading and appreciating art require embodiment and movement.

Seeing, reading, and regarding art are all outcomes our way of being in the world. Sartre claims that "the two worlds, the imaginary and the real, are constituted by the same objects; only the grouping and the interpretation of these objects varies. . . what defines

the imaginary world, as with the real universe, is an attitude of consciousness."[199] What, then, is the difference between the attitudes consciousness takes in seeing Pierre in the portrait of Pierre and seeing "Pierre" such that Pierre comes to mind? According to Sartre, the difference between an imaginary synthesis and a signifying synthesis is exemplified by the role of the signifier or visual object in the world that underlies the synthesis. To experience Pierre in the portrait is to alternatively focus on the presence of Pierre in his absence and the visual presentation of the picture. To experience the thought of Pierre in the word "Pierre," however, is to immerse oneself entirely in the thought of Pierre and abandon completely the word "Pierre" that served as signifier for the thought of Pierre. In his own words Sartre says:

> In signification, a word is but a milestone: it presents itself, awakens a signification, and that signification never returns to it but goes to the thing and drops the word. In the case of the image with a physical base, on the contrary, intentionality consistently returns to the image-portrait. We place ourselves facing the portrait and we observe it.[200]

Sartre wants to say the sign drops off in the case of signifying synthesis so that we see the signified without seeing the signifier or word. I disagree and maintain that more is accomplished with the eyes in both the imaginary synthesis of looking at a painting and the signifying synthesis of reading than Sartre concedes.

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[199] Sartre, *The Imaginary*, p.20.
[200] Ibid, p.23.

In reading the word I see the word. As a reader I have learned to see words so well that the meanings of the words have begun to animate the words themselves. Granted I'm usually unaware of this animation, but it is clearly evident and reflected in my way of life. If the most primitive level of reading consists in feeling the presence of linguistic meaning, than the more advanced stages of reading involves the transition from words to meanings. Granted, in the presence of meaning the visual presence of written words can occasionally slip from our attention, but this does not mean they do not play a significant role. We must confront and physically meet the words on the page each and every time. Just as our attention in an imaginary synthesis fluctuates between the presence of the painting of Pierre and Pierre the man in his absence, our attention in a signifying synthesis fluctuates between our awareness of the words on the page and their meanings.

Departing from Sartre, I want to maintain that in both imaginary and signifying synthesizes a cross-over takes place between the two actions of the "eyes" and the "mind." Sartre maintains that the imaginative attitude is continuous with perception but the signifying attitude is not. The "Book from the Sky," however, demonstrates that seeing and reading are continuous because in *seeing* the book, the presence of an absence (i.e., linguistic content) is discovered/uncovered. This is the result, not of an imaginary synthesis, but rather a signifying synthesis, because the synthesis relies on a form and content accessible only to readers. Sartre, however, would disagree. For Sartre, seeing a portrait and imagining Pierre is unlike seeing a sign and conceiving of its meaning:

I look at the portrait of Pierre. Through the photo, I aim at Pierre in his physical

> individuality. The photo is no longer a concrete object that provides me with perception: it serves as matter for the image. But here, it seems, is a phenomenon of the same nature: I approach these large black lines printed on a placard nailed above a door of the station. These black lines suddenly cease to have their own dimensions, color, place: they now constiture the words "Assistant Manager's Office." I read the words on the placard . . . one says that I understood, "deciphered," the words. This is not absolutely accurate: it would be better to say that I created them out of the black lines. . . the matter of the sign is completely indifferent to the object signified. There is no relation at all between "Office," black lines on a white page, and the complex object "office" that is not just physical, but social. . . between the matter of the physical image and its object there is a very different relation: they resemble each other.[201]

When we encounter the sign in the world we do not first experience it as a collection of black lines any more than we would experience a stick drawing of a runner as a collection of black lines. Granted there was a time when we did experience written language in this way, and perhaps we also once perceived stick drawings this way as well, but once we became fluent readers and representational seers there is no turning back.

For most of us, when we look at a written sign, we immediately see words and meaning. Written words animate and resemble their meanings. The resemblance between two things resides in the way we look at them. Resemblance can be more closely aligned to an attitude than an objective state or fact. We learn to see resemblance

[201] Ibid. p.21.

and the resemblances we see reflect what we deem important and worthy of orienting our lives towards. Clearly few things have commanded as much attention and accommodation in our way of life as the written word. Why then, should we find it surprising that we have begun to see a resemblance between written words and what they represent. We have long been aware that a resemblance can arise between the sounds and meanings of words. It's about time we recognize that a great part of the signifying synthesis that is reading takes place with the eyes instead of the mind.

Of course it goes without saying that the common ground between seeing and reading is particularly significant for its implications for aesthetics. In both seeing and reading there is a grasping of content or a meaningful possibility that is in the world waiting to be discovered by artists and audiences. The artist may discover it first and share this discovery with an audience as an artwork, but the artwork presents the opportunity for the audience to rediscover the significance on their own as well. The connection between artist and audience, therefore, falls entirely on the artwork. It is there to be discovered and the audience is like the artist when they directly connect themselves to the meaning of a particular work of art.

The meaning of a work of art, the way it reflects the intentionality and imagination of its artist and evokes the imagination and perceptual behavior of its audiences, lies in the work itself. We need look no further for the meaning of a painting or a poem than the particularity of the work. At the same time, the particularity of each and every work owes its conception to the context of a socially-constructed system of signification; the meaning and "reality" of the artwork cannot be divorced from this context. Because we share in the same context, way of life, or world of signification, we

can directly hear the meaning of another's speech and directly see the meaning of words on paper. The tension between meaning residing in the thing itself and meaning as a consequence of context is a false dilemma. There is no such thing as a thing in itself apart from its context. Everything is what it is by virtue of the relations and connections it holds with other things in the world.

Experiencing a work of art is a deeply personal and private experience and, at the same time, an experience based on an appeal to a universal. The work of art demonstrates its own necessity and way of being on the one hand, and can strike me as being uniquely my own experience on the other. The ability for artwork to bring together and rely upon that which is most subjective and that which is most objective or universal lays in the fact that feeling is constitutive of meaning. How a poem, painting, film, or musical work *feels* to me is essential to its meaning. Thus its intimacy is paradoxically part of its objectivity.

Just as objects in the world cause me to perceive them in certain ways and not others, literary objects cause me to read them in certain ways and not others. In a significant sense, I don't cause the meaning of a text to emerge any more than I cause the appearance of objects in my visual field to emerge. At the same time, neither reading nor seeing is purely passive. There is a large degree of active agency in both seeing and reading: the reflection of the other, affect, and anticipation all serve to animate the contents of our perceptions. Reading, like seeing, is part discovery and part construction. The meaning of the painting or the poem simultaneously demands my constructive energies to emerge and is already there to be discovered. The created/found structure of seeing/reading mirrors itself in the created/found structure that takes place in both an

artist's intentional relation to the creation of a work of art and the *co-creative* efforts of an audience to *discover* an artist's creation/discovery in a work of art.

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