Art and Knowledge:
the position of art in a liberal education

Margaret Hills

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Abstract

The focus of this dissertation is the relationship between art and knowledge and the implications of that debate for the place of the arts within the framework of a liberal education. In Chapter 1 this debate is examined from within the context of the philosophy of education from its inception in Plato's Republic to the contemporary debate within the philosophy of education in the anglophone tradition. It is argued that the role of the arts in education is informed by our view of knowledge and our view of art and that our views on both counts will inform where we place the arts in education. An Aristotelian position is adopted and it is asserted that any rigid division between theory and practice is misconceived, that theory and practice are internally related and that art as knowledge should have a central role in education.

In Chapter 2 the relationship between art and knowledge is examined from within the field of contemporary visual theory where it is suggested there is a dichotomised view of the meaning of art which parallels a dichotomised view of knowledge and value. Here it is argued that to adopt an either/or position in relation to these debates fails to take into account the composite nature of rationality which it is asserted is essential to the educational transaction. It is argued that both alternative and traditional approaches to visual representation must be incorporated into teaching pupils about art at a level appropriate to their development for if an educational aim is to enable pupils to make rational choices then these must be made in the light of all the relevant information available.

In Chapter 3 the contemporary debate within art education is discussed within the context of the current vocationalisation of education. Here the hazards of adopting an either/or position are reiterated and theories which fail to take into account the composite nature of rationality are rejected as inadequate and doctrinaire. It is argued that we require a theory of knowledge and a theory of art broad enough to take into account the breadth and complexities of both art and knowledge and that these theories should encompass an acknowledgement of the composite nature of rationality. Without an acknowledgement of the composite nature of rationality, which involves making a rational choice on the grounds of all available information, it is argued that the conversation which is at the heart of the educational transaction cannot be furthered.
Introduction

The subject of this dissertation is the relationship between art and knowledge and seeks to establish what is learnt through the study of the arts, and what their place should be within education. The relationship between art and knowledge has important implications for the justification of the role of the arts, that is, dance, drama, music, literature, film and the visual arts, in education and their inclusion in the curriculum because different theories of education are based on different views of knowledge. The theory of education with which this dissertation is primarily concerned is that of a liberal education which has traditionally been thought of as a process concerned with the pursuit of knowledge which would in turn lead to the development of the mind. This view of education has its origins in the works of Plato (423 - 347 BC) but is a concept of education which continues to preoccupy philosophers of education.

Within the tradition of critical examination of liberal education philosophers and educationalists such as J. S. Mill, Huxley, Sidgwick and Arnold, to name but a few, have demonstrated the different ethical positions that might be adopted and the different ways in which knowledge might arguably be structured. In the late twentieth century, Pring (1993), in re-examining the concept of liberal education as it is subjected to changed circumstances and pressures, characterises a liberal education in its 'pure form' as 'a way wherein education is seen as an initiation into forms of understanding which requires no external justification and which best takes place far removed from considerations of utility'. (Pring. R., 1993, p.51) This notion of education as initiation into understanding is drawn upon by Oakshott (1972) in his description of the educational transaction for Oakshott, we inhabit a world of ideas which determine how we experience the world, how we shape it to our needs and how we identify ourselves and others within it. These ideas through which we understand ourselves and the world in which we live have to be learnt — initially from our parents and immediate community, but then from books, from conversations with others, from the activities that we share with others and from the appreciation of works of art. Although our own individual perceptions of the world resulting from the process of learning will inevitably arise, they will arise from common sources which are publicly accessible, thus enabling a 'conversation' to take place. This conversation contains many voices including those of the sciences, the arts, of history and philosophy which have developed through reflection, criticism and speculation, from generation to generation.
and is, in Oakshott’s view, the inheritance that we enter into through the process of learning.

In Oakshott’s (1972) formulation this ‘conversation’ is central to the educational transaction and it is the responsibility of each generation, through the initiation of the next into the art of ‘conversing’, to maintain the conversation and to build upon it.

“And perhaps we may recognise liberal learning as, above all else, an education in imagination, an initiation into the art of this conversation in which we learn to recognise the voices; to distinguish their different modes of utterance, to acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to this conversational relationship and thus to make our ‘début sans la vie humaine’.”

Oakshott, M., 1975

Pring (1993) notes, that in initiating young people into this conversation one needs ‘to remove them from distractions of everyday life, from the pressing needs of the ‘here and now’, and to give them the space and the time and the leisure to learn the art of conversation and to participate in it’. Liberating the pupil from the present and the particular is also to instil a notion of knowledge and understanding as transferable and open-ended as opposed to specific and concrete, which was a theme pursued by Newman (1852) for whom a liberal education was based firmly on the nature of knowledge, but knowledge learnt as disciplines of active thinking, internalised and inter-connecting with each other as opposed to knowledge learnt as a set of inert and discrete ideas. Pring (1993) suggests that broadly speaking, these ideas underpin the notion of liberal education, which, until comparatively recently, prevailed in our universities and schools.

The main features of this notion of liberal education can, Pring (1993) suggests, be summarised as follows:

1) What should be learnt is rooted firmly within intellectual disciplines.

2) To be educated is to be initiated into these disciplines — that is, to have grasped the basic concepts acquired the essential skills, mastered the techniques of enquiry, developed the moral habits of these fundamental ways of knowing the world and of shaping experience.

3) The point or the value of the apprenticeship into the intellectual disciplines through which we come to understand and shape our experience, requires no further justification than reference to their own intrinsic value.
4) That initiation is a hard and laborious task. It requires a time and a place set apart. It needs, in other words, schools and universities separated from the world of business and usefulness.

5) The control and the direction of that conversation, and thus of the initiation into it, must lie in the hands of those who are authorities within it — certainly not government or industry or the community at large.

Pringe. R., 1993, p.55

In recent years there have been criticisms of this particular view of liberal education for, as Pring (1993) points out, the social circumstances within which liberal education is defined do themselves change — requiring a continuous re-examination of the concept of a liberal education. These criticisms, have, according to Pring, emerged from quite different quarters and may be summarised as follows: the disconnection of education from the practical world of business, the exclusion of so many from the liberal ideal, the failure to incorporate the moral and social formation of the next generation, the lack of public accountability in a publicly funded service. The subsequent ‘vocationalising’ of liberal education in response to these criticisms where vocational training is seen not simply as an adjunct of liberal education, nor simply as an alternative for those considered unsuitable for it, but as an integral part of the liberal education programme, challenges the notion of a liberal education in its ‘pure form’ as outlined above. However, the vocational alternative is in danger of remedying the perceived problems of a liberal education through the neglect of theoretical understanding, and reinforcing the distinction frequently drawn between theory on the one hand and practice on the other, between knowledge and skills, between thinking and doing or making. The apparent contrast between theory and practice lies all too often at the base of the liberal/vocational divide. However, as Pring (1993) argues, theory and practice are internally related.

"There is embryonic theory contained within intelligent practice. It becomes theoretical, and thus open to examination, reflection and criticism, once the understandings embedded within the practice are made explicit and systematically formulated"......"Theory, and the propositional knowledge which constitutes the theoretical position, are a provisional formulation of a set of ideas through which we make sense of reality, including the practical reality of worship, or work, or of moral struggle."

Pring. R., 1993, p.71

The origins of the liberal/vocational divide can be traced back to Plato’s Republic which is also taken as the point of departure in this dissertation. Vocational training does not lie within the scope of Plato’s notion of education and whatever skills are required by
the artisan class to practice their trade or profession must be acquired outwith Plato’s educational system. Similarly, all practical activities are devalued and practical subjects, such as the visual arts, denied any educational merit. However, the notion of a liberal/vocational distinction based on a division between theory and practice, as applied to the arts, has been challenged almost from its inception by Aristotle who was a pupil of Plato’s. In the Poetics Aristotle develops the theme, inherent in the Republic, that the arts belong structurally together but departs from Plato on several counts. Aristotle employs the concept of ‘artistry’ or ‘techne’ which can be defined as a productive skill or activity which matches rational and knowledgeable means to the achievement of predetermined ends. While the concept of ‘techne’ had greatly interested Plato, he had found the arts incapable of satisfying the criteria of knowledge attached to it. Aristotle establishes a connection between the specific kind of making and producing which is poetry or artistic production and other forms of making and producing which are manual. He then goes on to put forward a theory of artistic production and reception in which it is shown that the arts are concerned with significance and with meaning. Far from being devalued as in the Republic, Aristotle suggests that through the arts we may begin to attain knowledge and understanding having moved beyond discrete particulars for the arts are concerned not with the mere reproduction or imitation of reality but with making sense of it. In acknowledging the practical application of intellect Aristotle dissolves a rigid boundary between theory and practice, between thinking and doing or making and illustrates that theory and practice are internally related. Thus if a liberal education is concerned with the pursuit of knowledge and knowledge is both theoretical and practical any rigid divide between a liberal and a vocational education is a false one as it constitutes a denial of the inter-relatedness of theory and practice.

Chapter 1 outlines the Platonic and Aristotelian theories of art which continue to have relevance to the contemporary liberal/vocational debate and to thinking about the role of the arts in education. Following on from this is a discussion of the works of Paul Hirst, Philip Phenix and L. A. Reid as representative of the reassertion of this traditional debate within the twentieth century philosophy in the anglophone tradition.

Chapter 2 turns to contemporary visual theory in order to relate the views outlined in Chapter 1 about the relationship between art and knowledge, within the tradition of critical examination of liberal education, to theories of visual representation. Here a distinction is drawn between traditional and alternative views of knowledge, which, it is argued, correspond to traditional and alternative theories of art. While this distinction is admittedly broad-brush, support may be found for drawing upon it in the work of
Kelly (1987) in education, and in the writings of Bryson, Holly and Moxey (1991) on contemporary visual theory. In this chapter there is a focus on those issues within contemporary visual theory which have educational relevance and as such issues of interpretation and reception as well as those of creation and production are addressed.

The final chapter focuses on art and education and particularly on issues pertaining to knowledge, to reason and to understanding. Recent developments in visual theory are related to the current debate in arts education, and particularly those theories of art which take into consideration issues of individual development and the location of the arts within the social formation, for any coherent educational theory must take into account theories of the individual and of society alongside theories of knowledge.
Chapter 1

1.1 Art and Knowledge in Plato’s Republic

As O’Hear (1981) observes there is no general consensus as to what education is and there may be many different concepts of education in different societies. Furthermore, any educational theory is necessarily complex for alongside theories of knowledge, theories of the self or the individual and theories of society underpin any recommendations for educational practice. Therefore considerations such as what constitutes knowledge or what subjects are worthwhile learning cannot be fully considered without taking account of who is to learn, in what context and with what aims. However, people’s concepts of education and its aims are never independent of their general social and ethical ideal. And therefore, the question of what education itself is, is not a scientific question of fact but rather a question of values and opinions, The theories or views of man, of knowledge and of society which underpin educational theories are not always clearly in evidence and may in some cases be overlaid by some other more acceptable theory, or expressed in different, more acceptable terms.

In Plato’s Republic, for example, education is aimed at fitting people to perform their roles in the state, but it is organised so as to keep their desires and knowledge within that appropriate to a particular station. In order to achieve this aim all citizens are to be indoctrinated with a noble lie (or a magnificent myth, according to some translations) according to this, each child is fashioned by a god from a mixture of earth and metal — copper or iron in the case of the workers, silver for the auxiliaries or soldiers, gold for the guardians or ruling class — and there is a prophecy to the effect that the state will be ruined when its rulers are made of copper or iron. Plato represents Socrates as being asked if there is any way of making people believe such a story, and commenting in reply that it will be difficult in the first generation, but even so, it should serve to increase the loyalty of the citizen to the state and each other. (Republic, 415a-d) Thus the aim of education in Plato’s Republic is to affect a man’s desire and his concept of what counts as a good or happy life, and bring about the reality-desire match by working on his desires rather than by helping him to produce appropriate changes in reality. The noble lie, which is invented to instil the notion in the populace that this tripartite system is actually the natural and rightful order of things as ordained by the gods coupled with the cautionary prophecy, that if men go against it, the state will be ruined, is an example of how expectations can be manipulated and an example of an educational aim, that is, to keep people’s desires and knowledge within that deemed
appropriate to a particular station and to fit them to perform their roles in the state, overlaid and expressed in quite different terms. In Plato’s Republic these relationships, between an educational theory and the theories underpinning it, are made explicit and graspable as they are explored within the contained world of the Ideal State. However, in the real world these relationships are sometimes difficult to unravel and the underlying views of society, the individual and of knowledge which inform educational theories may be obscured and difficult to extract from the expressed educational aims.

Plato’s Republic is taken as the point of departure in this dissertation because the relationships between his educational theory and his views of knowledge, the individual and society, which underpin and inform his proposals for educational practice, are spelt out and made explicit. Within this context is a theory of the arts and their role in education which has had a damaging and enduring influence for it is a theory which denies the arts any educational merit and views them as both morally and intellectually degraded. Just as Plato’s view of education has survived and is, as Kelly (1987) points out, essentially the view of education which has traditionally informed the notion of a liberal education, so has Plato’s view of the arts. In the Republic we may find, in the devaluing of all practical activities and the high premium placed on purely intellectual activities, the origins of the liberal/vocational divide and the origins of the traditional down trading of the arts within a liberal education. These issues remain salient and are, as this dissertation seeks to illustrate, as yet unresolved.

Plato’s theory of education is based on a particular view of knowledge and truth in which there were said to be universal truths. The notion of universal truths has in the modern debate been overtaken by the notion of objective values and standards as determined by a scientific or positivist paradigm which leaves the arts standing accused of a rampant subjectivism. However, for Plato knowledge of a kind which is absolute and certain could be attained in all spheres through reason, and truth established not only in the field of science and mathematics but in those of morals, aesthetics and politics. Therefore universal truths were also elicited from the realm of aesthetic and moral values through application of reason, and education is regarded as the process by which these values are intentionally transmitted. Ultimately, Plato’s concern is not with education in itself but with its social function. His theory of education is developed in support of his political theory and of his view of society and it is only when he has conceptualized what a ‘just’ society might be that he asks what kind of education would be likely to achieve this kind of society. Beck (1964) suggests that this is why Plato has no specific discourse ‘On Education’, as a theory of education which is not relevant to a
theory of society as a whole can for Plato serve little purpose. Plato discusses education in great detail within the Republic and within the Laws. In both these treatises education is treated as the means whereby the customs and traditions of an ideal society may be inculcated and maintained.

“If a certain type of state is considered desirable then a certain, corresponding, type of character will be necessary in the citizens, and this will be produced by a certain type of education. The Ideal State of the Republic depends upon the educational scheme sketched in it, while the less ideal but more practical State of the Laws will be suited by the somewhat different scheme set out in that work.”

(Beck. F.A.G., 1964, p.199)

Overall, justice is Plato’s main concern. As Cornford (1941) points out the main question to be answered in the Republic is: What does justice mean, and how can it be realized in human society? Essentially, justice is seen by Plato in terms of a state of balance or harmony which is reached when all the constituent elements of any organism are working together each performing its own function and not impinging on the function of the other. This state of equilibrium in both the state and the individual is to be produced by education whose primary function is to select people for their most appropriate roles and to prepare them to fulfil these roles properly. Plato develops these ideas in his theory of the tripartite state and its parallel, the tripartite soul. Briefly, Plato regards all human societies as having three fundamental needs which he identifies as economic welfare, safety from internal and external dangers, and government. Corresponding to these identified needs he identifies three kinds of citizen—the artisans, who will attend to the economic needs of the society, the auxiliaries, whose role it is to ensure the implementation of the law and the rulers, who make the laws and all other kinds of governmental decision. These roles are ascribed to individuals through the selective function of education. In addition, because Plato wishes to create a harmony or balance in the individual comparable with the harmony he wishes to create in the Ideal State, education must also meet the needs of the individual.

Plato refers to the soul of man as something living which we cannot create or destroy, but which we can feed or starve, nourish or poison. The human soul is seen as a complex whole, consisting of three ‘forms’ or ‘parts’ corresponding to the three divisions in society. This tripartite system assumes a scale of worth. At the lower end is the ‘appetite’ or wealth loving or gain-loving element which he represents as the element which occupies the largest space in the soul and which education must seek to tame. The second element is more complicated but is commonly translated as ‘spirit’. The spirit is the foundation of courage but also the source of pugnacity and
aggressiveness, with their possible developments into ferocity and cruelty. When properly educated this aggressiveness becomes self-control or self-discipline. Nettleship (1935) points out that Plato represents the 'spirit' as the natural ally of the rational or better self. It is linked with righteous indignation in that it is that which "makes a man's blood boil at the consciousness of suffering unjustly, while it is characteristically absent when the suffering is felt to be deserved". (Nettleship. R.L., 1935, p.12) Finally the third and highest element of the soul is the 'philosophic' or reason, that which distinguishes man from other animals. This highest element is portrayed in its most primitive character as the impulse of attraction to what is familiar because it is familiar. It is then developed by Plato into that which delights in knowledge as something to be understood as opposed to mere familiarity. This development includes a susceptibility to the arts, to beauty and has an emotional and moral aspect. Ultimately, this highest form of the soul assumes an intellectual character in which, as Nettleship (1935) points out, the intellectual predominates over the emotional and love of wisdom is replaced by wisdom itself. These three elements of the soul are represented by Plato in allegorical terms as a beast with three heads each one corresponding to an element of the soul: a beast, a lion and ultimately a man. In a just, harmonious, properly educated soul reason will be in control and will take all the decisions, the 'spirit' will ensure that these decisions are carried out while the appetites will be made to accept these decisions and their consequences.

The education of the individual has a crucial and dual function for it must serve the needs of both the individual and those of society. However, according to Kelly (1987) it is clear from Plato's view of the soul and of the state that, for a large proportion of the population, education will consist of little more than a training in obedience. Kelly (1987) draws our attention to a parallel between the appetites and the artisan class in Plato's theory. As previously noted Plato envisaged the appetites as the element at the lower end of a scale of worth within the soul which education must seek to tame. In the tripartite state the artisan class occupies a parallel position, and as Kelly (1987) points out this must suggest a similar approach to the education of the artisan class in the state. Vocational training does not lie within the scope of Plato's notion of education and as such whatever skills are required by the artisan class to practice their trade or profession must be acquired outwith Plato's educational system. The implication is that Plato's system is based on selection and that although the primary or elementary stage is considered suitable for all citizens in the Ideal State there is no place in Plato's secondary education for the artisan class as there is no place in it for practical activity. Practical activities are devalued in Plato's scheme and he was concerned to distinguish
education from training, between study for its own sake and study which aimed at achieving ends extrinsic to the study itself. Thus the intellectual activities of mathematics and philosophy which constitutes Plato's secondary curriculum are elevated and highly valued while practical subjects such as art are devalued and denied any educational merit.

This formulation of intellectual and academic criteria has had a powerful and pervasive effect on educational practice and has had a pervading influence on the view of practically based subjects such as the arts and the perception that they are intellectually inferior. Furthermore bearing in mind the parallel between the appetites and the artisan class it is worthwhile noting that the appetite is represented as the elements which occupies the largest space in the soul while correspondingly the artisan class constitutes the largest class of citizens in the state. Both are accorded the lowest status within their respective systems. Therefore although the kind of society envisaged by Plato may be described as meritorian, in that all citizens should receive an elementary education prior to selection for further education by merit, both moral and intellectual, and not by birth or privilege, only a minority will be educated to this level. Because selection is based on a particular interpretation of worth Plato's system achieves equality of access, in that he gives everyone the opportunity to enter the second stage of education providing they are good enough, or rather good enough at certain things, nothing is offered to those who do not succeed at being selected at that level. Therefore equality of access is closely defined and there is no equality of provision. As such, although this kind of society can be called meritorian, it is, as Kelly (1987) points out, questionable whether one could describe it as democratic. It should be noted that this system is not dissimilar, in structure and rationale, to the tri-partite system of education introduced by Butler's 1944 Education Act which was gradually to be replaced by the comprehensive system. Recent developments such as the introduction of Technical and Vocational Education Initiative in 1982 and City Technology Colleges in 1986 are however indicative of a return to a meritorian system with epistemological divisions similar to those drawn in the Republic. Therefore, this apparently remote historical perspective is still very salient. Indeed, it is because Plato seeks to plan education in the interests of society that he has been charged with totalitarianism, a preference for the welfare of society over that of its individual members. Underpinning this view of education lies a conviction that there are absolute truths or values for it is only if one is convinced of the certainty of the existence of absolute moral, cultural and aesthetic values as objective and absolute that one can justify imposing them on others. Plato believed that philosophical enquiry would reveal what those values are and that education should
inculcate these values in the citizens of the state at the elementary stage of education to which all would have access. It is in this context that Plato examines the role of the arts within the curriculum.

The Role of the Arts in Early Education in Plato’s Republic

In Book III, Chapter IX (376-412 BC) of the Republic, Plato addresses the subject of primary or elementary education. Basically, Plato adopts the educational system already in existence but removes certain features which will not help to produce the type of character his Guardians are to have as it is from this group that the philosophic Rulers are to be selected at a later stage. The two main divisions of the primary curriculum are Music and Gymnastic, the former embracing all the subjects of general education. Music included all the arts over which the Muses presided and as Nettleship (1935) points out consisted of reading, writing, some elementary mathematics but mainly in the reciting and learning by heart of poetry, along with the elements of music and sometimes of drawing. Nettleship (1935) points out that in this twofold method of education it would appear that Music and Gymnastic training were related to one another as mental to bodily training. However, Plato asserts that the soul and not the body, is the primary object of both trainings. Music specifically educates the philosophic element of the soul, through the medium of the eye and the ear, while Gymnastic through exercising the body, not only produces health and strength, but disciplines the psychological element of the spirit. Thus a balanced diet of physical and intellectual experiences will lead to a balance and harmony within the soul. Balance is central, for an exclusive education in Music was thought to foster effeminacy and oversensitivity while an over emphasis of Gymnastic would lead to brutality and cruelty instead of the intellectual courage its practice aimed to nurture.

In Plato’s system Music commenced before Gymnastic. However, the elements within Music were to be carefully chosen in order that they promote the right moral attitudes. This censorship of the arts in education was to be extended to the arts in society so that this process would be reinforced in the cultural life of the state. As Beck (1964) points out the aim of poetry and music in Plato’s primary curriculum is to provide the growing mind with examples of beauty and nobility and to develop an appreciation of harmony and rhythm. Through this process of habituation the pupil will, argues Plato come to love nobility and beauty and to hate ugliness. (Repub. 401 d-e) As Beck (1964) notes this is precisely why Plato directs so much criticism towards the poetry and music of his day for if literature and music are to have this specific didactic purpose they must
instil only those aesthetic standards which inculcate the notion of beauty and nobility determined by Plato. It is important to acknowledge that in Plato's time poetry was generally regarded as the chief vehicle of knowledge "embracing the authoritative history of the people and their gods and heroes and as containing all the wisdom of the race". (Beck. F.A.G., 1964 p.204) Indeed as Cornford (1941) points out the Athenian child took his notions of the gods chiefly from the poets Homer and Hesiod who attributed to them every kind of immorality. Basically, Plato seeks to censor the poets for saying dangerous false things about the gods.

However, Plato then goes on to suggest that literature in particular, influences our characters in every way, and so the poets must be directed not only in what they say about the gods but in their works as a whole. Here Plato emphasises the dangers of the kind of poetry that has the reciter imitate or represent a character, rather than merely narrating what happened, a practice he regards as potentially corrupting. According to Keuls (1978) Plato was the first to connect the notion of 'enactment' or mimeses with any literature other than drama. (Keuls. E.C., 1978, p.25) Keuls points out that in its original sense mimesis meant 'the enactment of deeds and experiences, whether human or divine'. The extension of its meaning from 'enactment' to 'copying the appearance of' was in her view made for the sake of the argument against poetry, not for the purpose of criticizing the art of painting.

"As Plato puts it himself "there is an ancient feud between philosophy and poetry", there is none between philosophy and painting."  
(Keuls. E.C. 1978, p.24)

As previously noted Plato distinguishes between the narrative and the mimetic in poetry in Book III of the Republic, criticizing the mimetic elements in poetry on the grounds that, in childhood particularly, imaginative identification may leave its permanent mark on the character of the actor and his audience. Given the content of the poetry used in the early education this identification was considered highly undesirable.

"A child cannot distinguish the allegorical sense from the literal, and the ideas he takes in at that age are likely to become indelibly fixed; hence the great importance of seeing that the first stories he hears shall be designed to produce the best possible effects on his character".

Repub. 378; trans. Cornford

However, as Kuels (1978) points out the reference to the poets in Book X makes it clear that this earlier distinction between 'narrative' and 'mimetic' passages is now abandoned, and that all poetry is considered mimetic. All imitative work is now rejected
(595-6), not only the imitation of base character and action, and as Murphy (1951) notes the notion of imitation is extended to cover any kind of representative or descriptive form.

The Relationship Between Art and Truth in Plato's Republic

An important theme in both contemporary visual theory and educational theory is the relationship between art and knowledge. It is important to note that this has been a constant theme central to all important theories of art and education and particularly to a theory of a liberal or general education traditionally defined as the pursuit of knowledge. The essential theme of Book X of the Republic is defined in Cornford’s (1941) translation as how representation in art is related to truth. Cornford (1941) suggests that the main object of attack in Book X was the claim made by sophists and professional reciters of the Homeric poems, that Homer in particular, and in a lesser degree other tragedians, were masters of all technical knowledge, from wagon-building or chariot driving to strategy, and also that the poets were moral and religious guides. Cornford points out that as moral and religious guides the poet becomes the rival of the philosopher, as conceived by Plato, and the study of poetry an alternative to the severe intellectual training of the Academy.

“If wisdom is to be gained only through knowledge of the real world as disclosed by Dialectic, the claim that the poet can educate mankind to virtue must be hollow as the pretence that the artist knows all about shoemaking because he can paint a life-like picture of a shoemaker”.

Cornford. F., 1941, p.315

However, as Murphy (1951) notes while Book X addresses the claim of art to teach and impose ideals it does not follow that Plato would have tolerated its practice in his Ideal State were this claim to be renounced. In Murphy’s view this implies a recognition that the arts constitute a province of their own of a serious nature; and according to Murphy this province or domain is precisely what Plato seems to object to. It is a realm in which Plato finds little but superficial charm.

As previously noted the notion of imitation seems to be extended to cover any kind of representative or descriptive form. Imitation in this wide sense is seen as intellectually shallow, for painters and poets are charged with not taking the trouble of finding out the true nature of things. This criticism is applied to the painter who will paint us a shoemaker, a carpenter, or other workman without understanding any one of the crafts (X.598) and to Homer who undertakes to tell us about matters of the highest
importance, such as the conduct of war, statesmanship, or education (X.599). In Plato’s view these constitute superficial impressions which lack substance and are dangerous in that they disarm our critical faculties with their charm.

As Keuls (1978) points out the poet-painter equation is developed with the extended view of mimetic poetry in mind. The real nature of things will be known only to those who have given it the appropriate kind of study. The painter, however, is acquainted only with the product, the poet not with the principles of conduct and morality as studied by philosophers but with the facts of feeling and behaviour. As Keuls (1978) notes, this leads Plato to liken Homer to a painter who makes a shoemaker, or what appears to be one, himself having no knowledge of shoemaking, for the benefit only of those who have no knowledge of it either. (Keuls. E.C., 1978, p.25)

In Plato’s view the painter is the producer of work which is ‘twice removed from reality’. This is illustrated in the famous parable of the bed. God, the original creator, makes ‘the nature of the bed’, the carpenter makes a ‘copy’ of it, which is not perfect in its realization of the purpose of a bed. The painter copies its appearance and is thus inferior to the carpenter for at each remove from the original bed Plato assumes that something of the original has been lost. This theory about the art of painting involves the extension of the meaning of mimesis to ‘reproduction of appearance’. According to Keuls (1978) the poet-painter equation in Republic X is the backbone of most of the speculation that Plato was an enemy of the art of painting. However, in her view Plato developed his conception of the representational arts as being ‘imitative’ not in order to reject them, but in order to support his arguments against dramatic and literacy genres. It is not possible given the scope of this paper to pursue this line of enquiry in any depth, however it is important to acknowledge that Plato’s thought on the arts and their relationship to each other has been differently interpreted. However, there appears to be a consensus of opinion that the case against the painter does not have the same weight as that against the poets. Indeed as Murphy points out the parable of the bed does not constitute a very impressive indictment of art.

"Some painters study anatomy in order to represent the human figure more correctly. But the best anatomists would not necessarily paint well, while the painter may be doing well whatever it is that he is concerned with".

Murphy. N.R., 1951, p.225

In summary both painting and poetry are regarded as intellectually degraded. Aesthetic enjoyment is depicted as a special kind of pleasure of a perceptive nature in which the
question of truth and falsity is not addressed or merely taken for granted, but where the sensuous qualities of the aesthetic object are enjoyed for their own sake. Plato argues that if the task of the artist is to provoke sensuous pleasure by imitation then his success must be measured by his ability to do so. As such the production of works of art cannot be a form of good, for good cannot be applied where there are no standards but empirical fact. Sensuous pleasure is either produced or it is not. If it is successful and invokes pleasure then this is seen in terms of its effect on the percipient; to call it successful is to make a statement about the percipient rather than about the work itself. This attitude may still be discerned in the downgrading of the aesthetic and affective in education. All too often the arts are seen to constitute what Best (1992) refers to as a ‘subjective/feeling/individual/creative/personal realm’, whereas cognitive and conceptual matters are regarded as the province of the sciences and mathematics. Indeed, on a particularly pessimistic note Best (1992) suggests, that ‘It is widely assumed that the arts are merely for entertainment or enjoyment, from which nothing of significance can be learned’. (Best. D., 1992, p.xii)

Plato seems to think of sensuous experience as belonging to an inferior part of the soul. Murphy (1951) suggests that his hostility to it seems not so much from an imperfect appreciation of its function in the apprehension of truth as from his failure to connect the aesthetic development of the senses, through art, with the apprehension of beauty. Plato’s criterion of beauty in art is not the work of art but the beauty of the subject represented. Indeed as Murphy (1951) acknowledges it is not all clear that Plato ever closely associated art with beauty or beauty with art. In Book X he does not apply the notion of beauty to a work of art although elsewhere he treats beauty as a relation of suitability between elements of a whole. Given that Plato did not connect art with beauty, it follows, that when he proposes to banish art from the Ideal State, he did not consider that he was also banishing beauty, which he strives to create in the institutions and life of the city.

In conclusion, as Keuls (1978) rightly argues, Platonic notions have been analysed, interpreted, misinterpreted and even transformed. However, if Republic X inspired a banal view of art as merely ‘imitation’ in later traditions, it also inspired the first attempt, in the Poetics, to define the common principle of the creative arts. However, as Gadamer (1975) points out, when Plato in his critique of the poets relegates the imitative arts to the very lowest level because, unlike real things, they are not even simply imitations of the essential forms but rather imitations of imitations, then he is obviously inverting the true nature of artistic representation. Gadamer argues that we

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should not infer from this that Plato did not really understand the nature of artistic representation but rather that this is an ironic distortion intended to emphasize the claim of philosophy as dialectic to knowledge of true essences. Whether or not this is the case Plato’s critique of the arts in the Republic has had a lasting influence which can be evidenced in the relegation of the arts to the realm of the non-academic or vocational within a liberal education. While a painter’s trompe l’oeil effects are of relatively trivial ethical concern; the poet’s ability to mislead the heart by bypassing the audience’s understanding and making a direct connection with the audience’s baser feelings, is to Plato, of enormous ethical moment since it threatens the role and effectiveness of a properly philosophical education aimed at an understanding of reality, the forms manifest in the appearances of life.

Plato’s treatment of the arts has contributed to the downgrading of the arts in education for the model of education presented in the Republic has inspired what has since come to be known as a liberal education which has incorporated much of his original educational theory. We may find evidence of the Platonic heritage in contemporary educational theory and practice in the liberal/vocational divide with its damaging and false denial of the inter-relatedness of theory and practice. It is not only the arts that have suffered as a result of this distinction or only the practically based subjects that have fallen on the vocational side of this divide, but, much more importantly, actual people have been similarly divided and defined and implicitly encouraged to think of themselves and each other in the same divisive terms. As Pring (1993) points out nearly 75 per cent of sixteen year olds will terminate their education at the first opportunity, having experienced little but failure in the attempts by the school to initiate them into Oakshott’s ‘conversation of mankind’ which epitomises the liberal education ideal. While in the Poetics, Aristotle, who was Plato’s pupil, challenges Plato’s view of the arts his treatise has had little impact on educational theorising until, it would seem, very recently, in the sway of a renewed liberal/vocational debate where, as Pring (1993) notes, the problems of compromise have resulted in the determination to create different routes — the traditional educational one for some and the vocational one for many and the need has arisen to re-assess the idea of liberal education in the light of the vocational challenge. Aristotle’s treatise effectively dissolves the artificial distinction drawn by Plato between theory and practice. In the Poetics he establishes a connection between the specific kind of making and producing which is poetry or artistic production and other forms of making and producing which are manual. In his discussion of the nature of artistic production Aristotle makes it clear that the artist is involved in making rational decisions and that making involves the practical intellect. In
stressing fictionality, that is, in showing that mimetic or representational works are concerned with different areas or levels of possible reality and as such are to be distinguished from discourse which makes direct claims about reality, Aristotle is reacting against Plato’s assumption that the poet is a truth-teller who tells lies, and hence is to be condemned and banished from the ideal republic. Through the concepts of artistic unity and universal categories Aristotle puts forward a theory of the arts which not only acknowledges the practical application of the intellect but locates the arts within the social formation for he shows that the artist is not simply concerned with the imitation of reality but with making sense of it by providing coherent structures through which we may attain understanding of the world.

1.2 Aristotle’s Poetics

In the previous section we have seen how Plato has condemned the mimetic or representative arts as a species of falsehood or lies. Imitation is seen as intellectually shallow and painters and poets are charged with not taking the trouble of finding out the true nature of things. In the Poetics Aristotle develops the theme, inherent in the Republic, that the arts belong structurally together but departs from Plato in that while mimetic works are distinguished from discourse, which make direct claims about reality, Aristotle suggests that they may reflect different levels of possible reality. What we now call Aristotle’s Poetics is part of a work which was compiled between 360 and 320 B.C., for use, either as lecture notes or in some other way, in the education of young philosophers. The treatise is fragmentary as it originally consisted of two books, one dealing with Tragedy and Epic, the other with Comedy and perhaps Iambic Satire, a poetic genre associated with scurrilous personal humour. Only the first book has survived in an unrevised and unfinished form which is, as Murray (1920) points out in the preface to Bywater’s translation, suggestive of the manuscript of an experienced lecturer, full of jottings, with occasional phrases carefully written out but not designed to be read as a finished work. According to Halliwell (1987) Aristotle turned his philosophical attention to poetry, which it should be noted can be read by the modern reader as the aesthetic, because he saw ways of justifying this traditional element of Greek culture against Plato who had been his teacher. Although the Poetics is essentially devoted to poetry, the first chapter indicates that Aristotle possessed at least the outlines of a general theory of the mimetic arts in which music, painting, sculpture, dancing, poetry and certain vocal arts, probably acting are included. As Abbs (1992) points out these have remained, with the addition of film, the art forms central to Western culture, often referred to as the fine arts. In proposing that the arts belong
structurally together, that they can be described in general terms as 'imitations or representations of life' and that they can be differentiated according to various criteria of production and representation, it can be argued that the Poetics constitutes the first structuralist account of the arts.

However, as we have seen, this idea appears to be implicit in the Republic. Halliwell (1987) suggests that the opening of the Poetics indicates both a link with, and a distancing from, Plato. Aristotle employs the concept of 'artistry' or 'technē' which had greatly interested Plato. Halliwell (1987) defines a technē as a productive skill or activity, which matches rational and knowledgeable means to the achievement of predetermined ends. While the concept of technē had been applied to poetry within Greek culture for some time before Plato, he had found poetry incapable of satisfying the criteria of knowledge attached to technē. Aristotle departs from Plato in that he accepts poetry as a rational art. Essentially Aristotle is not prepared to follow Plato in condemning mimesis as a species of falsehood or lies. Instead he suggests that poetry if not describable in terms of truth, contributes to our understanding of human realities. Halliwell (1987) argues that while Aristotle views the content of mimetic works as inherently fictive, in that they are to be distinguished from discourse which makes direct claims about reality, mimesis could in Aristotle's view reflect different levels or areas of possible reality. This view is consistent with modern theories of both art and knowledge which reject a narrowly conceived notion of knowledge, preferring a wider reference, comprising meaning in other realms than the strictly discursive, including the aesthetic.

Other important concepts discussed in the Poetics and linked with mimesis are those of katharsis and unity. Katharsis in its literal sense means purification or purgation. It is primarily connected with tragedy, and refers to a powerful emotional experience of pity or fear induced by the mimetic or representational features of drama. However katharsis is not pure emotional release in the therapeutic sense—rather it opens up new possibilities for understanding on a higher level. As Halliwell (1987) notes, for Aristotle, katharsis invokes 'a sympathy which is not purely spontaneous or unreflective, but one which engages us imaginatively in understanding the causal nexus of the tragedy'. (Halliwell. S., 1987, p.125) The idea of release is seen as conducive to the functioning of these natural and universal feelings which facilitate and inform our response to events in the world. Mimesis and katharsis are connected in that it is the mimetic qualities of a well-made play which allow the identifications and elicit the emotions of the katharsis.
Unity is a more complex concept for in expounding his criteria of unity in relation to poetry Aristotle locates his thinking about art within a wider philosophical system. Briefly, unity in drama refers to the dramatic logic and coherence of time, place and action. Unity is tied to the requirements of mimesis and the appreciation of unity is part of a work's mimetic or representational content.

"The sense of what will make an appropriate beginning, middle and end of a tragedy cannot be separated from the understanding of what is entailed in the causation and motivation of the dramatic action itself".


This sequence or organization of parts is required in order that we can hold together and understand the chain of dramatised events. Halliwell (1987) suggests that Aristotle's concept of unity is an exemplification of his teleological approach to phenomena and his deep interest in logic. In Chapter 8 of the Poetics Aristotle makes it clear that artistic unity is something which the artist must incorporate in his work and not something which he may find ready-made in the world. In Chapter 9 Aristotle proceeds from his analysis of unity to consider universals. This chapter contains an important doctrine of poetic universality, which addresses itself to basic questions about the status of artistic works and our cognitive experience of them.

In summary Aristotle contrasts artistic unity with the disrupted and disconnected series of experiences which constitute an individual's life. In Chapter 9 a parallel distinction is drawn between history, as a series of contingent and often incoherent facts, and the structures of universals which poetry is able to dramatise. Because life and history do not, in Aristotle's view, regularly provide us with coherent structures the poet must find his material in possible or probable actions or events. Universals are general categories or concepts used to understand and describe the world through which, according to Aristotle, we may begin to attain true knowledge and understanding having moved beyond discrete particulars. Aristotle attributes poetic art with this sense of universality through the basic criteria of artistic unity, that is, probability and necessity. These criteria indicate the standards applied to the internal coherence of a poem. Probability is described in terms of things that happen or hold for the most part while necessity is that which will always happen. According to Aristotle we make sense of poetic fiction by interpreting it in the light of the general and universal concepts derived from our experience and understanding of life. Therefore in contemplating a work of art we draw upon our experience of the world which facilitates our
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understanding of the work of art which adheres to the criteria of artistic unity and which consequently possesses coherence and therefore significance. As Halliwell (1987) points out the Poetics contends that it is only when we cease to regard mimesis as imitation or reproduction of reality that we can appreciate its significance as an embodiment of factors relevant to our experience of the world. Above all Poetics constitutes a serious response to Plato and his view of poetry as false and immoral for in recognizing that art is concerned with significance Aristotle acknowledges a relationship between art and philosophy.

"History only relates how things actually happened whereas poetry tells us how things may happen and teaches us to recognize the universal in all human action and suffering. Since the universal is obviously the topic of philosophy, art is more philosophical than history precisely because it too intends the universal."


Of particular significance in educational terms is Aristotle’s suggestion that the arts can contribute to our understanding of human realities. His notion of artistic unity constitutes a recognition of the cognitive and rational thinking involved in artistic production and practical making. Aristotle makes it clear that artistic unity is not something the artist may find ready-made in the world but something the artist must incorporate and must therefore make or produce. Furthermore if art is concerned with significance and with the universal it must also be concerned with meaning and with the nature of reality and our human experience of it. In arguing that mimetic or representational works reflect different levels or areas of possible reality may be differently construed, differently interpreted and differently represented which is a notion that is in keeping with modern theories of aesthetic reception and interpretation.

On the subject of the supposed divide between theory and practice Aristotle’s insights are particularly pertinent and are reiterated by Pring (1993) in the following assertion:

"The logical connection between thinking and doing and between theory and practice are too often neglected in education, to the detriment of the intelligent practice essential to moral and working life".

Pring. R., 1993. p.72

This divide has persisted in educational practice and has been severely detrimental to the arts. In the present climate where, as Pring (1993) notes, the problems of compromise have resulted in the determination to create different educational routes, one liberal or traditional and the other vocational, there is a real danger that this divide will become a gulf. It is therefore of paramount importance that the idea of a liberal education be re-
examined and re-assessed in the light of the vocational challenge for the division between theory and practice is a false one in epistemological, individual and social terms. As O’Hear (1981) points out, on the assumption that any adult person in a modern non-totalitarian society is not automatically going to fill some traditional or assigned social role, and that his or her manner of life, including political and religious beliefs, is not going to be simply laid down, the following abilities will be necessary:

1) The ability to support him or herself.
2) The ability to make informed choices about life, including career, religion, politics, life-style and general attitudes.
3) The ability to decide what is and what is not morally acceptable.

Corresponding to each of these abilities, O’Hear suggests that we will expect a person’s education to provide him or her with the necessary basis, that is;

1) Sufficient skills to obtain work.
2) A general education giving a reasonable understanding of the nature of man and the world.
3) An education in morality.

Any rigid division between a liberal and a vocational education wherein different pupils follow different routes fails to take into account the range of abilities that an individual will require in order to function in a modern open society. O’Hear (1981), reiterates Aristotle’s thesis, for in arguing that the study of the arts has a vital place on the curriculum as part of a general education, he states that this is because ‘they represent the way people have attempted to come to terms in imaginative ways with their lives and problems and come to express their sense of significance of life and its goals’. (O’Hear, A., 1981, p.53) The need to find meaning and significance and to make sense of the disrupted and disconnected series of experiences which constitute our lives is surely a fundamental human need. Just as any rigid divide between a liberal and a vocational education is a false one as it constitutes a denial of the inter-relatedness of theory and practice so is any attempt to place the arts on either side of this divide. The point is to dissolve this boundary which is fundamentally misrepresentative of the nature of human experience.
1.3 Art and Knowledge in 20th Century Philosophy of Education

In part 1.1 and 1.2 of chapter 1 some of the ideas about the relationship between art and knowledge as put forward by Plato and Aristotle have been examined. It has been argued that the distinction drawn by Plato between theory and practice, thinking and doing or making is a false one and a damaging one not only for the arts but on a social and individual level. Furthermore, it is argued that any rigid division between a liberal and vocational education fails to take into account the range of abilities that an individual will require in order to function in a modern society, assuming that it is a non-totalitarian society and permits freedom of choice. However, the views on education first stated by Plato in the Republic have been restated by many subsequent theorists and can be discerned in the downgrading of the practical application of the intellect and the acquisition of skills which are perceived purely in vocational terms. The upshot of this is that while some subjects have been defined as intellectual and highly valued for their potential in developing the mind, others, including the arts, have been devalued as simply practical and subsequently denied any educational merit. These manifestations of Plato’s theories have endured to the present day largely because the notion that education should concern itself with the development of the intellect, and that the emotions should be suppressed, fits well with Christian notions of upbringing. The liberal/vocational distinction as defined in the Republic persists in the works of the early Christian theorists such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, in the ideas of humanists, in the tradition of the British public and grammar schools and is currently the subject of much contemporary debate.

However, despite the increasing shift towards vocationalism within education with its valuing of techné the arts would appear to be more under threat than ever. In order to understand how this state of affairs has come about it is necessary to pursue several lines of enquiry in educational thinking, in philosophy and in visual theory. In this section we will concentrate on educational developments within the framework of a liberal education as primarily concerned with the pursuit of knowledge and focus on how the relationship between art and knowledge has been understood in the 20th century in the philosophy of education within the anglophone tradition. One of these developments has been the development of the thesis that human knowledge, meaning and understanding consists of a limited number of quite different kinds of kinds, a thesis which has interested philosophers from the time of Plato down to the present day.
In the 20th century this thesis has been developed ‘under the spell of a hard rationalism that is, a view appealing to reason as a source of knowledge, which, as Hirst (1993) points out, profoundly determined its substantive content and the major educational principles for which it argues. According to Hirst (1974), the domain of knowledge is ‘centrally the domain of true propositions or statements’. (Hirst. P., 1974, p.85)

From this standpoint Hirst proceeds to outline a theory of art as a form of knowledge on the basis that there are logically distinct types of true propositions that can be distinguished in many different ways and that these in turn can be reduced to a number of distinct and irreducible categories which constitute logically distinct forms of knowledge. Thus Hirst arrives at a propositional theory of art in which works of art are seen as statements, parallel to scientific or mathematical statements, stating truths that cannot be communicated in any other way. In Hirst’s formulation, as in Plato’s, the development of the rational mind is achieved by introduction to as many different forms of knowledge as exist. Therefore, the debate about whether or not the arts constitute a distinct form of knowledge is not just for the sake of the arts but for the sake of the development of the rational and properly balanced individual. In Plato’s educational system balance is central, as a balanced diet of experiences will lead to a balance and harmony within the soul. However, in Plato’s system this balanced diet of ‘music’ and ‘gymnastic’ does not extend beyond an elementary education and is a diet designed, through strict censorship of the arts, to inculcate a particular sort of unquestioning harmony for it is at this stage that the men of bronze, of silver and of gold are singled out to take up their respective roles or to prepare for those roles.

Hirst’s view of art as a form of propositional knowledge is contrasted with other views on the relationship between art and knowledge, within the context of British and American philosophy of education, which adopt an extended view of knowledge which is not strictly propositional. Phenix (1964) and Reid (1984) take into account the notion of meaning and significance and draw upon Aristotle’s distinction between the theoretical or speculative intellect and the practical intellect of technē in support of the assertion that art is indeed knowledge if knowledge is defined in wider terms. The hard rationalism that Hirst adopts, his stress on the need for objectivity of judgement and his emphasis of the propositional or statement making nature of knowledge and of truth reflects a very narrow concept of knowledge. As Hirst (1993) was later to note, ‘the great mistake of the ‘rationalist’ approach was that it saw theoretical knowledge as the only type of knowledge that is properly significant in determining both the ends and means of rational practice and thus of the good life’. (Hirst. p., 1993, p.193)
Realms of Meaning and Forms of Knowledge

“In the 1960s and 1970s British philosophy of education was born, or re-born, under the spell of the analytical techniques then dominating British philosophy in general. But it was born, too, under the spell of a hard rationalism that profoundly determined its substantive content and the major educational principles for which it argues”.  
Hirst. P., 1993, p.184

This philosophical position was expressed in educational terms as a concern for a particular view of the rational, autonomous life which provided a clear framework for the formation of educational aims. Planning for educational practice was conceived as a matter for the rational determination of the ends to be pursued, the subsequent determination of the best means possible and finally the implementation of the conclusions reached. As Hirst notes the aims were first and foremost those of developing knowledge and understanding and the further pursuit of those as being both intrinsically worthwhile and vital to the ordering of developments in all other aspects of personal and social living. To this end forms of knowledge and understanding were logically mapped and the diversity of the cognitive objectives involved was explored for their logical interrelations. However, as Hirst (1993) points out, even while this ‘radically rationalist’ approach to education was being developed there were repeated signs of unease with it, in particular about the primacy over all else of reason.

In Realms of Meaning (1964) Phenix is concerned with types of meaning rather than knowledge and his six realms have been distinguished on criteria that pick out varieties of meaning rather than varieties of knowledge. Phenix (1964) suggests that what makes our experience distinctively human is our capacity to imbue experience with meaning and that human existence consists in a pattern of meanings. Phenix (1964) identifies six fundamental patterns of meaning which emerge from an analysis of the possible distinctive modes of human understanding. The six realms are symbolics, empirics, aesthetics, synnoetics, ethics and synoptics. These realms are seen as providing the foundations for all the meanings that enter into human experience in an archetypal sense. While it is acknowledged that we seldom experience meaning in a pure form and are more likely to experience it as a compound of elements from realms, these elements are seen to contain the essence of all meaning.

In using the term ‘meaning’ Phenix is referring not only to the processes of logical thinking but to the processes of inspiration and of conscience. In Phenix’s formulation ‘meaning’ has four dimensions. Firstly, that of inner experience or inner life to which
Phenix suggests that the unique human response is one in which the individual is aware of his responding in that any consequent action is conscious rather than mechanical. As such it can be said that thought is a mediating process intervening between stimulus and response. On the basis of this assertion Phenix suggests that reflective mediation is the core of meaning. He then goes on to argue that as a reflective experience, meaning presupposes a basic principle of duality, or of self-transcendance.

"In self-consciousness a person both is himself and yet, so to speak, stands outside himself. He is at one and the same time both subject and object, knower and known, agent and patient, observer and observed. This duality is what enables a person to know anything at all. One knows something if he is at one and the same time distinct from and identified with what he knows. All perception of relationships is based on this duality. A relationship is identity-in-difference two things are united in the one act of consciousness in order that their non-identity may also be recognised."

Phenix, P., 1964 p.22

Essentially Phenix is asserting that this dual quality of experience is the source of all that is characteristically human. In his schema it is the secret of man's unique adaptability, the basis from which we are able to make judgements of truth and falsity, of right and wrong and of beauty and ugliness. Secondly, there is a dimension of rule, logic and principle in which each type of meaning has its own rule that makes it one kind of meaning and not another. Social meanings have a different logic from artistic meanings just as moral meanings are based on a criterion different from meanings pertaining to language and so forth. Thirdly, Phenix refers to the dimension of selective elaboration. Arguing that, theoretically, there can be no limit to the varieties of meaning, he proposes an infinite field of possible formations of meaning, acknowledging that while not all of these meanings will prove to be important, a process of selection will occur. This selection will occur because, according to Phenix, the types of meaning that are significant, in that they pertain to 'actual human life', are the ones that endure, have an 'inherent power of growth' and consequently lead to elaboration and development within cultures. Phenix argues that rather than attempting a prior analysis in order to identify categories of potentially fertile meaning it is better to 'benefit from the long experience of mankind and to regard as most significant the forms of meaning that have actually demonstrated their fecundity'. (Phenix, P., 1964, p.23) These 'significant' meanings which may be identified by the fact that they have endured and been assimilated into both culture and tradition can be specifically identified by means of 'the classes of specialists who serve as guardians, refiners and critics of the cultural heritage' (Phenix, P., 1964, p.23) Phenix describes these groups of specialists as 'the authoritative interpreters of the human inheritance' consisting of

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scientists, scholars, savants, or 'wise men'. These elect individuals belong in turn to a semi-invisible community bound by a common responsibility for a particular kind of meaning which is characterized by a discipline or rule which expresses the particular logic of the meaning in question. Phenix is not specific about the nature of these communities but one can assume that academic bodies and associations meet his criteria. While it is on one level acceptable that this should be so, in the case of the arts it is a distinctively uncomfortable position for as we shall see in Chapter 3 the arts of the modernist period are defined time and time again in terms of what they reject and break away from. Furthermore, the notion of the 'the authoritative interpreters of the human inheritance', is implicitly Platonic in the sense that the Guardians of the Ideal State assumed a parallel position also informed by a superior education and seems to assume that 'meaning' that has been assimilated in the course of time through tradition is necessarily 'good' merely by the fact that it has endured the test of time.

Finally, as Wolff (1981) observes, in the twentieth century, government patronage of the arts has grown, operating in the United Kingdom through the Arts Council and the Regional Arts Association, working in conjunction with local authorities, through grants to artists and writers and funding for projects. Wolff (1981) argues that funding bodies are no more neutral than any other social organization, and that the success of some artists at gaining sponsorship and the failure of others is likely to be related to the type of work they do. In Britain, for a variety of reasons, there is some evidence to suggest that the allocation of funding is informed by aesthetic conformity rather than political content (Brighton, 1974;1977). However, as Wolff (1981) notes 'art which is successful in reaching a public by being 'bought' achieves this through various social structures and processes, and not simply because it is, in some sense, just 'good' art'. (Wolff. J., 1981, p.45) This of course raises the question as to who, if not the public, or bodies representative of the public, should, or is qualified to, determine what is 'good' art. Gablik (1984) notes that there is nothing about an object—no special function or property—that makes something a work of art, except our attitude toward it, and our willingness to accept it as art. However, there is evidence to suggest that what is deemed 'good' art is in fact decided by the 'authoritative interpreters' of the art establishment.

The fourth dimension of meaning that Phenix (1964) postulates is expression in which meaning is made communicable through symbols which are seen as objects which stand for meaning. The possibility of symbolization is dependent on the same principle as reflective mediation, that is the basic principle of duality or self-transcendence, for it
is the dual quality of reflective awareness that is required to understand a symbol. Phenix (1964) refers to the essence of a symbol as being both identified with its referent and distinguished from it.

In Phenix’s formulation all four dimensions of meaning pertain to the idea of meaning and help to explicate it. As the classification of meanings in education is ultimately to facilitate learning Phenix suggests that the different disciplines be organised in terms of general similarity of logical structure in order that certain basic ways of knowing can be described. He proposes that a logical analysis of the disciplines suggests that they may be divided into nine generic classes. Briefly, he arrives at this conclusion in the following manner. Every cognitive meaning has two logical aspects, those of quantity and quality. Quantity refers to the sense in which knowledge consists in a relation of the knower to some range of things known while quality refers to the fact that each such relation is of some kind. Both categories are then sub-divided into degrees of quantity, that is, knowledge is either of one thing, or a selected plurality or a totality, and distinct qualities of meaning refer to what actually exists, to imagined possibilities and to what ought to be. By pairing the various aspects of quantity and quality Phenix characterizes nine basic or generic classes of meaning which are then reduced to six realms of meaning as summarised below.

Table 1 Logical classification of meanings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic classes</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Realms of meaning</th>
<th>Disciplines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Form</td>
<td>Symbolics</td>
<td>Ordinary language, mathematics, nondiscursive symbolic forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Empirics</td>
<td>Physical sciences, life sciences, psychology, social sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>Form</td>
<td>Esthetics</td>
<td>Music, visual arts, arts of movement, literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Synnoetics</td>
<td>Philosophy, psychology, literature, religion, in their existential aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>Norm</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>The varied special areas of moral and ethical concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Norm</td>
<td></td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Synnoptics</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>Norm</td>
<td></td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>Form</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phenix, P., 1964
Forms of Knowledge

Hirst (1974) accepts Phenix’s thesis that meaning has a number of dimensions and that the classification of meanings rests on the classification of knowledge which is accomplished by classifying the objects of knowledge or what is known. However, he is critical of the ‘lack of clarity’ about what Phenix is classifying in classifying the ‘objects’ of knowledge. Hirst (1974) draws our attention to the fact that in a philosophical context the phrase ‘objects of knowledge’ is in general not taken to cover the objects about which, or of which, we have knowledge, but refers instead to the logical objects of knowledge when that state of mind is being distinguished from others. In this sense Hirst (1974) suggests that we may speak of logical objects in three senses. Firstly, there is knowledge with the ‘direct object’ that is people, places and things. Secondly, there is ‘knowledge that’ or propositional knowledge where what we know is expressed in a true statement or proposition. Thirdly, we know how or when to do certain things and this procedural knowledge, which enables us to actually do things, is usually referred to as ‘knowledge how’.

Hirst (1974) takes issue with Phenix regarding his interpretation of ‘knowledge of the direct object’. Hirst’s basic argument here is that much of the ‘knowledge of the direct object’ is in fact ‘knowledge that’ about the persons or objects concerned. However, according to Hirst, to this is usually added a claim that to have direct experience of the person or object, in terms of a form of experience, involves existential knowledge and that this is not expressible in statements or propositions. Hirst considers Phenix to be mistaken in considering ‘knowledge of the direct object’ to be a distinct type of knowledge because of these existential aspects arguing that, if one seeks to define knowledge, it is important not to confuse knowledge with other states, particularly states of perception, awareness and feeling. Hirst suggests that in general knowing is not an occurrent, conscious experience or state of awareness at all.

“Coming to know may be an experience, but the knowledge achieved at that moment is not to be confused with the concomitant awareness. What one knows in the existential form of ‘knowledge with the direct object’ is thus characterisable as ‘knowledge that’ concerning the object on which supervenes an occurrent state of awareness which is of a quite different character”.

Hirst. P. H., 1974, p.58

Essentially, Hirst thinks Phenix is mistaken in thinking that knowledge can be taken as a category wide enough to cover existential awareness and other intelligible states. In his view the thesis that the categories of meaning are fundamentally distinguishable as
categories of knowledge is only true if it is ‘knowledge that’ which is being considered. Having established that the task of distinguishing types of knowledge is a question of distinguishing different types of the objects of knowledge, Hirst argues that it is then a matter of looking for different types of true statements or propositions for it is in these that the objects of ‘knowledge that’ are expressed. In a paper entitled ‘Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge’, first published in 1965, Hirst outlined a concept of liberal education concerned with the development of the pupil’s knowledge and understanding, the diversity of its content being determined by the diversity of the forms that human knowledge and understanding were thought to take. An essential part of Hirst’s thesis was the suggestion that within the domain of knowledge a number of forms can be distinguished which are different in their logical character.

"On logical grounds it would seem that a consistent concept of liberal education must be worked out fully in terms of the forms of knowledge. By these is meant, of course, not collections of information, but the complex ways of understanding experience which man has achieved, which are publicly specifiable and which are gained through learning."

Hirst, P., 1965, p.96

None of these logically distinct forms of knowledge are, in Hirst’s formulation, ultimately reducible in character to any of the others, either simply or in combination. Hirst’s domain of knowledge is ‘centrally the domain of true propositions or statements’, and the question of their being logically distinct forms of knowledge to be the question of their being logically distinct types of true propositions or statements. He acknowledges that types of propositions can be distinguished in many different ways and that this raises the question as to which of these, if any, shows the domain of knowledge to consist of a number of fundamentally distinct and irreducible categories. Hirst suggests that we shall get at the logically fundamental characteristics of true propositions only by looking at those features which are necessary to all propositions in order to ask whether or not within them there exist mutually irreducible categories. The three characteristics which are necessary to all propositions and in which the differences are to be found are the concepts which propositions employ, the logical structure propositions use, and the criteria for truth in terms of which they are assessed. On this basis Hirst (1965) suggests that there are seven logically distinct forms of knowledge. The suggestion that in literature, the fine arts and religion, we have distinct forms of knowledge, has provoked opposition. However, it is important to point out that in Hirst’s formulation, as in Plato’s, the development of the rational mind is achieved by introduction to as many different forms of knowledge as exist. Therefore, the debate about whether or not the arts constitute a distinct form of knowledge is not just for the sake of the arts but for the sake of the development of the rational and properly
balanced individual. For as previously noted, balance in Plato's educational system is central, as a balanced diet of experiences will lead to a balance and harmony within the soul.

Hirst (1974) proposes a propositional theory of art. His interest lies with those characteristics of works of art that distinguish them as works of art, with the artistic knowledge they express and can communicate, and not with the other elements of knowledge that may well enter into them. Although Hirst acknowledges that works of art may contain or express non-artistic knowledge he argues that they are also stating something that is distinctly and irreducibly artistic in character. In essence his thesis is that works of art are artistic statements, parallel to scientific or mathematical statements, stating truths that cannot be communicated in any other way. Hirst uses the term knowledge as in when we say that we know the 2+2=4 or that water boils at 100°C. He is not concerned with the experience of coming to know, or of knowing as a form of seeing, thinking or being acquainted with. While he admits that it seems to be the case that any individuals coming to know whatever is expressed in a work of art, necessitates his direct experience of the work, and 'coming to know' is often taken as the central element in any claim to artistic knowledge, Hirst does not pursue these existential elements.

Hirst (1974) suggests that the propositional theory of art in which he is interested has been associated with false views about the way in which symbols in everyday discourse have meaning and statements can be judged to be true or false. In assuming this position Hirst rejects Saussure's analysis of symbols which is representative of an approach to the study of the products of cultural endeavour and linguistics which may be defined as structuralist. He argues that the central point of this view is that symbols name or refer to things outside us or to states of mind. Symbols are seen as the communication means for what we see, are aware of, or know already. They are also seen as logically independent of the knowledge they are used to express. Hirst argues that if one holds such a view, then two quite different views of works of art are possible. Either one views works of art as linguistic symbols that name or refer to properties of the external world or to states of mind, or one takes the view that works of art are not symbols of a language at all. Hirst points out that if one accepts the former viewpoint then works of art might either be considered the language of emotional states of mind or to refer to properties or qualities in the external world. This approach assumes that works of art are about something that exists quite independently of the works of art themselves. Hirst suggests that it is not at all clear that they are about
something that exists beyond themselves and that one may encounter immense difficulties in attempting to identify in which sense this might be so. If one accepts the latter view, that is, that works of art are not symbols of a language at all, then, according to Hirst, this concludes that works of art are not really symbols and do not really have meaning.

To view works of art in this way is to regard them as expressions of feelings or emotions and not as statements about anything. Indeed not even as statements about feelings or emotions. Although they may have emotive meaning this can, in Hirst’s view, only be in a very extended sense of meaning for they operate casually in that expressions are caused by emotions or feelings and are effective in communication in that they stir emotion in the peripient or receiver. Basically, Hirst finds both accounts unsatisfactory on the basis that the original theory, that the symbols of language have meaning by reference, is fundamentally flawed. If we reject this theory, then, according to Hirst, the character of works of art can be viewed very differently.

Hirst argues that what is wrong with the structuralist theory of the nature of linguistic symbols is the central notion of naming and reference and the implicit assumption that the connection between words and their meaning is purely contingent. Hirst argues that this is not the case and that meaning and intelligibility are necessarily tied to the employment of symbols in particular rule-governed ways. In his view neither does the meaning exist in the external world, nor the idea in the mind, without symbols or language. In this formulation meaning and understanding exist in the use of language and are expressed in the public use of symbols.

Hirst’s attempts to explicate his position by making reference to Wittgenstein’s discussion in Philosophical Investigations (1953) of the way language works. Wittgenstein invents small-scale languages for special spheres, such as house building, and asking how they might work and what they must be like. As Lacey (1990) points out Wittgenstein compares these small-scale languages to certain children’s games and calls them ‘language games’ which he then compares to the complexities of actual language, and uses them to emphasize the role of words in certain human practices like doing science or play-acting.

“We are able to engage in ‘language games’. Thereby meaning is a matter of a distinctive function that noises and marks can carry out in a given physical and social context. Only under particular conditions can there be noises that command or make statements. If this is so, then
works of art can, I suggest, be thought of as constituting a language
game or several language games”.
Hirst. P.H., 1974, p.157

In art, as in science or religion, the meaning is tied to the use of the symbols in the
context. Meaning exists only with the use to which the marks or noises are put and is
not conceivable independently of that. Therefore, from this point of view, in which
meaning is necessarily contextual, art, like all other symbol systems, has meaning as an
essentially human creation, and its meaning is dependent on the contexts in which
works of art have point and significance.

In so far as works of art can be regarded as statements, Hirst acknowledges that if the
notion of a statement is tied to that of truth or falsity, then this must be applied to works
of art. Hirst argues that the very creation of a symbol system presupposes the idea of
truth and falsity to refer to the occasions when the symbols apply and when they do not
respectively, and that the arts use symbol systems; The question as to whether works of
art are statements is ultimately reduced to the question as to whether or not there are
objective judgements, of a parallel kind to those found in mathematics, within works of
art. Here Hirst notes that it is only by virtue of the relationship that is created between
the symbols and, in Wittgenstein’s phrase, ‘the form of life’ that the context presents,
that there can be that objectivity of judgement that we call truth’. (Hirst. P. H., 1974,
p.160) Thus Hirst (1974) arrives at the formulation that if works of art involve the use
of symbols in relation to their context, that is, in relation to man’s own nature and his
complex social and physical environment, so that objective judgements of them as
works of art are possible, there is no reason why we should not speak of art as a form
of knowledge. Therefore Hirst’s thesis that art is propositional would appear to rest on
the question of the objectivity of judgements of art. However, overall he equivocates
between two positions. In the weaker or lesser position he seems to be asserting that art
is a form of knowledge if we can make objective judgements about art, which we
obviously can in so far as we can make statements, such as, ‘this painting is square’. In
drawing upon the notion of a symbol system and by acknowledging that meaning is
tied to the use of the symbols in the context Hirst seems to adopt a stronger position,
that is, that there are statements in art. Ultimately, Hirst retreats to the weaker position.
This is an absolutely crucial point which is the focus of much of the debate within
contemporary theory. Hirst’s narrow definition ultimately forces him to take up the
weaker position. The stronger position, that there is knowledge in art, is taken up by
Bryson (1991) in his semiotic account of visual representation which is outlined in the
following chapter. The position that there is knowledge in art as a complex symbol
system which relates to our experience of the world and that in art, like science or
religion, meaning is necessarily contextual, is to appreciate that there is knowledge in art of a much wider, deeper, significant kind than is possible if we accept a propositional definition. This argument has been developed within visual theory where it has been asserted that this complex symbol system is co-extensive with other symbol systems and seeks to locate the arts within the same circulation of signs which permeate the rest of the social structure.

In conclusion, he asserts that what is clear, is that if we do have artistic knowledge in this propositional, statement or know-that sense, then this has significance in relation to the role of the arts within the curriculum, and the way they should be taught although he does not say in what respect. O’Hear (1988) argues that against all this we can urge that the possibility of a symbol system being used to make true or false statements depends not on the ability of people to agree about its correct use, in terms, say, of the formal relationships existing between elements of formulae constructed out of the symbols, but rather on whether elements in the symbol system are used to refer to things outside themselves in such a way that the system can be used to say things about these extra-symbolic objects. O’Hear (1988) is of the opinion that Hirst’s idea that the arts use statement making symbolism is applicable only is so far as certain arts such as ballet or music utilize notational systems which refer to the elements of the heard or seen work. O’Hear contends that while there is certainly a sense in which statements made in these systems can be judged in terms of truth or falsity, these notational systems are not the work, they merely record living in static form on paper. Furthermore, O’Hear argues that ‘there is no question of a symphony or a ballet actually referring to and making statements about real events unless the composer or choreographer tells us through words what these statements are’. (O’Hear. A., 1988, p.97)

“If Hirst want to show that the arts are languages, what he has to do in each case is to specify the elements of the language which are used to refer, show what they refer to and further, show how statements can be constructed out of the language to say things about what is being referred to. In the absence of any of this we have to conclude that the mere fact that there is often agreement between people on artistic matters shows only that the arts are public forms of experience, rather than of knowledge, and that it is misleading to think of them in terms of statement-making languages”.

O’Hear. A., 1988, p.98

Essentially, O’Hear is opposed to any substantive educational decisions being made on essentialist grounds, that is, by analysing the meaning of words like ‘mind’ or ‘rationality’. In his view these decisions can only be made in the light of our general
aims and objectives in education. O’Hear argues for the inclusion of the arts in the curriculum on quite different grounds. Educational decisions should, according to O’Hear (1981), be made in the light of overall conceptions of human nature and society. We need an education that can help us to make sense of the significances people have given to their lives, and which marks out the differences between studying nature and studying human life. We need to be able to provide for the material conditions of life in as sane and practical a way as possible, but we also need to foster some sense of meaning for our lives. For O’Hear a study of literature and the arts has a vital place on the curriculum because they represent the way people have attempted to come to terms in imaginative ways with their lives and problems and to express their sense of significance of life and its goals. O’Hear argues for all the forms Hirst has outlined in his forms of knowledge thesis but on different grounds, not because their is something distinctive or specific about their methods or approach to experience but because a knowledge of their actual subject matter is necessary to a well-informed and well-adjusted life.

In summation, Phenix (1964) postulates an aesthetic realm of meaning in which the object of knowledge is the singular particular form. If every aesthetic object is incomparable then to classify it is to engage in an activity which is empirical or philosophical rather than properly aesthetic. Phenix regards the question as to whether aesthetic meanings can be properly called knowledge as being of little importance. In his opinion this rests simply on whether one prefers to limit the term ‘knowledge’ to the strictly discursive fields, for example mathematics and empirical science, or prefer a wider reference, comprising meaning in the other realms, including the aesthetic. Phenix draws upon Aristotle’s distinction between the theoretical or speculative intellect belonging to mathematics, science and philosophy and the practical intellect of technē belonging to art and morals. He suggests that the spheres of practical intellect may be further divided into the activity of making, which belongs to the arts and the activity of doing which belongs to morality. The understanding of art, therefore, is of making particular things and of particular things made. In other words, meaning in the arts refer to particular works, that is, individual things which have been brought into being as a consequence of work.

Both Hirst (1974) and Phenix (1964) refer to Bertrand Russell’s distinction between ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ and ‘knowledge by description’. Phenix argues that aesthetic meanings are gained by acquaintance and not by description, as in the case of empirical meanings. In his view significance cannot be embodied in separable symbolic
patterns, as in the sciences. Where scientific knowledge is about things in certain of their aspects, understanding in the arts is of particular things in their wholeness.

“Scientific knowledge is mediated by general symbolic forms. Aesthetic understanding is immediate, referring directly to the objects perceived. Empirical knowledge is mediated by general perception. The content of scientific knowledge is expressed in propositions, statements that may be called true, false or probable... aesthetic understanding is not contained in propositions, but in particular presented objects”.

Phenix. P. H., 1964, p.143

While Phenix observes that aesthetic objects may contain propositions, these propositions merely contribute to the content of the work of art, but their truth or falsity cannot be, in his view, the measure of the aesthetic meaning of the work. In emphasising that understanding in the arts is of particular things in their wholeness Phenix seems to echo Aristotle’s notion of artistic unity which is something the artist must incorporate in his work and not something he may find ready made in the world. If in the arts the object of knowledge is the singular particular form of each aesthetic object, given that aesthetic objects are made or brought into being as a consequence of work, we may say, that through the criteria of artistic unity which gives it coherence and therefore significance, we are able to make sense of works of art by interpreting them in the light of the general and universal concepts derived from our experience and understanding of life. Artistic unity is the prerequisite of the universal in art as Murray (1920) notes, it is characteristic of the classical view that Aristotle lays his greatest stress on the need for unity in the work of art, the need that each part should subserve the whole, while irrelevancies however brilliant in themselves should be cast away’. (Murray. G., 1920, p.19) It is, this idea of unity that Phenix is referring to when he speaks of understanding in the arts being of particular things in their wholeness.

Conversely, Hirst (1974) is interested only in ‘knowledge by description’ or ‘knowledge about’, although in his later work he repudiates this and notes that while he still considers the propositional elements in aesthetic understanding to be central to the proper characterization of this area, he now takes a different view as to how those elements are best construed. Hirst (1993) identifies his main error as ‘seeing theoretical knowledge as the logical foundation for the development of sound practical knowledge and rational personal development’. (Hirst. p., 1993, p.197) He now considers practical knowledge to be more fundamental than theoretical knowledge, the former being basic to any clear grasp of the proper significance of the latter.

“My argument now is not merely for the priority of practical knowledge in education, but rather for the priority of personal development by
Hirst (1993) acknowledges the influence of a number of contemporary philosophers in the development of this revision of his work and particularly those concerned with developing a 'more Aristotelian approach to our understanding of persons, practice, and the good life'.

In his earlier formulation Hirst (1974) is interested only in 'knowledge by description' or 'knowledge about'. Reid (1969) points out when Russell (1918) distinguished between 'knowledge by acquaintance' and 'knowledge by description' he was pointing out the difference between the acquaintance with simple colours and sounds, which he thought was a kind of a knowledge, and what we can say about them. Reid notes that Russell's critics admitted the distinction between knowledge and acquaintance but denied that 'acquaintance' is 'knowledge'. The criticism that if Russell was talking about simple sensations, how can we ever know these sensations in their purity without the influence of any other knowledge such as: this is a 'colour', it is 'red', it is on such and such a place on the spectrum etc; has been used to argue that experience of art is not knowledge. Reid, however, while acknowledging that it may well be a mistake to equate 'acquaintance with bare sensa' with 'knowledge' argues that it is a far greater mistake not to distinguish between acquaintance with sensa and the acquaintance we have of complex objects of art, and to assume that an argument against knowledge by acquaintance of sense data has any validity in the more complex case. Reid goes on to suggest that in the experience of art we have 'enriched acquaintance-knowledge' which pre-supposes a wealth of knowledge—that which in turn contributes to the discriminated content of acquaintance in perception.

"I know that it is symphony I am listening to, that it is the second slow movement, that the opening passage has been repeated in inversion etc., etc. I am not, of course, saying all these things all the time. Nor am I saying that enrichment is a function merely of propositional knowledge, or that acquaintance-knowledge of music is a sum of all that could be said truly. But without any knowledge-that—and in fact there is an indefinitely large accumulation of knowledge-that—it would certainly not be an acquaintance of any discernment or "richness"."

Reid. L.A., 1969, p.214

Reid (1969) contends that this 'enriched' acquaintance is a form of knowledge and distinguishes it from Russell's use by calling it 'acquaintance knowledge'. In doing so Reid (1969), like Phenix (1964) adopts a wider use of the term 'knowledge' than the
propositional arguing that the ‘enrichment’ of aesthetic apprehension of a work of art depends on a growth of knowledge of the work of art, which is distinct from the things that can be said about it. To this central concept is added ‘knowing how’ or procedural knowledge which Reid suggests has a close bearing on ‘acquaintance-knowledge’ in an extended sense. Like Phenix (1964) Reid draws upon Aristotle’s distinction between speculative or theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. However, while Phenix emphasises the activity of making in relation to the arts, Reid focuses instead upon the intuitive nature of practical judgement which Aristotle thinks of in aesthetic terms similar to his notion of artistic unity. He compares the aesthetic intuition of Aristotle’s morally wise man to ‘knowing-how’ in making or appreciating art, drawing an analogy between the artist ‘knowing’, where to place colours for example, and the intuition or perception, that coupled with reason, guides the practical judgement of the morally wise man in particular situations. This point is crucial in any discussion of knowledge in the arts for the judgements that an artist must make in creating a work of art are not made adequately by knowing truths about art and applying them. Knowing what to do in particular situations, in making particular things requires ‘aesthetic intuition’.

“The knowledge which the artist discovers through making is not properly known till the making has been completed. Of course he or she often has ideas or some tentative general plan. But the concrete final form of the work is not known, and cannot be known, beforehand. There is not even a simple telos to guide him, a craftsman may have a pattern to work to or a housebuilder a plan. If we are talking of creation...and in spite of the commonly cheap use of this word everywhere, art-making is truly creative — we have to realise that the telos is changing all the time whilst the artist is working in dialogue with the medium. There is evolution whilst he works; and it is not simply the unfolding of a plan, but creative evolution.

Reid L. A., 1984, p.18-19

Reid (1984) asserts, that the knowing, the cognitive apprehension, of art is essentially direct, intuitive, experiential, and not as such propositional. In his earlier writing Reid (1969) argues that we learn ‘truths’ about art by being involved in the art. This is true of both making and of appreciation and involves cognitive discrimination through feeling, what Aristotle refers to as the ‘aesthetic intuition’ which guides practical judgements, and which is not essentially propositional at all. While there is a detachment proper to aesthetic judgement and aesthetic objects may contain propositions which enrich our experience of works of art, the values of art cannot be known in the detachment of propositional thinking. In so far as we make statements about art such as ‘this painting belongs to this period or style’ we can say in a straightforward way that there are truths about art but this does not take us very far. Reid (1969) suggests that the word ‘truth’ is more naturally and appropriately applied
to propositions than to knowledge; and that the making of true propositions is only one part of knowledge.

"'Knowledge' is a wider, richer notion than the truth which belongs to propositions; conversely, the truth which belongs to propositions is a much more definite and constricted concept than the knowledge of which it is the manifestation and expression".

Reid L. A. 1969., p.218

Summary

In conclusion, it is only when we expand the parameters of a propositional view of knowledge, that is, that if one believes a proposition and the proposition is true, and one is justified in believing it true, then one has knowledge, that art can claim to be knowledge. The above debate is in the context of a particular and very narrow cognitive concept of knowledge which has its roots in the Enlightenment and has since been challenged by continental philosophy, by postlinguistic philosophy, by modernism, by post-modernist philosophy and by psychoanalysis, and seems to involve what Abbs (1987) has referred to as 'the extrapolation of categories', that is, the inappropriate imposition of the scientific paradigm onto the aesthetic realm. Hirst's propositional theory of art, as we have seen, rests on the question of the objectivity of judgements made about art but here we meet the problem of interpretation. Reid (1984) suggests that we must place each judgement alongside other judgements, building up through time a critical canon but never a final authority. Ultimately, Reid thinks that the objectivity of knowledge and understanding of art has to be personally judged.

"One can accept, on authority, that, to be compassionate is commonly reckoned a virtue, or that a Rembrandt self-portrait is said to be a great painting. But if one has never felt the goodness or compassion or the quality of Rembrandt's painting, one cannot know their intrinsic or inherent values. Knowing about bare facts involves only a small part of oneself, knowing the value of art is a holistic involvement".

Reid. L.A., 1984, p.20

However, if we remain working within this paradigm the view that the objectivity of knowledge and understanding has to be personally judged implies that artistic appreciation must be subjective because, supposedly unlike the sciences, there can be such wide and even irreconcilable differences of critical opinion about the same work of art. Best (1992) suggests that Reid, amongst others, makes the assumption that artistic value must be subjective because it is not possible to discover it by the methods of the physical sciences. Best (1992) goes on to accuse Reid of subjectivism, which is, in his view, on the other side of the same distorted coin as scientism. Indeed, as Best (1992)
argues, a principal source of the misconception that the arts are a matter of feeling, not of reason or knowledge, is the unquestioning acceptance of a rigidly narrow conception of knowledge which relegates the arts to what Best has referred to as ‘purely subjective or mysterious metaphysical realms. To base the case for the arts on subjectivist notions amounts to denying that any reason can be given for particular artistic understanding and experience, or for the value of the arts. It is precisely this issue which is taken up by later educational theorists such as Best (1992), Pateman (1991) and Abbs (1987, 1989, 1990), but which is also raised in the field of contemporary visual theory notably in the work of Bryson (1991) and Garvin (1980).

The question as to whether or not there is knowledge in the arts is a complex one. An exploration of Plato’s Republic and Aristotle’s Poetics has evidenced that the answer to this rests on how one defines knowledge and this continues to be the case within the 20th century debate. The Platonic theory of education is based on a particular and strong view of knowledge and of truth and places the supremacy of reason over all other human attributes. It is this view of education that has informed what is referred to as a liberal education which in its ‘pure form’ has been defined by Pring (1993) as ‘the initiation into forms of understanding’ or alternatively, by Kelly (1987) as a process concerned primarily with the development of man’s powers of reason. Vocational training and all practical activities were devalued in Plato’s theory and a distinction drawn between theory and practice which remains as part of the Platonic legacy within a present-day liberal education. It has been argued that this distinction is a false one and is misrepresentative of the nature of human experience. Furthermore, it is argued that in acknowledging the practical application of intellect Aristotle dissolves the rigid boundary imposed by Plato between theory and practice and illustrates that theory and practice are internally related. Despite this the Platonic view has dominated both the theory and the practice of a liberal education, while the Aristotelian view is found predominantly in the voice of dissent. In the current climate, where the emphasis on vocational training threatens to reinforce the artificial distinction between theory and practice which all too often lies at the base of the liberal/vocational divide in education, this voice must be raised. The consequences of such a division are damaging for any rigid division in education wherein different pupils follow either one narrowly defined route or another fails to take into account the range of abilities that an individual will require in order to function in a modern open society.

Within this range of required abilities is the fundamental need of all human beings to come to terms in imaginative ways with their lives and problems and to express their
sense of significance of life and its goals. The arts offer such possibilities for us to make sense of our experience of the world and therefore belongs in an educational system which is open to all pupils.
Chapter 1
Bibliography


Chapter 2

Art and Knowledge in Contemporary Visual Theory

Introduction

In the previous chapter we have examined the relationship between art and knowledge from a number of differing standpoints and within the broad framework of a liberal education. Particular attention has been drawn to the distinction drawn between theory and practice which has resulted in the downgrading of the arts in education along with other subjects thought of as essentially practical or vocational. Such a rigid distinction has been rejected and it is suggested that theory and practice are internally related. The propositional theory of art put forward by Hirst (1974) has been shown to be limited for while there may be propositions or statements made about art and aesthetic objects may contain propositions which enrich our experience of works of art, the making of propositions is only a part of knowledge and only one part of art. A wider definition of knowledge is required if we wish to argue that there is knowledge in the arts rather than a narrowly defined propositional knowledge, which renders art banal and takes no account of its complexities. An extended view of knowledge which takes into account technē, or the practical application of the intellect, which acknowledges that making is intelligent and involves theorising is required if we are to argue that there is a relationship of any significance. However, it is also important to stress that the arts are concerned with meaning and with making sense of reality and have an important social function in that they present us with different levels of possible reality allowing us to make sense of our lives by providing us with coherent structures and removing us from the present and the particular to the realm of the universal. As Trilling (1951) has pointed out ‘the illusions of art are made to serve the purpose of a closer and truer relation with reality’. (Trilling, L., 1951, p.78)

In this chapter the focus will shift from the relationship between art and knowledge as perceived from a primarily educational perspective to the field of contemporary visual theory where the debate about the relationship between art and knowledge has been conducted in quite different but parallel terms. As we have seen in the previous chapter the question of whether or not there is knowledge in arts rests on two counts, that is, our view of knowledge and our view of art. Plato excludes the arts from his curriculum because his view of art is not compatible with his view of knowledge. Hirst proposes a theory of art compatible with his theory of what constitutes knowledge and thus grants
A semiological account of art is important in the context of this discussion because it is an approach to communication based on the notion of a code model of communication which can be generalised to all forms of communication. If one wishes to locate the arts in the social formation as a form of communication co-extensive with all other forms of communication then semiotic theory appears to offer possibilities to do this. The desire to locate the arts within the social formation seems in part a reaction against the perceptualist account but it also constitutes a development within the social history of art as it seeks to locate art within the social structure on a basis which departs from a traditional Marxist account of base-superstructure. In educational terms this is important because, if, as previously stated, we make sense of reality of life and our experience of the world through art we need to understand how this occurs and how this sense is communicated. If semiotic systems such as language, operate primarily in the conversational mode; while other systems, such as aesthetic systems, operate in a conversational mode only sometimes, what then are the relations between the kind of structures and functions that aesthetic systems have to their affinity for the conversational mode. These are the sorts of questions which arise from semiotic enquiry and as yet remain unanswered or only partially answered and therefore seem to offer possibilities. The importance of locating art within the social formation is twofold, firstly if art is a symbol system co-extensive with all other symbol systems then, along similar lines to the forms of knowledge thesis, it must come into education in order that all the forms of communication are represented, if not, there will be an imbalance. Secondly, a semiotic account of art as developed by Bryson (1991) locates knowledge in art and does not tie it to the propositions or statements that can be made about art. This is the stronger position that Hirst (1974) seemed to struggle with before adopting his weaker propositional position. If this position can be sustained then the arts have a central role in education. Sperber and Wilson (1990) date the origins of the semiological account back to Augustine (354 - 430), who approached the study of grammar, logic, rhetoric and hermeneutics within the unifying framework of a theory of signs. More recently the term ‘semiology’ was used by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure (1857 - 1913) in his ‘Course in General Linguistics’, where, he says:

“A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology, from the Greek semileon ‘sign’.

Saussure, F. de, 1974, p.16

The term ‘semiotics’ was used by C.S. Peirce (1839 - 1914), the American philosopher responsible for the tripartite classification of signs into icon, index and symbol. This
term has been taken up in more recent times, in preference to ‘semiology’, by such theorists as Umberto Eco.

While a language is the central example of a system of signs, used by convention, Pateman (1991) points out that works of art, for example, a novel, a painting or a musical composition are not themselves like languages, but rather instances of the use of languages or language-like systems, that is, instances of parole. Saussure (1916) distinguished between a language (une langue) and speech (parole) for if a language is a system of signs, it is a system put to use on specific individual occasions as in speech or writing. Pateman (1991) notes that different methods of analysis and schemes of explanation are necessary for langue and parole. Works of art are instances of parole or speech but differ in that one generally expects to be able to construe the meaning of an utterance at least partly through recourse to a dictionary, which correlates signifiers and signifieds for a given language.

The notion of ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’ is the Saussurean distinction between the two sides of a sign. Thus, ‘cat’ in English is the signifier of what in French is signified by ‘chat’. The forms, that is, the signifiers are different; the signified is the same. However, in the case of visual representation it is difficult to see how this approach could apply as it is doubtful whether one could construct a ‘dictionary’ of visual images which would enable one to establish a one to one relationship between the form, or visual signifier and the signified, which Saussure equates with something mental, an image, an idea or concept — say, of a cat, that would be very meaningful.

Burks (1980) makes a similar point in his analysis of Peirce’s semiotics in relation to the verbal arts.

“Recently, structuralists have applied the methods of linguistics to the analysis of the verbal arts: literature, drama, poetry. Do not the differences between natural languages and art forms seriously limit the transfer of methods and results from linguistics to aesthetics? A poem, qua linguistic corpus, is very different from a poem, qua work of art. Must not the methods and results of linguistics be significantly modified before they will fit artistic activity?”

Burks. A.W., 1980, p.70

Therefore, as Garvin (1980) notes the question arises as to whether aesthetic objects are semiotic objects of a special kind, and if so, how do they differ from other semiotic objects. Garvin suggests that one of the obvious differences is that in aesthetic objects the aesthetic function is dominant. However, Garvin (1980) points out another possible
difference in that aesthetic objects differ from many other semiotic objects in that responses to them are not couched in the same system in which they themselves were conceived. Thus, a linguistic object such as an utterance is couched in a linguistic system—and the usual response to it will be another utterance, couched in the same linguistic system. An aesthetic object, on the other hand, will be couched in some aesthetic system, such as a particular literary or artistic tradition, but the response to it will not usually be another aesthetic object couched in the same system.

“A common audience response to a work of art or literature is a favourable (or unfavourable) comment which itself is not a work of art or literature (unless it is some form of literary criticism). The response to an artistic performance—which can be viewed as the concrete manifestation of a particular work of art or literature—will often be not only a favourable comment but also some other culturally patterned form of approval such as applause; neither of these, of course, is itself an aesthetic object (with the exception, again, of reviews with literary ambitions), nor are they couched in the same semiotic system as the original aesthetic object.”

Garvin P.L., 1980, p.107

However, as Garvin (1980) himself notes there are instances where the response to an aesthetic object is in fact itself an aesthetic object for example the many documented instances in folklore where the response to a particular aesthetic performance, such as that of a song, by one person is that of a similar performance by another person. Moreover, aesthetic objects are not the only semiotic objects to which the response is not usually couched in the same system, on the contrary, this is also the case with a great many semiotic objects belonging to relatively common and straightforward sign systems. An obvious example of this is traffic lights and road signs, to which the response is a practical act and not any form of semiotic behaviour at all.

Garvin concludes that one can then say that certain semiotic systems such as language, operate primarily in a conversational mode; while other systems such as many aesthetic systems, function in a conversational mode only under special circumstances. In Garvin’s opinion the really deep questions that arise from this have to do with, among others, ‘the relations of the kinds of structures and functions that these systems have to their affinity for the conversational mode, and to the question of what this, in turn, means with regard to the role of the different systems in the broader cultural setting.’ (Garvin. P.L., 1980, p.107)

It is this question that preoccupies Bryson (1991) in his paper ‘Semiology and Visual Representation’ in which he proposes that our ability to recognise images is an ability
which presupposes competence within social, that is, socially constructed, codes of recognition that are learnt by interaction with others in the acquisition of human culture. Bryson’s view that painting, as an art of the sign, is co-extensive with the flow of signs through both itself and the rest of the social formation has educational implications in that it seeks to locate visual representation, as a discursive art, within the same circulation of signs which permeate the rest of the social structure. To view works of art as instances of the use of language or language-like systems is not necessarily to regard language or works of art as message-carriers, supervenient to the thoughts, ideas, activities and experiences of individual people. On the contrary, as Best (1992) points out, language, and the other social practices of a culture, such as the arts, provide the standards of truth and falsity, they give the structure of a possible reality, as the expression of the form of life of a society.

In Best’s view it is language, and other cultural practices, which create human beings, and not the converse, and that language, like the arts, cannot be coherently regarded as independent of a whole way of life, and the natural actions and responses set in a cultural context.

“One’s possible ways of thinking and experiencing, and therefore one’s very being, are inextricably bound up with the language and practices of society. For example, the thought that it is five o’clock obviously depends on the existence of a society which has practices involving clocks and watches”.

Best, D., 1992, p.82

Best (1992) argues that the conception of life of an individual has to be formulated in linguistic and artistic media, and in that sense it is dependent on the cultural practices which constitute the possibilities of formulation. Therefore, in the arts, language and many other aspects of human life, the possibility of individual development in thought and experience actually depends upon the learning of the disciplines of objective, publicly shared cultural practices. Thus, if education is concerned with the development of the individual (that is, as opposed to a primary concern with the economic needs of society), then the arts have a central role to play. It is also important to note prior to examining approaches to visual representation in greater detail that semiotic theory, while useful in a general sense, in that it is able to demonstrate that art has cultural meaning, may not necessarily be a useful approach in actually understanding the construction and deconstruction of cultural meaning in the arts.

Having briefly examined and outlined some of the theories which underpin ‘alternative’ and ‘traditional’ approaches to visual representation we will now examine these
or conformity; just as it is to think that it sometimes calls for the one, sometimes the other. Education, argues Hudson, always calls for both. Hudson draws upon the distinction between indoctrination and education where the difference is usually located in one of three places, that is, in methods, content, or aim. In his view it is not possible to differentiate education from indoctrination in terms of aim any more than of content or method. Briefly, for Hudson, the essential difference lies in the matrix where the pupil experiences the intellectual tension between conformity and criticism which is the essence of rationality. In practical terms the element of conformity is the instruction provided by the teacher; the element of criticism are the problems set by the teacher which get progressively harder until a point is reached where the pupil needs more instruction before he can go on. Further instruction is then provided followed by further problems and so on. Radical criticism enters into this process by pointing out inadequacies and improvements and imparting an awareness of these critical processes to pupils. A further important way in which radical criticism can come into ordinary education has to do with how things are decided. Hudson refers to morals, politics and aesthetic appreciation as areas in which we all have to make first hand judgements.

"The aim of such consideration is not to arrive at a knowledge of what is true or false, but to make a rational choice".

Hudson. W. D., 1977, p.53

Before putting this position forward it is necessary to examine these two approaches in greater detail in order to ascertain if such a position, that is, drawing on both ‘traditional’ and ‘alternative’ approaches, is possible for if these positions are fundamentally opposed, as they are, the intellectual tension between conformity and criticism might simply degenerate into either/or and tension become choice.

2.1 The Perceptualist Account

As previously noted the perceptualist approach to visual representation can be said to be underpinned by a traditional view of knowledge in that it seeks to define an essence of art. Arnheim (1992) exemplifies this position in his call for the revival and further exploration of the basic principles on which, he argues all productive functioning is based.

"If one believes that art is indispensable as a psychological and, indeed, as a biological condition of human existence, it must be assumed to grow from the very roots of our being. These roots must be traceable. The interpreters devoted to this task must also be the heralds of the principles they are retrieving—an obligation of which they must be constantly aware. They must be convinced that those objective
principles exist, and even though their concern in any particular case may be quite specific, they must not be distracted by the many accidentals of convention, fashion and deviant motivation that camouflage the essential base. We cannot afford to avoid discussing what constitutes the true core of art by focusing instead on social determinants or esoteric theory. It is comparatively easy, although not irrelevant, to talk about the historical derivations of a style or the economics of a period. It is much harder to deal with the primary conditions that distinguish art as art”.

Arnheim. R., 1992, p.ix

This passage is interesting on several counts. Firstly, in an prior paper Arnheim (1992) asserts that art possesses certain characteristics not replaceable by other activities of the human mind arguing that its uniqueness consists in being able to interpret human experience by means of sensory perception. In other words, Arnheim is suggesting that, works of art speak to us by means of the senses with which we are endowed; vision, hearing and touch. This view echoes that put forward by Phenix (1964) who argues that aesthetic meanings are gained by acquaintance and not by description, as in the empirical sciences. Whereas empirical knowledge is mediated by general concepts, aesthetic understanding is, in Phenix’s view, attained in direct perception. Indeed, as Arnheim (1992) himself notes ‘I am convinced that the value and sense of art reveal themselves only when they are derived from the spontaneous significance of perceptual expression’. (Arnheim. R., 1992, p.177)

Secondly, as previously noted, this approach to the understanding of visual representation is designed to be independent of issues of historical variation and consequently artistic truth tends to be viewed as trans-historical, thus the criteria employed remain the same regardless of changes in style and manner of representation. This assumes that there are eternal truths to be found, what Arnheim refers to as ‘those objective principles’ on which he argues all productive functioning is based. In this assumption Arnheim seems to be proposing that a propositional theory of art is possible, that it is traceable, and that we must look to psychology and biology in order to ascertain its ‘essential base’. Indeed Arnheim (1992) writes of his own work in the psychology of art that ‘by its own intrinsic dynamics, my work moves from specific observations to ever more general propositions and hence into a precipit of thought whose present rules of the game may not suit mine’. (Arnheim. R., 1992, p.4) Arnheim points out that empirical investigations in the natural sciences as well as in the humanities rely on certain axioms without which they lose their meaning. Their principal axiom affirms that the target of any acceptable inquiry is a set of objective facts that the researcher undertakes to verify and explain. Arnheim notes that the indispensable assumption is that there exists a final truth about say, the universe or a
work of art. This is said to apply regardless of whether the researcher relies on
quantitative methods of measurement and proof or on qualitative analysis for in both
cases the researcher is faced with researching the objective facts.

Arnheim argues that the artist is no less obliged to do justice to the facts than is the
scientist, except that the artist’s own view of the subject is included in the conception to
be represented. In his view the arts, taken all together, offer infinitely many of the same
truths, complementing rather than contradicting one another. However, as Arnheim
concedes, what we cannot be sure of is whether our best description of a fact is correct
and whether it is in our power to achieve correctness. Despite this he remains
convinced that the artist, like the scientist, strives towards the best approximation to the
truth available to him.

“I have yet to see an art historian offering an interpretation of a work of
art without the conviction that what he is telling is objectively correct or
at least deserving to be so considered. Any painter, sculptor, or
instructor of architectural design criticizes the products of his students
with the certainty of a person who is applying valid criteria with
professional expertise.”

Arnheim. R., 1992, p.4

Arnheim’s central thesis is that art possesses certain characteristics not replaceable by
other activities of the human mind and that its uniqueness consists in being able to
interpret human experience by means of sensory perception. This involves a process
whereby the primary presence of the world is modified by selecting and organising,
which are cognitive activities directly related to recognising and understanding. In the
visual arts, Arnheim suggests, that the perceptual world is presented in its sensory
directness. The painter or sculptor is confined by the directness or immediacy of this
presence to the tangible qualities of shape, colour and movement. However, while the
visual arts present the perceptual world in its sensory directness, concepts are only
made available indirectly as ‘metaphorical derivates of sensations’. Similarly, Arnheim
suggests, that while language refers directly to concepts such as ‘love’ or ‘ambition’,
the images called up by words are indirect. Ultimately, Arnheim concludes that the
human mind constantly combines thought and mind and makes them compensate for
each other’s limitations.

Finally, Arnheim’s notion of the human mind combining thought and image is
reminiscent of Aristotle’s concept of the morally wise man. As previously noted Reid
(1984) compares the aesthetic intuition of Aristotle’s morally wise man to ‘knowing-
how’ in making or appreciating art drawing an analogy between the artist ‘knowing’,

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where to place colours for example, and the intuition or perception, that coupled with reason, guides the practical judgement of the morally wise man in particular situations. It is this notion of perception coupled with reason as expressed in Aristotle’s idea of practical knowledge that appears to have parallels with Arnheim’s account.

In Art and Illusion (1960) one of the most influential modern writers on art and aesthetics Ernst Gombrich outlined his approach to art in terms of a psychology of perception located within the wider framework of 20th century cognitive psychology. Basically, Gombrich (1960) views painting as the mimesis or representation of perception, modified by a schema. This approach, as Gombrich himself acknowledges, models itself on a certain understanding of observation in science. First, there is an initial problem, a trial solution is proposed, in the form of the hypothesis most appropriate to the problem and the one deemed most likely to lead to the problem’s solution. An experimental situation is devised in which the strengths and weaknesses of hypothesis can be submitted to falsification. The resulting situation reveals new problems the existence or importance of which were not apparent at the commencement of the process. The observation continues, constantly testing its hypothesis against the observed world, and re-testing its scheme of things against perceptual disclosure.

As Bryson (1991) observes Gombrich’s characterization of the production of works of art as ‘the gradual modification of the traditional schematic conventions of imagemaking under the pressure of novel demands’ suggests that the pattern for artistic production is the same as that for science.

“Giotto, for example, sets out to record the appearance of the human face. Tradition suggests a particular formula or schema for its transcription onto canvas; let us imagine that it is an early Giotto where the influence of Cimabue is strongly felt. Giotto tests the schema against observation of the face. Observation reveals that here and there the Cimabue schema is inadequate to the perceptual findings, and that the schema must be modified in accordance with the discrepant data. The modified schema in turn enters the repertoire of schemata and will in due course be subjected to similar tests and elaborations as its predecessor”.

Bryson. N., 1991, p.63

This conception of image making, with its key terms of schema, observation and testing, is referred to as the Perceptualist account, because the essential transaction involves the eye, and the accommodations the schema must make to new observations coming into the eye. The viewer’s experience is similarly defined and incorporates the same terminology. The viewer confronts the image and mobilizes a stock of perceptual memories which he brings to the new work for testing, whereupon the visual schemata
are in turn modified by the encounter and the viewer’s gaze. Wollheim (1991) calls into question any rigid reparation of the two roles of maker and viewer. He observes that the artist himself is the first spectator of the work. As the artist made the painting, for example, so he also viewed it from a viewpoint that anticipates the viewpoint of others who will later be the audience. Wollheim suggests that neither the artist nor the viewer exists in complete solitude for in imagining the work’s future audience, the artist moves away from his unique position, towards the vision of it that others will have. Likewise, in viewing the work, the spectator discovers or retrieves the experience that the artist had before the work as its first viewer, and incorporates it as part of viewing. This communion between artist and audience is, in Wollheim’s opinion, enabled by the fact that, as viewers, both audience and artist share the same perceptual powers, what Wollheim (1991) describes as the capacity for ‘seeing in’, that is, for seeing the marks on the surface and at the same time seeing those marks as representing something; the capacity for seeing the representation as expressing human emotions; and the capacity for finding visual delight in the representation.

Wollheim’s (1991) portrayal of the conditions of spectatorship, or what Gombrich (1960) has called ‘the beholder’s share’ stresses the universal perceptual powers that we share as human beings. However, as Bryson (1991) notes this view takes no account of the difference between one social group or another, nor differences between cultures and historical periods, differences of race and gender, differences between those who have power and wealth and those who do not. In his view the experience of such differences is as much a part of what it is to be a human being, as experience of those capacities which we, or some of us may share. This is of course an issue within education which is expressed in the debate about the subjectivity of experience which is in turn tied to where we place the parameters of knowledge.

2.2 Alternatives Approaches

Many of these objections to the perceptual account of visual representation, which aligns the discussion of art towards questions of perceptual psychology, are expressed in a semiological view of art, which sees the art work as part of a system of signs and representations in the social formation. According to this view the work of art is defined by its historical conditions of origin and reception. It refuses to ground representation in either perception or in the phenomenological experience of the world arguing that representation is always a matter of convention, not of essence. As such, it
is argued that the confrontation between the work of art and the spectator necessitates an act of interpretation and demands an acknowledgement of social difference.

Bryson (1991) puts forward a series of objections to traditional approaches to visual representation that are representative of the semiotic approach. As Bryson notes, traditional approaches tend to discuss visual representation as if it were constituted by historical constants, based either in human perception or in the universal conditions of human experience. As we have seen, this is a feature of all accounts of visual representation which seek to define an essence of art. Bryson (1991) argues that such accounts fail to come to terms with the issues of power which are necessarily historically and culturally defined.

"Perceptualism always renders art banal, since its view never lifts above ocular accuracy and always renders art trivial, since the making of images seems to go on, according to perceptualism, out of society, at the margins of social concerns, in some eddy away from the flow of power. But one need not think this way; if we consider painting as an art of the sign, which is to say an art of discourse, then painting is co-extensive with the flow of signs through both itself and the rest of the social formation. There is no marginalization; painting is bathed in the same circulation of signs which permeates or ventilates the rest of the social structure."

Bryson. N., 1991, p.60

Bryson points out that in the perceptualist account of visual representation the image is thought of as a channel, or as a stream of transmission, from a site dense in perception to another site avid for perception. Social and political power are seen to utilize this channel and its object of perceptual transmission, the image in various ways, positively in, for example, the case of patronage, where intervention may be construed as positive and supportive in that it economically enables a painter to carry out his work. Conversely, such intervention may be of a negative nature, appropriating the image to a particular ideology, of the patron, for example, the Church or the State. Ultimately, according to the perceptualist account, power is viewed as an external, as outside the inward perceptual activity of painting and viewing. Therefore, while power is thought to enable, support, maintain and finance the perceptual channel, it remains outwith that channel.

"Power is an external that moves in, and the forcefulness of power is measured by the degree to which it penetrates and overtakes the private transmission of percepts, where the essence of power manifests exactly in its exteriority."

Bryson. N., 1991, p.64
As Bryson (1991) himself acknowledges, this argument would appear to lend support to a social history of art, which seeks to show systematically the various ways in which the arts can adequately be understood only in a sociological perspective: Such an approach is in opposition to approaches such as perceptualism which see art as somehow ‘above’ historical determinants and the history of art as the intrinsic development of style, independent of social or historical factors outside the aesthetic field. (Wolff, J., 1981, p.49) Wolff, like Bryson, argues that works of art are not closed, self-contained and transcendent entities; however, Wolff goes on to argue that works of art are the product of specific historical practices on the part of identifiable social groups in given conditions, and therefore bear the imprint of the ideas, values and conditions of existence of those groups, and their representatives in particular artists. According to Wolff (1981) approaches which view art as ‘above’ or immune to these conditions and determinants are, in a particular sense, ideological. However, while Wolff’s view is representative of views of art which see it as ideologically constructed and necessarily socially structured a view denying this is not necessarily a rebuttal of it, rather a variant of it. Wolff’s claim that approaches to visual representation which do not take historical and social conditions into account are necessarily ideological is similar to claims that liberalism is not above or beyond ideology, that is an other ideology, albeit with characteristics different from all other ideologies, in that its adherence is not to particular substantive beliefs, but to certain procedural values. Wolff employs a theory of ideology which states that the ideas and beliefs people have are systematically related to their actual and material conditions of existence. However, Wolff argues that ideological forms are not only ideas, values and beliefs but the material embodiment of these factors in cultural institutions and artifacts. As culture is produced by people, or groups of people, in specific social and historical situations, we can say, that culture like beliefs or ideas, is affected by the actual and material conditions of existence.

"The cultural producer has his or her own location in the social structure, potentially generating its own ideological form; but at the same time, the society as a whole will be characterized by general ideological forms arising out of the general economic conditions and the mode of production of that society".


As previously noted Arnheim (1992) suggests that 'we cannot afford to avoid discussing what constitutes the true core of art by focusing instead on social determinants or esoteric theory'. (Arnheim, R., 1992, p.ix) Likewise, Abbs (1987) is critical of what he refers to as 'the overt and continuous politicization of the arts' which he regards as one of the fallacies of late modernism. Basically, Abbs (1987) argues that
sociological enquiry into the nature of visual representation leads not only to a misconception of the purposes of art but to the triumph of ideological criticism and the subordination of aesthetic value to historical meaning and relevance.

"The elevation of criticism brings about a further distance from the aesthetic realm, for the question becomes not one of prolonged aesthetic engagement but one of conceptual meaning and the task not one of creation or performance or appreciation but one of ideological placement or, more frequently, displacement".

Abbs. P., 1987, p.31

Using feminist criticism as his exemplar, Abb's (1987) central criticism of any ideological analysis of artistic work is that any dynamic engagement with the medium and form of the art work tends to get lost. Similarly, Arnheim (1992) seems to think that such consideration deflect us from our central concern which is, or ought to be, the search for the underlying 'objective principles' which constitute the true core of art. Wolff (1981) herself acknowledges that sociologists and Marxists have paid too little attention to the nature of particular genres and artistic forms. However, drawing on the work of the Russian Formalists, between 1915 and 1929, Wolff suggests that the ideology of a class or group is mediated by two sets of conditions at the aesthetic level. These are the 'conditions of production of works of art' and the 'existing aesthetic conventions'. Wolff contends that the 'conditions of production' make possible the construction of a particular work and set limits to this construction. Taking into consideration the conditions surrounding cultural production means, for example, recognising the extent of political censorship in a particular society or to take up Abb's (1987) exemplar of feminist criticism, understanding the gender divisions in society in order to understand women's apparent absence in the history of art. More specifically, artists are faced with particular conditions of work, affecting the work they produce and the manner in which they produce. As the 'conditions of production of works of art' extends to encompass the existing techniques of artistic production and include the technological and institutional conditions of production, it is difficult to see how Abb's (1987) objection that 'the dynamic engagement with the medium and form tends to get lost' in any ideological analysis, can be sustained. The medium and form of art works must surely be informed, at least in part, by the 'conditions of production' for these actual, material conditions mediate artistic production and expression and determine its particular form but not uncontaminated by culture. This debate constitutes a false and oversimplified dichotomy which mirrors the objectivism/relativism debate in epistemology and ethics and also in the social sciences. In these areas the terms of the debate have been under revision for some time, it is therefore interesting to note that in the arts an either/or situation seems to prevail. In epistemological terms Abb seems to
adopt a positivist stance in that he takes up objectivist approach in opposition to Wolff's more subjectivist approach which acknowledges that art is not produced in a vacuum devoid of external influence but in a society as a cultural product.

The second set of conditions through which ideology is mediated at the aesthetic level is, according to Wolff (1981) 'existing aesthetic conventions' or codes. Aesthetic codes are seen to operate as 'mediating influences between ideology and particular works of art by interposing themselves as sets of rules and conventions which shape cultural products and which must be used by artists and cultural producers'. (Wolff. J., 1981, p.65) The ideas and values of the artist, which are socially formed, are in visual representation mediated by cultural conventions of style, genre and aesthetic vocabulary. Indeed, as Eagleton (1977) notes, just as the artist works with the technical materials of artistic production, so he or she works with the available materials of aesthetic convention. Therefore, in reading cultural products, we need to understand their logic of construction and the particular aesthetic codes involved in their formation. Wolff argues that 'ideology is not expressed in its pure form in the work, the latter acting as a passive carrier', rather, the work of art itself re-works that ideology in aesthetic form, in accordance with the rules and conventions of contemporary artistic production. She suggests that in order to understand how a particular painting, for example, is subversive, it is necessary to look beyond its explicit, or implicit content, and to investigate its particular use of aesthetic conventions, and its position in relation to other works of art. Hadjinicolau (1978) makes this point when he raises the question of whether, since ideology consists of a relatively coherent entity of ideas, values and beliefs by which people express their relationship with the conditions in which they live, paintings constitute such coherent entities, or rather, whether they convey them. Hadjinicolau suggests that the notion of conveying may imply that the production of pictures is not in itself an ideological form, but that it acts as an unwitting carrier of ideologies. If this were so the production of pictures would be a vehicle for conveying ideologies in the sense that the form of the painting would harbour ideologies seen as content. However, as Hadjinicolau notes 'aesthetic value' is, in traditional approaches to visual representation, attributed to form and not to content. This is significant for if the form of a painting is the style in which it is executed or the manner in which the content is to be expressed, then it would seem to follow that if ideology is mediated at an aesthetic level using 'existing aesthetic conventions' then these conventions would be expressed in the form of the painting. Hadjinicolau (1978) resolves this by arguing that 'ideologies should not be sought in the 'content' of paintings but in their 'manner' (which implies the unity of form and content)'.

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(Hadjinicolaou, N., 1978, p.16) However, as Pateman (1991) notes the notion of unity of form and content can be complex, content and form can be experienced as antagonistic: the content may refuse to fit the form or the form alter the meaning of the content. One argument is that the artist’s real creative achievement occurs when he or she finds a way of relating form and content so that they cease to be antagonistic but reinforce each other or fuse, creating a whole which cannot be disassembled into parts. It would therefore seem to be through this process of relating form to content, of relating what is to be said, to the manner in which it is to be expressed, that the artist works or re-works ideology in aesthetic form. This account, like Bryson’s (1991) semiological account, challenges the notion of power as an external, as outside the perceptual channel of painting and viewing for the artist’s visual vocabulary and use of cultural conventions such as style and genre are the aesthetic manifestation of the artist’s ideas and values which, as previously noted, are socially formed. Indeed, just as works of art are not closed, self-contained, and transcendent entities, neither are artists.

Therefore, both the ‘conditions of production of works of art’ and the ‘existing aesthetic conventions’ operate as the mediators of ideology at the aesthetic level, that is, according to Wolff (1981), Hadjinicolaou (1978), Clark (1973), Eagleton (1990) as writers on the social history of art from a broadly Marxist perspective. Unlike the perceptualist account, where power is an external, these conditions which mediate power are conceived as operating at the level of production or creation and are therefore seen as part of the actual construction of a work of art. The notion of ‘existing aesthetic conventions’ or codes is taken up by Bryson (1991) who suggests that the ability to recognize an image:

“neither involves, nor makes necessary inference towards the isolated perceptual field of the images creator…it is, rather, an ability which presupposes competence within social, that is, socially constructed, codes of recognition”.

Bryson. N., 1991, p.65

In Bryson’s view there is a crucial difference between the term ‘recognition’ and the term ‘perception’ in that the former is social. Recognition, argues Bryson, does not unfold in the solitary recesses of the sensorium but through the activation of codes of recognition that are learnt by interaction with others in the acquisition of human culture. Bryson goes on to argue that if one accepts an account of painting as sign then one, by implication, relocates painting within the field of power from which it has been excluded in the perceptualist account of visual representation. According to a
semiological account ‘the transcendental comparison between the image and perceptual private worlds’ is replaced by socially generated codes of recognition. Similarly, the place of power, of social, political and economic power, which according to the perceptualist account is an external, on the outside of the perceptual activity, is relocated on the inside from the works inception. In place of the perceptual link or arc which is alleged to extend from the outer world of things into, what Bryson (1991) describes as ‘the recesses of inwardness and subjectivity’, what the artist perceives and viewer re-perceives, is the link which, according to a semiological account, extends from individual to individual as a consensual activity, in the form of recognition.

“The social formation isn’t something which supervenes or appropriates or utilizes the image so to speak after it has been made: rather painting, as an activity of the sign, unfolds within the social formation from the beginning. And from the inside—the social formation is inherently and imminently present in the image and not a fate or an external which clamps down on an image that might prefer to be left alone”.

Bryson, N., 1991, p.66

However, while Bryson’s position on the location of power within visual representation would appear to support the position which says art is to be approached in terms of social history, he departs from this approach. He takes issue with the supposition that in the claim for the imminently social character of the sign, a social history of art is being necessarily advocated. Bryson (1991) suggests that to approach art in terms of a theory of social history, which suggests that art belongs to the superstructure of society and that the superstructure cannot be understood without analysis of the social and in particular the economic, base, is to adopt an approach no better placed then perceptualism to follow through the implications of what it means when we begin to think of paintings as signs. Bryson (1991) takes issue with the Marxist base-superstructure model of society which underpins much of the theory in what is known as the social history of art.

In Marxist theory the base-structure is seen as the economic apparatus of society, and assuming the unified action of forces of production and relations of production, then art, alongside legal and political institutions and their ideological formations, is assigned to the superstructure. According to this account, if we want to understand painting, then we must first look to the base, to the questions of who owns the means of production and distribution of wealth, to what constitutes the dominant class, to the ideology this class uses to justify its power; and then to the arts, and to painting, as aspects of that legitimation and that monopoly. Thus, social history, in the Marxist view, is the expression in the superstructure of real, determinant events occurring in the
economic base; legal institutions, political institutions, ideological formations, and among these the arts—and painting—are said to be secondary manifestations of base action. Bryson (1991) notes that in the extreme statements of base-superstructure thinking, signs are no more than the impress of base on superstructure. The sign is seen to follow the base without deviation, which as Bryson points out, is also to say that the base determines discourse for as previously noted if we accept the semiological account of painting as an art of the sign this means that we accept it as an art of discourse. This discourse, in base-superstructure thinking, takes its patterns from power and repeats them in ideology. Therefore as Bryson notes ‘signs and discourse, are assumed to accept the impact of the material base as wax accepts the impress of a seal’. (Bryson. N., 1991, p.66)

This base-superstructure model proposes a material base that of itself engenders the sign. Yet difficulties arise as to how signs emerge from this material base. Bryson (1991) contends that the economic or material base never has produced meanings in this uncanny sense and that the world does not bear upon its surface signs which are then simply read there. He therefore takes the view that while the Marxist base-superstructure model may seem to lead to a social history of art, and concede the social character of the sign, the ‘iron-clad’ pronouncement that the sign belongs to the superstructure omits its social history. Bryson argues that although the sign is said to arise from matter, as ‘its negative relief, or stencilled echo’, the sign’s own materiality, its status as material practice, is ‘sublimed or vaporized just as drastically as in the perceptualist account’.

"The global body of signs—discourse—is said to be part of the cloud of ideas and ideologies hovering over and obscuring the real material base, as though discourse were the transcendental accompaniment, floating and hazy, to the real material world".

Bryson. N., 1991, p.66

His principal objection to the Marxist base-structure or economist position is that it is forced to deny that the sign, the discourse, is also material and entails material work and elaboration. Therefore, although the material character of painting cannot be ignored as it tends to be equated with substance, for example, the pigment, the brush and the canvas, the question of the location of power remains.

"If one sets side by side the picture of a factory turning out machines, and a studio turning out paintings, then it will seem as though all the power is in the factory and none in the studio, and that the social history of art must first describe the hard reality of production, ownership,
capital, and dominant and dominated classes, and then trace the repercussions of this hard reality in the atelier".

Bryson. N., 1991, p.68

Bryson (1991) argues that if one equates the materiality of painting merely with substance then once again painting is marginalised just as it is, he argues, according to a perceptualist account of visual representation. However, Bryson goes on to suggest that figurative painting isn’t just the material work of brush and pigment on canvas. Non-figurative work may, he notes, tend in this direction but as long as the images one is dealing with involve recognition, which as previously noted are codes that are learnt by interaction with others in the acquisition of human culture, then they are material signs. This leads Bryson to the conclusion that as signs, as complex statements in signs and as material transformations of the sign, paintings are part of a flow of discourse traversing both the studio and the factory.

Unfortunately, Bryson (1991) does not elaborate as to how this flow of discourse functions, however Garvin’s (1980) point that responses to aesthetic objects are not usually couched in the same system, and that this is also the case with a great many semiotic objects, is helpful in thinking about a flow of discourse between different systems. Ultimately, Bryson seeks to construct a form of analysis sufficiently global to include within the same framework both the economic practices which a Marxist Materialism assigns to the base, and the signifying practices which are marginalised as super-structural imprint. This involves breaking the barrier between base and superstructure, which Bryson argues relegates the sign to a position of exteriority in relation to the social formation. basically, Bryson seeks to replace the Marxist base superstructure model with a form of analysis ‘dialectical enough, and subtle enough, to comprehend as interaction the relationship between discursive, economic and political practices.’ (Bryson. N., 1991, p.69)

The final point to be made about Bryson’s thesis is in relation to his proposal that the flow of discourse between works of art and society is a flow in two directions. In his view the painter can work on the discursive material, can elaborate it, transform it through labour, and return it to the social domain as an alteration or revision of the society’s discursive field. According to Bryson’s analysis both the perceptualist account and a Marxist social history of art conceive the flow as being in one direction only and thus deprive the image of any power of intervention within the social fabric. Conversely, a semiological approach claims to relocate painting within the social domain by way of considering the visual image as sign co-extensive with a flow of
signs within the social formation. As such the visual image is viewed as discursive
work which returns into society.

"The painter assumes the society's codes of recognition, and performs
his or her activity within their constraints but the codes permit the
elaboration of new combinations of the sign, further evolution in the
discursive formulation. The result of the painters signifying work, these
are then recirculated into society as fresh and renewing current of
discourse. The configuration of signs which constitutes a particular
image may or may not correspond to configurations in the economic and
political spheres, but it need not have first been read there, or match
events which only by an act of arbitrary election are privileged as the
truth of social history".

Bryson. N., 1991, p.70

Bryson (1991) acknowledges that the main objection to this account is that the power of
the image to intervene in the social fabric is severely limited. In response he challenges
the notion that power is located exclusively in the economic sphere arguing that power
can also be microscopic and discrete, a matter of local moments of change, and that
such change may take place 'whenever an image meets the existing discourses, and
moves them over; or finds its viewer, and changes him or her'. (Bryson. N., 1991,
p.71) In Bryson's view power is not a monolith but rather a 'swarm of points'
traversing social stratifications and individual persons.

Thus, the image engenders a discourse which is dynamic in that it has the power to
initiate change. This assertion inevitably leads us to consider questions about the
audience and the reception and interpretation of works of art. Within a semiological
framework the interpretation of works of art is conceived of in terms of the projective
model of sign activity. In the classical model of sign activity which makes a distinction
between the two sides of a sign Saussure equates with something mental, an image, an
idea or a concept exists in some degree of separation from the thing that carries the
meaning, for example, a word, which is the signifier. However, it is characteristic of
signs that are given some permanent or notational form, for example a text or a
painting, that the signs are able to travel away from the context of their making both in
space and in time, without ceasing to be signs. Objects such as texts or paintings are
regarded as structures governed by 'dissemination' in that they enter contexts other than
the context of their emergence. Meaning comes to the sign from the place it projects
itself forward to, that is to say, from its context at a given time. Therefore, although the
painting or the text remain materially the same, they may be differently read or
interpreted. As Steiner (1975) notes: 'When we read or hear any language — statement
from the past, be it Leviticus or last year’s best-seller, we translate’. (Steiner. G., 1975, p.28)

Before we return to the consideration of the possibility of an alternative position in relation to the role of the arts in education the concept of knowledge underpinning these respective views will be briefly reiterated. It is important to remind the reader that the debate between traditional and alternative approaches in visual theory is mirrored in the debate between objectivism and cultural relativism in epistemology. Any doctrine could be called relativism which holds that something exists, or has certain properties or features, or is true, not simply, but only in relation to something else. Cognitive relativism applies to knowledge claims in general rather than simply to claims about value, can take ‘the extreme form’, that is, that all beliefs are true. If no proposition can be both true and false, then when A believes what B disbelieves, then we call their disagreement merely ‘apparent’ and say that they are really thinking of different propositions. Lacey (1990) points out that this could be avoided by saying ‘they are talking of the same propositions, but each saying that it is true for him, not simply true; ‘true’ is replaced by ‘true for’. (Lacey. A.R., 1990, p.206)

Cognitive relativism in Lacey’s view is more plausible when applied to societies, cultures and conceptual schemes, that is, in cultural relativism. Cultural relativism can also apply to principles of reasoning as well as to propositions believed, however a standard objection to this is that the claim that relativism is true, or the argument by which it is supported, is itself surely put forward as being absolutely true or valid: do not the very notions of asserting and arguing involve those of truth and absolute validity? Lacey (1990) stresses that relativism is not the same as subjectivism. Some relativism may be subjectivist, but a subjectivist view or viewpoint claims that what appear to be objective truths or rules in certain spheres, notable ethics, are really disguised commands or expressions of attitude. The statement ‘Lying is wrong’ would be regarded not as stating as objective fact, but as really being the command ‘Never lie!’, but as Lacey points out a relativist need not say that what seems to be assertions of the relevant kind are really disguised commands or expressions of attitude.

Positivist or objectivist views, by contrast, claim that there are truths independent of human wishes and beliefs, or that there are independent ways of establishing certain truths or answering certain questions. Since Comte, the term positivism has been used in such different ways by philosophers and social scientists that it is difficult to assign it a precise and consistent meaning yet however the term positivism is used by
philosophers and social scientists a residual meaning is always present and this derives from an acceptance of natural science as the paradigm of human knowledge. Cohen and Manion (1992) suggest that positivism may be characterised by its claim that science provides man with the clearest possible ideal of knowledge. Yet in spite of the scientific enterprise’s proven success—especially in the field of natural science—its ontological and epistemological bases have been the focus of sustained criticism.

“Beginning in the second half of the last century, the revolt against positivism occurred on a broad front, attracting some of the best intellectuals in Europe—philosophers, scientists, social critics and creative artists; and even today opponents of positivism are made up of a similar cross-section, including some from within the ranks of social scientists themselves”.

Cohen and Manion, 1992, p.23

Critics of positivism and of the notion of the objective consciousness have stressed its alienating effect in everyday life. Roszak (1970) notes that ‘while art and literature of our time tell us with ever more desperation that the disease from which our age is dying is that of alienation, the sciences, in their relentless pursuit of objectivity, raise alienation to its apotheosis as our only means of achieving a valid relationship to reality’. (Roszak, T., 1970)

2.3 The Reception and Interpretation of Works of Art

In the previous section it is asserted that if we accept Hudson’s concept of the composite nature of rationality which involves making a rational choice, as opposed to arriving at a knowledge of what is true or false, then neither of the remaining two positions outlined in the introduction to this chapter are ultimately acceptable as they are simply products of the dichotomised debate which produced them in the first place. It is asserted that only an account of art and knowledge which takes into account the composite nature is educationally viable for the two positions, which according to the dichotomised debate seemed initially tenable are, to use Best’s analogy, the two sides of the same distorted coin. As previously noted Hudson suggests that the rational enterprise involves two essential elements. One of these elements is conformity, as being rational is a process of concuring in, and operating with, standards which determine in their respective fields what counts as reason and what does not. The other essential element in the rational enterprise is criticism which subjects accepted standards of explanation or decision to ever more exacting tests of their effectiveness and where they fail, rejects them in favour of more effective ones.
As noted earlier in this chapter there are several clear dangers in adopting either/or a purely ‘alternative’ or ‘traditional’ approach to art and knowledge when these are transposed into the practice of education. In the second position if one regards the arts as basically subjective and culturally specific and holds a view of knowledge as being relative, there is a danger, (and a precedent in the extremes of child-centered progressivism) that if everything is relative and subjective then there is nothing to measure anything against and, as Hudson has pointed out, without conformity, take criticism to its logical conclusion and you must reach licence for without conformity, which in Hudson’s formulation is the instruction provided by the teacher, there is no matrix of tension wherein the pupil experiences the intellectual tension between conformity and criticism which is the essence of rationality. Without criticism the effect is similarly stultifying and the danger here in relation to the third position, that is, if one regards the arts as embodying universal truths and objective principles and holds a view of knowledge as objective and universal, is that then one arrives at narrowly defined views of the relationship between art and knowledge which takes no account of the myriad of other complexities involved. This is evidenced in Hirst’s propositional theory and in the more narrowly cognitive perceptualist accounts. It is therefore proposed that if one takes account of both these positions then one has something approaching a rational account of visual representation which is educationally viable.

Hudson’s notion of the composite nature of rationality has parallels within the literature pertaining to the reception and interpretation of works of art and particularly with Gadamer’s hermeneutic circle. In Gadamer’s formulation interpretation involves a circular process of projection and modification. Here, as with Hudson, the aim is not to arrive at a knowledge of what is true or false, but to make a rational choice in the light of all the relevant information available, grounded by the ‘logic of openness’ and the hermeneutic circle which guarantees an anchoring in a certain range of possibilities.

In the following section there is a discussion of theories of the reception and interpretation of works of art, which, it is argued, provide useful models of the composite nature of rationality which can be drawn upon in support of the position, advocated in this dissertation. Within the field of the phenomenology of perception, Iser (1978) in his work concerning the nature of interpretation and literature does not conceive of an idealised implied reader and takes into account different modes of interpretation and different concretisations of the work in the reader. Iser (1978) distinguishes between the text, the work and the reader. He suggests that the literacy work has ‘two poles’; the artistic (the author’s text) and the aesthetic (the realisation
accomplished by the reader). The work is not identical with either, but is ‘situated somewhere between the two’. (Iser. W., 1978, p.21) The text only takes on life when it is realised in reading, and therefore the work, which comes into existence with the reading, is always more than the text. Obviously, this account differs from Wollheim’s proposal that the spectator discovers or retrieves the experience that the artist had before the work as its first viewer. On the contrary, Iser says that ‘the manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition’. (Iser. W., 1974, p.132)

This is a more acceptable account of the interaction between reader and text or spectator and image. While the artist or writer is the first viewer or reader the notion that this initial experience anticipates the viewpoint of others on the grounds that we all share the same perceptual powers cannot be sustained. Perception refers to those processes that give coherence and unity to sensory input. Used in the most general sense the term covers the entire sequence of events from the presentation of a physical stimulus to the phenomenological experiencing of it. Wollheim (1991) appears to be referring to the sense in which perception is, ‘An awareness of the truth of something’. (Reber. A.S., 1986, p.527) Reber notes that this sense is largely non-technical and connotes a kind of implicit, intuitive insight. The experience which Wollheim describes is more convincingly explained in terms of projection which in psychodynamic theory refers to the perceiving of events and environmental stimuli (particularly ambiguous ones) in terms of one’s own expectations, needs and desires or to the process of ascribing unwittingly one’s beliefs values or other subjective processes to others. The Rorschach Test and other projective devices, although much criticised as useful psychological tools, convincingly illustrates that a series of ten standardized, bilaterally symmetrical inkblots can be extremely widely and diversely interpreted.

In Iser’s formulation the author has, so to speak, left the picture and the interaction goes on between the ‘two poles’ of the author’s text and the realisation accomplished by the reader. In the case of visual representation these ‘two poles’ would be the image and the spectators response or interpretation. Just as the text only takes on life when it is realised in reading so the image takes on life when it is viewed. The work which comes into existence as a result of reading or viewing, is always more than the original work.

“The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader”.
Iser. W., 1974, p.125
Therefore in Iser’s formulation in order to understand the reading process, which is the actualisation of the work, we need to understand both the nature of texts and the nature of the reading process. Iser suggests that the text necessarily offers ‘polysemantic possibilities’ or, in other words, leaves gaps, which the reader fills in reading. Texts can only establish various perspectives as they do not correlate exactly with the real world and are composed only of sentences and statements. Neither do they contain one single, hidden meaning to be recovered in interpretation but rather contain a certain indeterminancy which renders them open to different readings. The reader fixes meaning in the act of reading. However, because the text is never completely open; the possibility of total subjectivism is avoided because the structure of the text guides the reader. This account can be applied to understanding the nature of the reception or interpretation of visual representation. It may also provide a bridge between the perceptualist account and the alternative approaches outlined in this chapter. For although Iser has been criticised for ignoring the social and historical dimensions to the act of reading, unlike some writers in the same tradition, he does take into account different modes of interpretation and different concretisations of the work in the reader. Therefore, while the criticism that Iser ignores issues of historical and social variation may be sustained, the fact that he takes into account issues of individual variation in the reader, separates him from an extreme perceptualist position, as in Wollheim (1991), which stresses a universality of reception by an audience united by the perceptual powers putatively shared by all human beings. By taking into account issues of individual variation and by locating the ‘work’ in the realisation of reading, Iser suggests by implication, that there are as many ‘works’ as there are readers, without it is argued lapsing into total subjectivism. However, Iser’s formulation begs the question: What makes individuals experience paintings and texts differently?

Iser does not refer to differences in perception to explain issues of individual variation in the reader but to differences in disposition. In psychology the term disposition is used in connection with the study of the personality, and refers to ‘any hypothesised organisation of mental and physical aspects of a person that is expressed as a stable, consistent tendency to exhibit particular patterns of behaviour in a broad range of circumstances’ (Reber. A.S., 1986, p.206) However, as Reber points out in this sense, the literally dozens of terms used as descriptive labels for example, habit, temperament, ability, motive, faculty, trait etc. are all interpretable as dispositions. Moreover, as Reber (1986) notes, the theoretical problem that has spawned this ‘terminological forest’ is the need to explain the regularity and consistency of behaviour independently of variation and alteration in the environment.
This problem has been approached from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives in contemporary psychology. Of most interest and relevance to the present discussion are those which take into account social, cultural and environmental factors such as social learning theories, situationism, interactionism. Briefly, the central problem is in thinking about disposition or personality in behaviourist terms; how much of the behavioural consistency that most people display is due to underlying personality types or traits or dynamics and how much is due to consistencies in the environment and in the contingencies of reinforcement? Much of the theorising about the personality derives from this integral problem and form part of the nature - nurture debate which is a debate of long standing over the relative contributions of experience i.e. nurture, environment and learning, and inheritance or nature and genetic predisposition, to the make-up of a human organism.

Reber (1986) points out that it is interesting to note that theoretical approaches concerning personality can be seen as representing two distinguishable generalisations. Type theories, trait theories and psychodynamic and psychoanalytic theories perceive the personality as a legitimate theoretical construct, as a hypothetical, internal ‘entity’ with a casual role in behaviour and, from a theoretical point of view, with genuine explanatory power. Conversely, approaches such as behaviourism, situationism, social learning theories, and interactionism regard the notion of the personality as a secondary factor inferred on the basis of consistency of behaviour—while other operations and processes play the critical casual roles in dictating behaviour for example, the environment, social contexts, the characteristics of any given situation. Therefore, the notion of personality or disposition as a means of accounting for variations in individuals has relatively little explanatory power in psychological approaches which stress the impact of the social environment in determining behaviour.

This would seem to suggest that Iser (1978) in electing to use the term ‘disposition’ to account for issues of individual variation regards it as a legitimate theoretical construct with genuine explanatory power. Therefore, although it might appear that a recognition of individual variation and modes of interpretation leads to a recognition of difference in experience, nurture and learning, and this in turn to an acknowledgement of differences between cultures, historical periods, race and gender, this is not necessarily the case. However, as Wolff (1981) points out Iser’s formulation of the reader who fixes meaning in the act of reading, but who avoids total subjectivism because the text guides the reader and is never completely open, is very similar to Gadamer’s concept of the
hermeneutic circle which describes the process of interpretation as an essentially interactive one. Here the interpreter approaches the material with certain preconceived ideas about it, projecting meanings onto it, and anticipating its nature. In the light of his or her contact with the material, those preconceptions can then be modified, and a circular process of projection and modification eventually allows the interpreter to achieve a satisfactory understanding.

“If we examine the situation more closely, however, we find that meanings cannot be understood in an arbitrary way. Just as we cannot continually misunderstand the use of a word without its affecting the meaning of the whole, so we cannot hold blindly to our fore-meaning of the thing if we would understand the meaning of another...All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or of the text”.

Gadamer, H. G., 1975, p.238

Gadamer (1975) following Heidigger, argues like Iser (1978) that it is impossible to eliminate the self from the act of interpretation. However, Gadamer unlike Iser takes into account the question of historical understanding which he argues cannot ever consist in somehow transposing oneself into the past, or into some act of direct empathy with another person. In Truth and Method (1975) Gadamer suggests that one’s own present and ‘historicity’ invariably enter into the hermeneutic act and therefore colour the understanding itself. Interpretation is therefore always re-interpretation, from the point of view of the present.

Wolff (1981) notes that since this is an ontological point, that is, describing the essential nature of human existence, and not a methodological point, it is not a question of trying to find a better or more ‘objective’ method of interpretation. Interpretation simply is what Gadamer calls a ‘fusion of horizons’, of past and present or reader and author. This is because the consciousness of the contemporary reader or historian, is itself historical. Gadamer makes respectable again the notion of ‘prejudice’, on the basis that if we did not have prejudices and preconceptions about what to expect in a text, we would have no way of approaching it in the first place.

Prejudices in Gadamer’s formulation are ‘conditions of understanding’ (Gadamer, H. G., 1975 p.245) When we understand or interpret something we begin with a certain idea of what it might mean, or what to look for and this idea arises in our own existential—historical situation.

“Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails
that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial
directedness of our whole ability to experience”.
Gadamer. H. G., 1975, p.9

According to Iser’s (1978) account the possibility of total subjectivism is avoided
because the structure of the text guides the reader. Likewise, Gadamer avoids the
charge of complete relativism, made by critics such as Hirsch (1976), by distinguishing
prejudices from ‘false judgements’, maintaining that a good historian, while necessarily
starting from his or her own prejudices, will make these prejudices conscious, and will
also retain an openness to the past, or the text, allowing the initial prejudices to be
corrected by what is actually contained in the text. Thus, the ‘circular’ process of
projection and modification eventually allows the interpreter to achieve a satisfactory
understanding.

By ‘satisfactory understanding’ Gadamer does not mean an understanding as close as
possible to the author’s original meaning: ‘Understanding is not merely a reproductive,
but always a productive attitude as well’, (Gadamer. H. G. 1975, p.264) Thus while
Gadamer argues that it is never possible for a reader to reproduce the original meaning
the authorial meaning plays an important part in the joint production of meaning which
is achieved in the ‘fusion of horizons’. Without the imperative to pursue original,
determinate meaning, hermeneutics accepts that textual meaning is always re-created by
new readers, which is not to say that any meanings may be imposed on the text, since
the logic of ‘openness’, (Gadamer’s standing example is the Platonic dialogues) and of
the hermeneutic circle guarantees an anchoring in a certain range of possibilities offered
by text.

In this sense Gadamer’s formulation is congruent with the basic assertion which binds
the theories of visual representation collectively referred to as ‘alternative approaches’
and which states that the confrontation between the work of art and the spectator
demands an act of interpretation and necessarily prompts a recognition of the historical
gulf separating the horizon of the work from that of the spectator. However,
Gadamer’s concept of ‘historically affected consciousness’ requires some explanation.
Weinsheimer and Marshall (1988) refer to ‘Gamamer’s delineation of a consciousness
that is doubly related to tradition, at once ‘affected’ by and also brought into being
‘effected’ by history, and conscious that it is so’. (Weinsheimer and Marshall, 1988,
p.xv) In Part Two of Truth and Method (1960) Gadamer offers an account of our
historical consciousness which suggests that when we seek to reconstruct a past book,
event, movement or theory ‘just the way it really was’ we fall into the ‘aporias of
historicism’ by seeking to bypass the impact which that book etc., exercises upon
ourselves now, in our own situation. Nicholson (1991) suggests that we may take this to mean that ‘to make history itself, and historical things, into objects for our interested gaze is to overlook the historical process that is already at work in ourselves and in our very understanding’. (Nicholson, G., 1991, p.153) In Gadamer’s view our own mode of thought is a horizon we cannot eliminate; to understand something from the past is to experience the fusion of its horizon with our own; true self-understanding is to grasp our own selves and minds as exposed to history’s power and history’s effects. Since the unity of the historical process is objectively constituted by the ever-renewed fusion of ever-changing horizons, it becomes crucial to our very being to understand ourselves out of a tradition. Moreover, as Nicholson (1991) points out, only a false consciousness, according to Gadamer, would wish to be emancipated from the authority exercised over us both by past works and by intermediaries. The operation of tradition in advance of all our reflection makes it inevitable, and correct, for us to have ‘prejudices’. In ‘The Relevance of the Beautiful’ (1977) Gadamer refers to this concept specifically in the context of visual representation.

“It is not simply a matter of saying that we who experience art constantly face the co-existence of past and present. This is not simply the situation in which we find ourselves when we pass from one room to another in a museum.... We are always in this position. In our daily life we proceed constantly through the co-existence of past and future. The essence of what is called spirit lies in the ability to move within the horizon of an open future and an unrepeatable past”.

Gadamer, H. G., 1977, p.11

Therefore, Gadamer (1977) locates our experience of historical awareness of the arts within the broader framework of the social context and proposes a consciousness or historical awareness which facilitates the fusion of horizons between past and present, author and reader. As we have seen, theorists as diverse as Bryson (1991), Wolff (1981), and Best (1991) have emphasised the importance of the recognition of social and historical factors influencing both the production and reception of works of art. This is a defining feature of what has been referred to collectively as alternative approaches to visual representation. Of these approaches, the semiological approach locates visual representation within the same circulation of signs which permeate the rest of the social structure. Bryson proposes that our ability to recognise images is an ability which presupposes competence within socially constructed codes of recognition that are learnt by interaction with others in the acquisition of human culture. Therefore, the arts cannot be coherently regarded as independent of a whole way of life as they express, like language and other cultural practices, the life of a society and give structure to the possibility of a shared reality.
While perceptual and phenomenological accounts of visual representation are illuminating and helpful in thinking about certain aspects of the production and reception of works of art the general tendency to ignore social, historical and cultural issues limits their utility in any sustained argument for the importance of the arts in education. Bryson (1991) and Wolff (1981) argue that works of art are not closed, self-contained and transcendent entities but rather the product of specific historical practices on the part of identifiable social groups in given conditions and therefore bear the imprint of the ideas, values and conditions of existence of those groups and their representatives in various artists. However, Bryson's objection to both the perceptualist account and a Marxist based social history of art, are very persuasive in so far as he seeks to locate the image within the social formation from the beginning arguing that 'the social formation is inherently and immanently present in the image and not a fate or external which clamps down on an image that might prefer to be left alone'. (Bryson. N., 1991, p.66)

While Bryson departs from a classical Marxist social history of art on the grounds that the Marxist base-superstructure model of society which underpins much of its theory is incompatible with a semiological account, some Marxist concepts are helpful in thinking about the production of the image in terms of it being embedded in the social formation. These are the 'conditions of production' and the 'existing social conventions'. In the Marxist account these conditions operate as mediators of ideology at the aesthetic level. However, they are also seen as part of the actual physical construction of a work of art. The concept of 'existing aesthetic conventions' that is the style or manner in which a painting, for example, is executed is, congruent with the notion of an aesthetic system in semiological terms (Garvin 1980) makes the point that an aesthetic object will be couched in some aesthetic system, such as a particular artistic tradition but may elicit a response in another system. In this sense 'aesthetic conventions' or codes can be thought of as semiotic systems which operate in a flow of semiotic systems but are also intrinsic to the art object. From the works inception, at the level of production, the artist works the conventions, codes or aesthetic systems, he or she does not bolt them on afterwards. The work may or may not be appropriated by ideology as the perceptualist account suggests and indeed as both Gadamer and Iser suggest works of art may be variously interpreted but this is not peculiar to works of art, scientific innovation has been appropriated, differently interpreted and used to ends never intended by those who made the original discoveries for example, in the field of genetics and nuclear energy. It may be, as Gadamer has suggested, that original
meaning is never fully recoverable but it does not follow that it was never there, merely that it has become permeated with contemporary meanings.

Garvin’s point, that we may respond to one semiotic system through another system, brings us to Arnheim’s (1992) assertion that the human mind constantly combines thought and image and makes them compensate for each others limitations. Although he is emphasising the compensatory nature of this interaction it may be relevant to thinking about the way we move between semiological systems especially in regard to visual representation. If as Best (1992) suggests the conception of life of an individual has to be formulated in linguistic and artistic media and the possibility of individual development in thought and experience is dependent on the acquisition of these practices, then the perceptualist account of this process of interaction between thought and image supports the semiological assertion that the image as sign is co-extensive with the flow of signs, not only within the social formation, but on a cognitive level. The fact that we utilize a semiotic system, such as language, which operates primarily in conversational mode, and that this is the dominant mode does not preclude an acknowledgement of a constant interaction between this semiotic system and any other semiotic system such as an aesthetic system. While we may respond to an aesthetic object which is couched in some aesthetic system, in another system, for example, a linguistic system, we tend to respond according to the cultural conventions and practices we have learnt.

As previously pointed out Garvin (1980) has suggested that the really deep questions that arise from this enquiry have to do with the relations of the kinds of structures and functions that aesthetic systems have to the conversational mode, and to the question of what this, in turn, means with regard to the role of the different systems in the broader cultural setting. It may be that perceptual and phenomenological approaches, given their recognition of interactive systems, may eventually provide some of the answers. In conclusion, all of the approaches examined seem to offer insights, although differing insights, into the nature of visual representation. In attempting to identify some area of common ground between these diverse theoretical perspectives an ‘alternative’ position has been adopted in so far as the notion that any one theory constitutes the truth in any universal sense is rejected. These various accounts of visual representation represent a collection of truths about its production of works of art and about their reception, and re-interpretation, within the social context.
Summary

In this chapter we have explored some of the current issues of debate within visual theory and noted that the debate between traditional and alternative approaches to visual representation is underpinned by differing views of knowledge and in this respect mirrors the debate between objectivism and cultural relativism in epistemology. In this context Hudson’s (1977) notion of the composite nature of rationality in which it is suggested that the rational enterprise is a dialectical process, two things and not one, that is, conformity and criticism in tension, has been referred to as his distinction between conformity and criticism has considerable bearing on the debate outlined. Abbs (1987), for example runs the risk of bigotry in his dismissal of sociological enquiry into the nature of visual representation. Indeed, in his assertion that sociological enquiry leads to a ‘misconception of the purposes of art’, Abbs betrays a misconception of both art and sociological enquiry. Similarly, where everything is open, nothing rational can be achieved. Theories of interpretation, such as those of Gadamer and Iser, acknowledge the dangers of subjectivism and relativism and in response to this Iser (1978) argues that the possibility of total subjectivism is avoided because the text is never completely open and guides the reader. Likewise, Gadamer (1975) avoids the charge of complete relativism by distinguishing prejudices from ‘false judgements’, maintaining that a good historian, while necessarily starting from his or her own prejudices, will make these prejudices conscious, and will retain an openness to the text, allowing the initial prejudices to be corrected by what is actually contained in the text. This circular process of projection and modification eventually allows the interpreter to achieve a satisfactory understanding and, it could be argued, prevent criticism degenerating into licence.

Hudson (1977) puts it to us that being rational is a matter of both conformity and criticism. That rationality is not ‘either/or’ but ‘both/and’, in tension. Criticism, short of licence, necessarily involves conformity to some standards, while conformity, short of bigotry, necessarily subjects standards to applications which might discredit them. In conclusion, it is interesting to note that Hudson’s ‘matrix of tension’ where the pupil experiences that ‘intellectual tension between conformity and criticism which is the essence of rationality’, has parallels with Gadamer’s hermeneutic circle. In Hudson’s ‘matrix of tension’, which is provided, up to a point, by the teacher, the element of conformity is the instruction; the element of criticism, the problems. Radical criticism enters into ordinary education in two ways; by the imparting of critical processes to pupils by making them aware that accepted ways of looking at things are under constant
reappraisal, by pointing out inadequacies and possible improvements; and by the inclusion in the curriculum of subjects such as morals, politics and aesthetic appreciation where pupils have to make first-hand judgements. In the latter case Hudson suggests that the aim of such consideration is not to arrive at a knowledge of what is true or false, but to make a rational choice. That is to say, a choice which fulfils at least two conditions: (i) It is made in the light of all the relevant information available; and (ii) its grounds and implications are consistently adhered to.

"We discover whether—in our views about: what is right or wrong, which political system is best, how works of art should be appraised, etc.—we have taken account of all the relevant facts and are consistent in our judgements by hearing what others have to say on these matters and discovering how our own opinions fare in the arena of open discussion."

Hudson. W. D., 1977, p.53

This process is not dissimilar to Gadamer’s circular process of projection and modification in the hermeneutic circle. Here, as with Hudson, the aim is not to arrive at a knowledge of what is true or false, but to make a rational choice in the light of all the relevant information available, grounded by the ‘logic of openness’ and the hermeneutic circle which guarantees an anchoring in a certain range of possibilities. In Gadamer’s formulation this process of interpretation takes place between reader and text, or as suggested, between spectator and image. It is however possible to transpose this interaction into an educational setting where the process of projection and modification is carried out in the arena of open discussion, as part of the ‘conversation’ which Oakshott (1972) suggests is central to the educational transaction.

Overall an examination of the relationship between art and knowledge from within the context of visual theory identifies a dichotomised view of the meaning of art which parallels a dichotomised view of knowledge. While these dichotomies have their origins in positivism they echo the division between theory and practice which has permeated a liberal education. Within both of these educational debates the arts have been variously mis-represented and the issues fudged. It has been strongly argued in chapter 1 that the distinction between theory and practice is a false distinction and that theory and practice are internally related. Similarly, the debate within visual theory is, as previously noted, the two sides of the same distorted coin. It is however important to acknowledge that theories concerned primarily with the reception and interpretation of works of art that emphasise the process of coming to know are congruent with the notion of the composite nature of rationality. This dynamic process of coming to know must surely have implications for the actual practice of teaching.
Chapter 2
Bibliography


Chapter 3

Art and Education

Introduction

As Hirst (1974) notes whatever else a liberal education is, it is not a vocational education, not an exclusively scientific education, or not a specialist education in any sense. Disciplines, such as those of mathematics, science, history, literature and the arts are taught and engaged in for their own sake, because they are recognized to be valued in their own right and a part of any fully civilized existence. Thus, a liberal education has traditionally been concerned to liberate the individual from the present and particular by developing the mind. As O’Hear (1981) points out, to say, as the liberal educator says, that learning is to be pursued for its own sake is in part to say that what is studied cannot properly be controlled or anticipated by outside influence. For any outside influence to be justified in doing so it would have, itself, to be in possession of the truth. O’Hear suggests that we should be wary of any claims on the part of political authorities to have this knowledge and of the totalitarian and repressive implications of political attempts to dissect or curtail learning, even in the name of ideals such as fraternity. A liberal education is then not concerned with the socialization of individuals into political systems nor is it concerned with the indoctrination of individuals into specific values. Knowledge and learning and the critical attitude are seen as the best defence against false enlightenment while ignorance, especially enforced ignorance, is a valuable ally to repression.

The focus of this dissertation is the relationship between art and knowledge the purpose of which is to ask if art has a place in education. If we conclude that there is a relationship between art and knowledge and that it does therefore have a place in education we must then ask what sort of place this should be. This question is addressed within the framework of a liberal education, that is, within a view of education as concerned with the pursuit of knowledge and the development of the mind. Given that a relationship between art and knowledge has been established we must ask whether or not it is educationally essential as part of some core on a par with the sciences, for example, or should it be merely made available as an option and not allocated any central place within the curriculum.

In this final chapter the developments in thinking about the relationship between art and knowledge, within the philosophy of education and within visual theory, as outlined in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, are related to the question of the status of the arts in education
and it is argued that the arts should occupy a central position at the core of a liberal education. In Chapter 1 it is argued that

a) the traditional liberal/vocational divide in education is a false one and damaging for the arts, that theory and practice are internally related and that if a liberal education is concerned with the pursuit of knowledge and knowledge is both theoretical and practical then the arts have a place in education.

b) that the 20th century debate within the philosophy of education, as to whether or not there is knowledge in art, has been conducted in the context of a very narrow cognitive concept of knowledge that a propositional theory of art is inadequate and that it is only when we expand the parameters of a narrow positivist view of knowledge that art can be said to be knowledge in any meaningful sense.

c) that given we reject the positivist paradigm and the false distinction between theory and practice then we can argue that there is knowledge in the arts.

d) that the arts involve theoretical and practical knowledge and are concerned with making sense of reality, with meaning and with significance.

In Chapter 2 it is argued that

a) an examination of the relationship between art and knowledge from within the context of contemporary visual theory identifies a dichotomised view of the meaning of art which parallels a dichotomised view of knowledge and this dichotomy, between objectivism and cultural relativism in epistemology or between alternative and traditional views of art, represent the two sides of the same distorted coin and is responsible for the fallacy that there is a definitive split between reason and feeling, between knowledge and expression and between science and art.

b) that rationality has a composite nature, that the rational enterprise is a dialectical process and that in asking the questions as to whether or not there is knowledge in art and if so what is the distinct nature of this knowledge we must engage in this dialectical process in order to make a rational choice.

c) that the notion of the composite nature of rationality is congruent with Gadamer’s formulation of the interpretation of works of art where the process of projection and modification in the hermeneutic circle echoes Hudson’s ‘matrix of tension’ between conformity and criticism.

d) that Hudson’s and Gadamer’s formulations move away from the perpetual either/or position that permeates both visual theory and epistemology and
inform a theory of art and knowledge which is congruent with the notion of a liberal education as the pursuit of knowledge and the development of the mind.

In Chapter 3 we will examine the contemporary debate within arts education. In examining current thinking about the role of the arts in education it is argued that progressivism in education is a further example of the dichotomy between objectivism and cultural relativism in epistemology as outlined in Chapter 2. In employing the language of affectivity, in stressing self-expression and feeling, the progressives endorsed the fallacy that art is subjective and effectively reinforced the notion that the arts are concerned with emotion with feeling and not with knowledge or rationality. As such it can be said that the progressivist and positivist views are the two sides of the said equation. It is also argued that progressivism in art education has clear links with modernism in the arts for both movements embody an orientation towards time, conceived as linear and developmental, which is historicist. However, rejection of both progressivism and modernism within contemporary thinking about the arts in education in favour of a ‘conservationist’ or ‘postmodern’ aesthetic is in danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water yet again. The debate continues to be conducted in dichotomous terms and an either/or position prevail. In reacting against progressivism and modernism there is a tendency to dismiss issues of cultural relativism or reread them as politicization. It is argued that such an approach is conformity untempered by criticism. Likewise it can be argued that the coupling of progressivism and modernism in art education has led to licence unmitigated by conformity. Neither of these positions are ultimately acceptable and it is argued that if rationality is conformity and criticism in tension then we need a theory of art and a theory of education which takes the composite nature of rationality into account and the complexity of artistic production and reception. It is suggested that while perceptualist and phenomenological theories of art have different insights into the nature of visual representation than those put forward by alternative approaches such as semiotics we may come to a greater understanding of art if we adopt a both/and position rather than an either/or position. To adopt such a position is not only in the interests of rationality for the consideration of different and sometimes conflicting viewpoints can lead to new insights furthering the ‘conversation’ which is the educational transaction and enabling us to build upon it. Hirst (1993) has stressed the importance in education of the pupils initiation into a complex of specific, substantive, social practices with all the knowledge, attitudes, feelings, virtues, skills and relationships that that involves for personal development. An education in art forms part of this initiation and as such it is argued that it should have a central role on the basis that it fulfils all of these criteria, for as cultural practice art is located in the social
domain and as Bryson (1991) has illustrated the artist assumes society’s codes of recognition and performs his or her activity within its constraints as such the arts reflect our concerns and preoccupations by removing them from the present and particular and making a sense of them which we may either choose to accept or reject.

3.1 The Contemporary Debate Within Arts Education

In the following section the contemporary debate within arts education will be examined with a focus on the most recent core of publications. The critique of progressivism and modernism is outlined as is the rejection of the positivist paradigm which relegates the arts to subjectivism. An examination of the notion of the generic arts and its possible implications which is an issue that has provoked both controversy and dissent in the current educational climate is referred to and it is suggested that the notion of the arts as a generic community has gathered momentum on the grounds of expediency rather than because they constitute a group of some special cohesion. The common characteristics that are traditionally cited i.e. creativity, imagination and self-expression can it be argued be found in every area of the curriculum.

The core publications which have informed this debate are a series of twelve volumes published by The Falmer Press. These twelve volumes constitute a ‘Library of Aesthetic Education’ which is divided into three sections, the first of which is designed to provide the historical and philosophical frame for the series. Of the four volumes which make up this section, two are a collection of essays which include contributions from practitioners in the fields of arts education as well as philosophers concerned with aesthetics such as L. A. Reid, Roger Scruton, Peter Fuller, Ernst Gombrich, Arthur Danto and others. Therefore, these volumes are arguably representative of contemporary thinking about the arts in education in so far as they constitute the core of recent publications in art education and include contributions from a wide variety of important theorists. An important theme which runs throughout these four volumes but which is taken up particularly by Abbs (1987, 1989, 1990) is a critique of modernism in the arts and progressivism in education, which he claims have informed the practice of teaching in our schools and which have led to a condition of ‘impasse and disorientation’. However, Abbs goes further than this and while his claim can be substantiated he seems reluctant to acknowledge that both these movements were reactions to the stale and stultifying paradigm which in fact produced them. Here in the excesses of his attack on both these movements and particularly in relation to late modernism in the arts there seems a danger that rejection will amount to reaction.
Briefly, modernism as it pertains to the arts, is not easy to define. This is partly because the term 'modernism' has been used to describe a whole variety of different movements whose only seeming common denominator according to Pateman (1991) is that they have taken place in the twentieth century. However, Pateman goes on to suggest that modernism and indeed post modernism are concepts that can be used to define a certain orientation to experience most tangibly expressed and codified in the arts and crafts and in particular in architecture.

An understanding of modernism is in part provided by the word itself. It derives from the Latin 'modo' meaning 'just now' and has obvious links with such related concepts as modernity and modernization. Indeed, as Abbs (1987) points out, modernism true to its name, is marked by a highly conscious orientation to time, particularly to the present tense. Similarly, Callinicos (1989) draws our attention to Baudelaire's essay 'The Painter of Modern Life', written between 1859 - 1860, in which modernity is referred to as 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent'. (Baudelaire. C., 1863, p.403) In Baudelaire's view modernity is but one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable. While his specific concern was to characterize an art which discovers the eternal in the transitory, as opposed to an abstract and academic cult of timeless beauty, his definition of modernity captures the experience of continuous development and change in modern societies since the onset of the Industrial Revolution.

In his critique of modernism Abbs (1987), argues that, in its preoccupation with the 'new' and the 'now', modernism was a rejection of the past, 'defined negatively by its opposition to traditional culture; consciously setting itself against the past and facing only the present and the future'. (Abbs. P., 1987, p.13) He goes on to point out that nearly all definitions are emphatic about its iconoclastic nature, its insistence on disruption and what Jencks (1986) has referred to as its 'fetish of discontinuity'. (Jencks. C., 1986, p.43) Raymond Williams in his essay 'The Emergence of Modernism' (1989) notes that while modernism can be clearly identified as a distinctive movement, in its deliberate distance from and challenge to more traditional forms of art and thought, it is also strongly characterized by its internal diversity of methods and emphases. Williams describes modernism as a 'restless and often directly competitive sequence of innovations and experiments which are more easily recognised by what they are breaking away from than by what they are breaking towards'. (Williams. R., 1989, p.43) However, as Gombrich (1972) rightly notes, while this experience of
continual progress and change is expressed through modernism in the arts, it is not an experience confined to the arts.

"We know of the Stone Age and the Iron Age, we know of the Feudal Age and the Industrial Revolution. Our view of this process may have ceased to be optimistic. We may be aware of losses as well as gains in these successive transformations, which have carried us into the Space Age. But ever since the nineteenth century the conviction has taken root that this march of the ages is irresistible. It is felt that art no less than economics or literature is swept along by this irreversible progress. Indeed art is seen as the main 'expression of the age'.

Gombrich. E. H., 1972, p.485

It is this link between modernism and the historical process, as it was formulated by Hegel and Marx in the nineteenth century, and adopted by the various avant-garde movements within modernism, that has provoked both dissent and controversy. As Pateman (1991) points out much of modernism is based on a distinctive sense of its own need, claiming to serve the ‘spirit of the time’ as it moves into a necessary future. On the whole critics of modernism reject the notion of inevitable historical progress.

"History bears no predetermined meaning, and even if it did, it carries no absolute right to determine ethical or aesthetic principles".


One can, Pateman (1991) asserts, paint beautifully against the ‘spirit of the age’ arguing that with this realisation, confirmed in his view by ‘the failure of Marxism as the science of history’, we enter the postmodern period. Pateman (1991) suggests that modernism had to collapse because of its own tenets and assumptions. He identifies these assumptions as ‘the fallacies of historicism, functionalism, scientism, literalism, conceptualism and relativism’. (Pateman. T., 1991, p.117) Most of these ‘fallacies’, in his view, derive from the key fallacy of historicism as defined by Karl Popper in ‘The Poverty of Historicism’ (1957). He suggests that the relationship of historicism to modernism in the arts entails an extrapolation of categories in which dubious historical terms are transferred into aesthetic terms and seen to justify various artistic movements and specific forms of art. In his view the historicist argument, which depends on a developmental view of history, has been used to validate or invalidate and determine the form of artistic work within the modernist period. A similar view may be discerned in the work of Lyotard (1984), Gombrich (1972), and particularly in the work of Abbs (1987, 1988, 1990). It should be noted, although any detailed discussion is outwith the scope of this dissertation, that this viewpoint is congruent with the postmodernist critique of modernism, for as Sarup (1988) points out, postmodernists distrust metanarratives and are suspicious of any form of universal philosophy.
"Societies which anchor the discourse of truth and justice in the great historical and scientific narratives (recits) can be called modern. The French Jacobins don’t speak like Hegel but the just and the good are always found caught up in a great progressive odyssey”.

Lyotard. J. L. (In an interview with Christian Descamps)

Therefore, within the critique of modernism is a critique of historicism and of Marxism which may explain the notable absence from ‘The Library of Aesthetic Education’ of any contribution by writers of a Marxist persuasion an absence which as we have seen in Chapter 2 does not reflect the current position or debate within contemporary visual theory.

Abbs (1987) pursues his critique of modernism and progressivism by arguing that like modernism the concept ‘progressive’ bears within itself an overt orientation towards time, conceived as linear and developmental.

"It is, surely, no accident that the word ‘modernist’ and the word ‘progressive’ both reveal an orientation towards time which rubs out and cancels the past, which denies any form of ancestor worship. Thus, in the progressive movement in education we will find that what is valued unconditionally is self-expression and individual growth while inherited culture and a personal sense of cultural solidarity, of belonging to an historical past which gives depth and meaning to the present, is actively undermined. As with modernism ‘now’ is elevated, above and radically disconnected from ‘then’ and the value of skill, of tradition, of the whole invisible field, severely occluded”.

Abbs. P., 1987, p.33

Progressiveness in education has had an extremely important influence on the arts in education which are still reeling from its impact. Co-inciding, as it did, with the modernist movement in the arts the progressive emphasis on self-expression reiterated the impulse within the arts to break away from traditional academic High Art. Progressivism constituted a major challenge to the notion of a liberal education for against the pursuit of excellence for its own sake was placed the view that learning is to be valued and pursued only to the extent that is necessary to enable people to play their part in the god and natural life. Furthermore it suggested that a liberal education produced no appreciable gain in goodness or happiness on the part of those educated and that such an education actually interfered with the individual’s intuitive sense of goodness and rightness. Abbs like many others, takes Rousseau as a key initiator of progressivism in education. At the beginning of the twentieth century, at the same time as the modernist movement began in the arts, the progressive conceptions first formulated by Jean-Jaques Rousseau in Emile (1762) reached a critical mass and
effected a revolution whose good and necessary effects, particularly in our nursery and primary schools, still form a part of our educational inheritance. In Emile (1762) Rousseau advocated the methods of learning through discovery, of allowing self-regulation and of relating learning to the progressive stages of child development. Of his ideal pupil ‘Emile’ Rousseau claimed: ‘Nature should be his only teacher and things his only models’. However to secure a true education for his fictional pupil Rousseau had to sever him from his own civilization and from all historic culture. All inherited culture is seen as imprisoning and against ‘the man of culture’ Rousseau was to place ‘the man of nature’ who lived in the present tense and only for himself.

“Our wisdom is slavish prejudice, our customs consist in control, constraint, compulsion. Civilized man is born and dies a slave. The infant is bound up in swaddling clothes, the corpse is nailed down in the coffin. All his life long man is imprisoned by his institutions”.

Rousseau, J. J., 1762, p.10

Abbs (1987) observes that in Emile the following juxtapositions are drawn: ‘nature against culture, spontaneity against civilization, the individual against the community’. (Abbs. P., 1987, p.35) As O’Hear (1981) notes this emphasis is in stark contrast to ‘the reflectiveness and commitment to lonely study and to the critical attitude which characterize at least the higher reaches of liberal education’. (O' Hear. A., 1981, p.6) In O'Hear’s (1981) view the challenge presented to the liberal educationalist by progressivism is to defend the pursuit of excellence in learning for its own sake, against the view that learning is to be valued and pursued only to the extent that it is necessary to enable people to play their part in the good and natural life. O’Hear concludes that to reply effectively to this challenge we have to look at the nature of learning itself. To criticize liberal education as unnatural for man is to presuppose a correct understanding of what is natural for him and what a good life would be. But as O’Hear argues it is precisely here that knowledge is essential, in order to avoid mistakes, illusions, false enlightenment and dangerous oversimplification.

Abbs (1987) however expresses his objection to progressivism in historical terms. In his view progressivism came to be an educational philosophy based on a fundamental discontinuity, on an historical sense of human time. Like modernism it wanted to achieve an immediate ‘now’ uncomplicated by any past events, free from the obligations posed by any cultural past.

“Emile, in a sense, is a child of modernism, 150 years before it became an event; a fictional figure presaging the future; the dispossessed self-regulating individual, living for himself, beyond all received cultures, with no debts to the past, with no past to have debts to.”
However, as Kelly (1987) points out, Rousseau emphasises learning rather than teaching. This distinction is central to his view of education for the focus has changed from the transmission of knowledge and eternal truths from teacher to pupil, to the actual educational process. The child is the subject of this process and education is seen in terms of the processes of development it is concerned to promote. The teacher’s task is to guide the learning and development of the pupils through providing experiences and opportunities for experience through which natural development may occur. Moreover, the pupil is not seen as a ‘man in the making’ but as a child, for what he or she is here and now and not in relation to what he or she may become.

“We know nothing of childhood; and with our mistaken notions the further we advance the further we go astray. The wisest writers devote themselves to what a man ought to know, without asking what a child is capable of learning. They are always looking for the man in the child, without considering what he is before he becomes a man”.  
Rousseau, J. J., 1762

Thus attention is drawn away from the end product of the educational process and centered on that process itself, away from what is to be learnt and on to the individual who is to do the learning. These themes were taken up by a number of important educational theorists during the next century notable Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Herbart (1776-1841), Froebel (1782-1842) and Maria Montessori (1870-1952). Each of these individuals expanded, developed and interpreted Rousseau’s ideas in slightly different ways with different emphasis and endeavoured to translate these ideas into practice. As stated above, it was at the beginning of the twentieth century, at the same time as the modernist movement began in the arts that progressivism found fertile ground and through the work of J. H. Badely at Bedales School, A. S. Neill at Summerhill, Susan Isaacs at Malting House and Kurt Haan at Salem School and later at Gordonstoun this view of education came to be asserted in practice and to exercise a great influence on practices in the primary sector of state education in the United Kingdom.

In the arts the progressive notion of self-expression became the essential key to the teaching of the arts but as Waller (1991) points out this emphasis arose as much from a revolt against traditional ‘academic’ art and is indicative of the state of the art in the late 19th century.

“The downfall of academic High Art at the end of the 19th century and the rise of the colourful post impressionist work shortly afterwards made possible for the first time a comparison between child and adult art. Child art, primitive art, tribal art and Western Asiatic art were no
longer regarded as crude but rather as sensitive and expressive forms of art”.

McDonald. S., 1970, p.329

The term ‘Child Art’ was coined by Franz Cizek who was associated with the Secession movement in Vienna led by the painter Gustav Klimt. As Waller (1991) notes this movement owed much to writers active in left-wing politics as well as to artists, and its aims were to break with previous classical art movements, to make a critical assault on bourgeois culture, and to seek a refuge from the pressures of the external world. Cizek was associated with the Secession movement from its inception at the turn of the century and in his rejection of traditional art teaching methods, became one of Austria’s most progressive art teachers. Cizek believed that every child had the potential for creative expression, and those who came to his studio were encouraged to engage in ‘free expression’, with Cizek providing the materials and support for their efforts. Viola (1942) in his biography of Cizek refers to a lecture given by Cizek in 1924, in which he said:

“Child art is sacred. If it is destroyed, external values are destroyed. And if it is covered by foreign layers, the natural growth of the child is made impossible. The task is to let the child grow naturally, but not arbitrarily”.

Viola. W., 1942, p.45

Exhibitions of child art organized by Cizek, and later by Marion Richardson and Herbert Reid were to travel, with enormous success, across Europe and America. Extending from this notion of uninterrupted self-expression the interest in play developed. Play was seen as a method of imaginative learning within education and this notion was greatly extended and deepened by contact with the writings of Freud, Jung and Susan Isaacs and later by the writings of D. W. Winnicott, Melanie Klein and other members of the Post-Freudian school of psychoanalysis. Play, notes Abbs (1987), often came to be viewed as the paradigm for all modes of learning, for all educational practice, and particularly the practice of the arts. Abbs (1987) raises an important point here:

“Art is embodied symbolic—expression and demands knowledge and skill, a formal context and a continuous culture and while having certain structural similarities with play has a variety of other functions that childhood play does not possess. Above all, art belongs to a cultural continuum and a public world; it simultaneously includes and transcends the creative play of the growing child”.

Abbs. P., 1987, p.44
In the long term, the limited and limiting notion of self-expression can in Abb's view only lead to impoverished practice, for in the same way as progressive art teachers tended not to develop the actual techniques of art, so they tended to neglect the various traditions of art-making.

"While creativity may well, in fact, be endogeneous it yet needs a bed of culture to flower, the richer that bed, generally, the better the flowering".

Abbs. P., 1987, p.45

In this respect Abbs (1987) echoes the view put forward by O'Hear (1981) in support of a liberal education, that is, that knowledge is essential, in order to avoid mistakes, illusions and oversimplification. An education in art which is limited to self-expression precludes a great deal of learning about the nature of the production and reception of works of art. It also fails to locate art making within the broader field of cultural practice and artistic tradition and thus actually limits even expressive possibilities.

Finally, and of particular relevance to the relationship between art and knowledge, Abbs (1987) draws our attention to the fact that to describe the nature of art the progressives tended to employ the language of affectivity, as if art were a matter of expression only, of emotion, of feeling, of subjective impulse, as if, that is to say, it was not also an intellectual and cognitive matter.

"In reacting against the dominant rationalism of our civilization the progressives merely endorsed its cardinal fallacy; the fallacy that there is a definitive split between reason and feeling, between knowledge and expression, between science and art. The progressivist and the positivist views are the two sides of the same equation; they emerge out of the same conceptual matrix, one tacitly agreeing to work on one side, the other on the other side. Yet our experience of art, both of making it and receiving it, supports a different conception. Through art we know the nature of our experience. Art holds up in presentational symbols the conceptions of feelings, the conceptions of actual and possible worlds. Through art we recognize, the permanent elements of our human experience. Art like science, though in a different field, is a mode of comprehension, a mode of knowing, a mode of intellectation".

Abbs. P., 1987, p.46

Certainly, from the 1950s to the mid-1970s and beyond a great deal of educational debate was conducted in dichotomous terms, for example, instruction versus expression in the arts. A way forward is to get away from these dichotomies for as previously stated being rational is not 'either/or' but both/and, that is, a matter of both conformity and criticism. These dichotomies are themselves products of positivism. In modernism and progressivism in education it is argued we encounter two great and
related failings. Modernism is seen as guilty of transposing aesthetic terms into historic and ideological terms and thus, in effect, erasing them; while the progressive movement stands accused of conceiving aesthetic experience, largely in psychological and hedonistic terms, of subjectivity. Both, according to Abbs (1987, 1989, 1990) and Pateman (1991) deny tradition, modernism being guilty of a reductive historicism while progressivism is deluded by a kind of naturalism that attempts to avoid the obvious truth that we are born into communal relationship and, potentially, into an ever richer cultural continuum. The conclusion is drawn that these two ‘traditions’, intertwining in diverse ways throughout the course of the twentieth century, have led finally to a deep philosophical and pedagogic confusion. What both Abbs and Pateman fail to fully acknowledge is that both modernism and progressivism are reactions to an inadequate and stultifying paradigm. Like all such reactions, they are the reverse of the same coin and embody the same underlying mistakes, which is why it is important to look at the underlying presuppositions and question them, in order to have a framework for a paradigm which salvages possible insights from both.

3.2 Rationality and the Arts

Best (1992) does not take up Abbs’ critique of modernism and progressivism. Instead the main theme of his work is to show that artistic experience is as fully cognitive and rational, and as fully involves learning and understanding, as any subject in the curriculum. In place of the twin enemies of modernism and progressivism Best (1992) refers to the subjectivist doctrine.

"My central concern can be stated simply: if artistic judgements cannot be rationally, objectively justified there can be no place for the arts in education. Yet since it is a vital characteristic of artistic judgements that they are often, and importantly, expressions of individual feeling and value, this seems to imply that they are purely subjectively. This creates a problem about how they can be justified in education. It will be very clear how important this issue is in view of the current entirely justifiable demand that all aspects of education should be assessable and accountable.

Best, D., 1992, p.xvi

However, in asserting that only the ‘objectively justifiable’ is capable of admittance into education, Best remains working within the old positivist paradigm. Best (1992) contends that we have been effectively conditioned by the ‘tradition and prevalent doctrine’ into believing that the meaning of a work of art in some mysterious way lies behind it, or is to be found away from it, in a subjective or metaphysical realm. His thesis is that its meaning is to found in the work of art itself and that this reflects
precisely what most of us do, all the time, in our involvement with the arts. To justify our judgements and feelings about a work of art we give reasons which, argues Best, refer not to unintelligibly mysterious subjective mental events, but to objective features of the work itself.

The ‘traditional and prevalent doctrine’ which Best (1992) refers to is the common assumption that there is necessarily an opposition between, on the one hand, feeling, creativity and individuality, and on the other hand, cognition and reason. The notion of the human mind as consisting in two distinct realms—the Cognitive/Rational realm, and the Affective/Creative realm, is in Best’s view part of the subjectivist Myth. He argues that it is of the utmost importance to recognize the manifestations of this Myth, because it is one of the most plausible, yet most damaging, persistent and pervasive, of the various guises of the subjectivist doctrine. Moreover, not only is it disastrous for the educational credentials of the arts, but it expresses a complete distortion of the character of other disciplines, such as the sciences.

Best (1992) in a similar vein to Bryson (1991) goes on to argue that the meaning of the arts, as of language, is rooted in human actions and responses and cultural practices. This view, he suggests, is in opposition to ‘a whole tradition of philosophy of the arts’ which is still the unquestioned—almost, in effect, unquestionable foundation of most of the current thinking about the arts and the arts in education’. (Best, D., 1992, p.16) This tradition, is in his view, derived from Decartes, Kant, Cassirer and Langer, is based on a resort to supposed ‘inner’ occult mental processes. It is interesting to note that Bryson (1991) rejects perceptualist and phenomenological accounts of visual representation on similar grounds when he argues that works of art are not closed, self-contained, transcendent entities or closed perceptual channels. The ‘traditional and prevalent doctrine’ to which Best (1992) refers are those, which in his view, regard artistic meaning in general as founded on symbolism. The confusion is ‘exacerbated by the widespread conflation of the aesthetic and the artistic, with the assumption that the aesthetic is the generic notion...for then it is often contended...that the essential and distinctive ‘aesthetic’ quality is an immanent form, instantiated in the work of art, but emanating from a metaphysical form—rather like a Platonic universal, or Kantian noumenon’. (Best, D., 1992, p.16) This Best (1992) argues is the tradition of the still influential Cassirer and Suzanne Langer, whose metaphysical ‘forms of feeling’ are in Best’s view similar to Platonic universals. His main objection is to Langer’s (1957) emphasis on the ‘basic intellectual act of intuition’ as the ultimate foundation of meaning, whether artistic or linguistic. In Best’s view this amounts to an assertion that
meaning is a subjective ‘inner’ private process, which, is he argues an unintelligible supposition. While not wishing to deny the importance of intuition Best argues that it cannot be the basis of meaning.

Underlying these subjectivist doctrines is, argues Best (1992) a deeply held conviction about the character of the self. Against ‘the picture of the self-conscious and self-reliant, self-transparent and all-responsible individual which Descates and Kant between them imposed on modern philosophy’ (Kerr. F., 1986), Best (1992) offers a picture of the self derived from the later work of Wittgenstein, and captured in Holderin’s phrase as ‘the conversation which we are’. In other words he proposes that the foundation of the self is in the common human way of acting and responding, set in the context of cultural practices as opposed to ‘some supposed subjective ‘inner’ spirit or mentality’.

It is this emphasis on the natural ways of acting and responding which underlie the concepts of the arts in Best’s formulation. The roots of artistic, as of any form of understanding, are to be found not in an under-lying rational principle but in what is involved in a child’s learning, in the natural ways of responding and acting which are the preconditions of learning. In this sense, argues Best, it is derived from an underlying rational principle; but in Best’s view it is the contrary, if any principle could be formulated it would be answerable to the natural ways in which people respond to the arts. This is why it is to rationalize in the wrong direction to examine the roots in order to find a principle. If there is such a principle it will be found at ‘the top of the tree nourished by the roots of natural responses’.

“One might say that it is neither feeling nor reason but action which is the root...action takes place within and inseparably from a social context, and which is an expression of cultural practices. But of course action itself, is, at least frequently, inseparable from feeling, cognition, rationality.”

Best. D., 1992, p.27

Best’s insistence that there can be no principle which underlies and justifies our responses to and engagement with the arts should, he argues, not be construed as denying the possibility of justifying artistic judgements. In his view it is the possibility of rational justification which shows that the arts are fully educational therefore while he asserts that it makes no sense to suppose that there can be a rational justification for the natural responses which are at the roots of the concept of art this does not, in his view, imply that there cannot be a rational justification of judgements made within the concepts of art which have grown from those roots.
Reason in Best’s formulation is equally important to questions of appreciation, meaning, judgement, evaluation and applies equally to the creator and the spectator. It is central to his educational thesis as the question as to whether reason has a place in the arts is the question whether the arts necessarily involve cognition or knowledge. Therefore, if we wish to argue for the place of the arts within a liberal education, as the pursuit of knowledge, then the question of whether knowledge is possible is the question of whether there can be learning and teaching.

This is the question that preoccupied Phenix, Hirst and L. A. Reid whose views are outlined in Chapter 1, Section 3 and which are central to any debate about the educational value of the arts. However, as we have seen there is considerable debate about what constitutes knowledge in the arts, for example, Hirst proposes a propositional theory of art in which works of art can be regarded as statements which are in turn tied to the notion of truth or falsity. Ultimately, this theory, as previously noted, rests upon the question of the objectivity of judgements about works of art, of a parallel kind to those found in mathematics. Meanwhile, Phenix (1964) argues that while aesthetic objects may contain propositions, these propositions merely contribute to the content of works of art. The truth or falsity of propositions contained in works of art cannot be, according to Phenix, the measure of the aesthetic meaning of the work. Best (1992) rejects the idea that reason is tied to the notion of knowledge as necessarily propositional. Hirst’s (1974) assertion that ‘the domain of knowledge is centrally the domain of true propositions and statements’ (Hirst. P., 1974, p.85) may, in Best’s view, be initially plausible for the sciences but not for the arts.

“The danger is that to continue to equate knowledge and rationality with the ability to produce true propositions will help to perpetrate the damaging misconception that where the arts are concerned we cannot legitimately speak of knowledge and rationality”.

Best. D., 1992, p.44

This debate refers to the narrowly defined empiricist view of knowledge outlined in the previous chapters. It is a view of knowledge that has traditionally underpinned liberal educational theory in which in order to justify the arts in education one must be able to show that it has objective value and objective content. If one remains within this paradigm, as Hirst (1974) does, then one either arrives at a very narrow propositional theory of art or alternatively, argue that a liberal education is about more than the transmission of knowledge and that art fulfils whatever additional criteria of justification is argued for. To argue the latter position is however incompatible with the
assertion that an education in art should be central unless one abandons the idea that the
transmission of knowledge is the defining feature of a liberal education. An alternative
position is to argue, as is argued in this dissertation, that if the empiricist epistemology
is modified and one accepts a broader concept of knowledge which takes into account
the practical application of the intellect and the importance of meaning and significance
or that art fulfils some other educationally important function such as a social or broadly
therapeutic function, or both, then one can argue that the arts have a central role to play
in education. Here is argued that knowledge, understanding and reason are central to,
and inseparable from, artistic experience, and are necessary for the educational
credentials of the arts, but this does not entail only the ability to produce true
propositions. Indeed, as Best argues, this conception is inadequate even for the
rationality involved in scientific and other forms of knowledge often regarded as
unquestionably propositional. He concludes, like Phenix (1964) and L. A. Reid
(1969), that a principal source of the misconception that the arts are a matter of feeling,
not of reason and knowledge, is the unquestioning acceptance of a rigidly narrow
conception of knowledge.

One of the confusions underlying this misconception is a conception of objectivity
which caricatures the nature of the sciences. Since no scientific analysis can locate an
aesthetic or artistic element, then it is assumed that it cannot be actually in the art work,
but is subjective, in the sense that it is merely projected imaginatively into the work by
the spectator. (The process of projection is referred to in chapter 2 in the context of
individual variance and the interpretation of visual representation and text.) Best (1992)
rejects what he refers to as ‘the prevalent sense of objective...that of the absolute and
universal, is a notion which has very little, if any, application in any sphere...’ (Best.
D., 1992, p.31) Best argues that although a work may be open to various
interpretations, this lends no support to subjectivism, since beyond certain limits a
judgement could not count as an interpretation at all, precisely because it cannot be
supported by reason.

This viewpoint is similar in its conclusions to Gadamer’s formulation of the
hermeneutic circle where ‘false judgements’ are distinguished from prejudices which
are the ‘conditions of understanding’. When we understand or interpret something we
begin with a certain idea of what it might mean, or what to look for, and this idea arises
in our own existential-historical situation. According to Gadamer (1975) this is
inevitable, however, in his formulation while it is impossible to eliminate the self from
the act of interpretation, total subjectivism is avoided because the text or image guides,
the reader or spectator, and is never completely open. The interpreter approaches the material with certain preconceived ideas about it, projecting images onto it, anticipating its nature, but in the light of his or her contact with the material, those preconceptions can be modified, and a circular process of projection and modification eventually allows the interpreter to achieve a satisfactory understanding. This process is not, in its description incompatible with the process of reasoning which Best (1992) describes when he suggests that while there may be a variety of possible interpretations of a work of art, one has to appeal to reason to decide which is the most convincing.

Best’s (1992) critique of scientism is reiterated by Abbs (1987) in his critique of modernism in which he refers to scientism, or the tendency to impose the scientific paradigm inappropriately to an understanding of the arts, as one of the fallacies of historicism. The relationship between historicism, which depends on a developmental view of history, and modernism in the arts entails an extrapolation of categories in which dubious historical terms are transferred into aesthetic terms and seen to justify various artistic movements and specific forms of art. Scientism, in Abbs’ (1987) view followed on from the historicist fallacy and he relates it specifically to a tendency in the visual arts to adopt the language and assumptions of technology and science.

"After all, these intellectual disciplines seemed to be the true pace-setters, determining, through another kind of restless innovation, the forms of life to come. In technology one could certainly talk, without ambiguity, of historical development and a kind of progress".

Abbs. P., 1987, p.25

However, Best (1992) sees the influence of scientism rather differently. He makes no reference to historicism but refers directly to the positivist paradigm. For him, 'scientism and subjectivism are the two sides of the same distorted coin', for what often impels people to subjectivism about the arts is the common assumption that the sciences are paradigm examples of rationality, coupled with the recognition that artistic judgements are obviously not open to scientific verification. As Best notes this inevitably leads to the mistaken supposition that the arts cannot be fully rational. However, as previously noted, this also reflects a widely prevalent misunderstanding of the character of scientific enquiry and understanding. Certainly, part of this assumption is due to the fact that, supposedly unlike the sciences, there can be such wide and even irreconcilable differences of critical opinion about the same work of art.

In conclusion, Best (1992) suggests that a major source of the educationally disastrous subjectivist assumptions about artistic appreciation, interpretation and production is a
fundamental misconception about the nature of objectivity, knowledge and reasoning. In this he reiterates the questions raised by Phenix (1965) and L. A. Reid (1969, 1974) about the implications for the arts if a narrow definition of knowledge is adhered to. Unlike Abbs (1987, 1989, 1990) he locates the origins of subjectivism in philosophy itself, whereas Abbs finds the enemy elsewhere, in modernism, in progressivism and in Marxism as the ‘science of history’. What unites them is the conviction that the arts in education in our present culture and society, are threatened.

3.3 The Generic Arts Debate

An either/or as opposed to a both/and position seems to persist in much of the literature on arts education. It is interesting to note that although Abbs in his condemnation of progressivism points out ‘the progressivist and the positivist views are the two sides of the same equation’, his own thesis is conducted in dichotomous terms. Similarly, Best (1992) in asserting that only the ‘objectively justifiable’ is capable of admittance into education, appears to remain working within a positivist paradigm. In the current climate, where the downgrading of the arts in education is less to do with truth than with use, Best draws our attention to the ‘expedient myth of the generic arts’ and makes two important points. Firstly, he suggests that in the ‘overwhelmingly vocational and utilitarian ethos of the current political and educational climate’, there is a widespread assumption that the arts are merely peripheral. Best contends that while on the one hand, the arts are regarded as expendable and not serious candidates for priority in education, the powerful possibilities of learning through the arts are, on the other hand, clearly conceded in the general nervousness about the arts characteristic of authoritarian regimes. Secondly, it is suggested that there is a danger that educational priorities are being conferred on those areas of the curriculum which are easiest to assess, rather than on those which are educationally and humanly of greatest significance. Best argues that pressures may impel us towards the convenience of subjects which appear to be susceptible of clear-cut attainment targets.

Having made these two points Best then draws our attention to the ‘seductive thesis that the arts form a generic area of the curriculum’. Briefly, this is often taken to imply that the arts should be combined, since they supposedly involve the same creative processes. As Best points out this is clearly very attractive to administrators, on grounds of expediency, to economise on staff in schools, time-table space and money. The most influential source of the ‘combined arts’ thesis can be identified as the National Curriculum Council, Arts in Schools Project: The Arts 5-16 A Curriculum
Framework published in 1990. While Best acknowledges that the Arts in Schools Project has facilitated stimulating multi-disciplinary work and inspired fruitful arts initiatives, he is critical of the philosophical foundations which underpin it.

The notion that the arts from a generic community has in Best’s view gathered momentum for reasons of expediency and in reaction to a fear for those arts with no projected independent space in the national Curriculum. However, the notion that the arts form a unified aesthetic field has been assumed by philosophers and educators from Aristotle onwards. Such a view is also explicitly stated in the influential Gulbenkian Report: The Arts in Schools (1982) where the arts, that is, music, drama, poetry, literature and the visual arts, are seen to constitute a single category of understanding. In the philosophy of education Hirst (1965, 1974) has made similar assumptions about an aesthetic form of knowledge, as do both Reid and Phenix. Best (1992) raises the question, ‘What is supposed to be the similarly common root of painting and music?’ He goes on to suggest that while the most plausible case for the supposed generic character of the arts is that common usage implies a unity, that is, because ‘art’ is used to apply to them all, there must be some essential defining character, this cannot be sustained. Here, Best refers to Wittgenstein’s example of language games. Wittgenstein refutes the notion that there must be something in common when the same word is applied to different instances in his theory of family resemblances.

“Consider for example the proceedings we call ‘games’ — board games, card games, ball games, Olympic games and so on. What is common to them all? Don’t say: “There must be something in common, or they would not be called ‘games’” — but look and see whether there is anything common to all. For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all……To repeat, don’t think but look!”

Wittgenstein. L., 1972, p.66

Best concludes that, in order to make the case for the generic community of the arts, it has to be shown, not just that there are common characteristics, but that these common characteristics are distinct from all other disciplines. Simply to claim common characteristics is not enough for it is clear that there are common characteristics between any and all disciplines. As Best points out, mathematics, sciences, geography, history, physical education, like the arts, involve imagination, sensitivity, objective judgement, rationality, intuition and feeling but they are not generic. Best opposes the view that the arts constitute a group with some special cohesion or possess a character distinct form all other areas of the curriculum.
“Traditional candidates, such as imagination, creativity, and self-expression, have, I hope, long been discarded, since, in any good school, such characteristics can be found in every area of the curriculum.”

Best. D., 1992, p.33

In response to Best’s critique, Abbs (1992) an advocate of the notion of the arts as a generic community, suggests that this critique derives, in part, from a deep suspicion of verbal generalities and a predilection for particulars, for specificities, for actual cases and locatable examples. Abbs (1992) argues that for Best the concepts ‘generic’, ‘combined’, and ‘integrated’ are virtually synonymous. The term ‘generic’ does not, according to Abbs, necessarily mean combined and integrated, neither does the notion of ‘generic’ have to involve the notion of structural equivalence; only the idea of common characteristics. The aim is rather to practise a particular dialectic, which observes the general, and, simultaneously, recognises the differentiation into different types. Abbs accuses Best of a narrow literalism of mind which is false to the nature of language and its necessary metaphoric extensions.

In response to Best’s proposal, that the notion of the arts as a generic community has gathered momentum for reasons of expediency within the context of the current political and educational climate, Abbs pleads ignorance.

“Best attacks those who, mesmerised by the deceptive logic of the generic argument, went on to develop a general aesthetic faculty or to merely amalgamate the arts into general programmes to meet diminishing resources and allocated time. The difficulty here is to know who he is attacking. As we have seen these are not, even remotely, the concerns of Aristotle or Langer but neither are they the concerns of those who have attempted to develop the argument in an educational context”.

Abbs. P., 1992, p.283

Abbs (1992) justifiably, reminds us that in The Falmer Press Library of Aesthetic Education, which he acknowledges was edited with the generic community concept in mind, each of the six art forms, that is, art, drama, music, literature, dance and film, is allocated a volume in recognition of their very clear differences and are all given the same value and the same curriculum status. Abbs concludes that ‘Best is fighting a phantom, a spectre of compromise and philosophical ineptitude which does not exist’. Yet it seems clear that in drawing our attention to what Pring (1993) has referred to as the ‘vocationalising’ of education and the implications for the arts of attainment targets and assessment, although these have always existed in some form within arts education, that Best is attacking the ‘overwhelming vocational and utilitarian ethos of the current political and educational climate’, in which he argues the arts are threatened
and are also threatening, in so far as they challenge this ethos. It is from this standpoint that Best takes issue with the notion of the generic community of the arts which in seeking to establish the arts as a distinct realm within education risks the dilution of its particular and distinct disciplines. More importantly for Best the generic notion is underpinned, in his view, by a metaphysical ‘aesthetic’ which he regards as implausible as it once again relegates the arts to the irrational and subjective domain from which he is concerned to extract it. Best (1992) like Bryson (1991) is concerned to locate the arts within the flow of communication and knowledge which exists within the social formation and is resistant to any attempt to create what he would regard as a false realm which he argues does not exist. However, it should be noted that although Best’s emphasis on rationality and objective justification seems to tie him to an outmoded positivist paradigm his formulation of what constitutes rationality is closer to Hudson’s (1977) concept of the composite nature of rationality than a derivative of positivism. To be objective, argues Best, one’s judgement may have to be modified or rejected in the light of sound reasons for a better interpretation or evaluation. Thus a commitment to rationality implies a repudiation of dogmatism or bigotry, and any attempt to impose interpretation by the exercise of authority. However, like Hudson, the continuing effort to enlarge or improve upon accepted standards is balanced by the element of conformity.

“Although there can be and should be individual responses, and the possibility of differences of interpretation, such differences and individuality are possibilities which have and arise from limits. Beyond certain limits one’s response would not be an expression of individuality, but of a lack of understanding. Not anything can count as a response to a work of art, just as not anything can count as a reason for artistic appreciation”.

Best. D., 1992, p.61

Summary

One of the significant issues arising from an examination of current thinking within arts education is the persistence within the debate of a positivist paradigm in so far as the debate is conducted in dichotomous terms which are themselves products of positivism. Abbs (1987, 1989, 1990), in his critique of modernism and its related fallacies is, for example, prepared to subsume the entire venture of the sociological enquiry into the arts along with issues of cultural relativism, under the umbrella of ‘the overt and continuous politicization of the arts’, which, he argues is yet another manifestation of the pernicious fallacy of historicism with which modernism is, in his view, saturated. According to Abbs (1987) even scientism is a product of historicism, an idiosyncratic
view, for although both Marxism and positivism can be said to be children of the Enlightenment, the scientific method as conceived by Comte (1798-1857) has, as Cohen and Manion (1992) point out, has been a recurrent theme in the history of Western thought from the Ancient Greeks to the present day. It is also surely significant that Abbs critique of modernism is conducted almost entirely in terms of historicism, a considerable achievement given that Marxism is never mentioned. This omission and the absence of any contribution by writers adopting a Marxist perspective from ‘The Library of Aesthetic Education’, and absence which as we have seen does not reflect current thinking within visual theory, is indicative of what Hudson (1977) has referred to as ‘conformity’ which taken to its logical conclusion results in bigotry. While ‘The Library of Aesthetic Education’ may, as it purports, represent current thinking about the arts in education, it does not constitute a fair representation of current thinking about art.

Abbs (1989) proposes a ‘conservationist aesthetic’ which he stresses is not Conservatism, but conservatism, an aesthetic which he suggests is already emerging in the arts as a reaction to the extremes of modernism.

“No longer in the arts is it a question of manically asserting one’s individual freedom, one’s special uniqueness, one’s startling originality; it has become more a question of establishing a continuous symbolic community, of returning to sources, or re-establishing vital connections to the historic past as well as to the natural order”.

Abbs. p., 1989, p.166

Quoting the philosophical biologist, Mary Midgely (1979), Abbs asserts that the notion of a conservationist aesthetic is captured in the phrase, ‘Culture is the completion of instinct’. Culture, argues Abbs, is the outgrowth the articulate culmination of our biological nature and consequently reflects within its forms and rhythms the natural history of all things. Art-making, at root is, Abbs concludes ‘a primary and transformative energy of our own nature within Nature, an activity we delight in and need to engage in for a full realisation of our creative species’. Abbs goes on to propose a ‘biological grounding of mental symbolic activity’ which is reminiscent of Arnheim’s assertion that, “If one believes that art is indispensable as a psychological and, indeed, as a biological condition of human existence, it must be assumed to grow from the very roots of our being. These roots must be traceable. (Arnheim. R., 1992, p.ix) Too many philosophers, argues Abbs, from Plato onwards have put mind on the other side of nature, thus making it alien; and too many, especially in the Empiricist tradition, have rendered the arts a secondary and essentially a trivial pursuit. Neither is it a secondary and symptomatic expression of economic forces, as in Marxist theory. Rather, it is the
biological grounding of symbolic life which returns art to the order of nature and makes it fundamental.

The two central threads of this emerging ‘conservationist aesthetic’, that is, those of ecology and history, can, he suggests, be discerned in the best Post-Modernist Architecture. Thus the ‘conservationist aesthetic can be said to be a post modernist aesthetic. On the relationship between art and knowledge, Abbs concludes, not surprisingly, that aesthetic intelligence is in fact perceptual intelligence, an insight he stresses is crucial to the conservationist aesthetic. Aesthetic knowledge is ‘bodily knowledge’, that is, ‘an appreciation of patterns through the power of sensibility’, formally expressed and developed through all the arts. As such, argues Abbs, the arts belong together and presumably as ‘bodily knowledge’ constitute a distinct realm or form of knowledge, for Abbs argues, that not only do they belong generically together but that they should be granted the same importance in the curriculum as other ‘intellectual communities’ such as the humanities and the sciences.

Furthermore, the ‘conservationist aesthetic’ involves the ‘reclamation of the various and neglected traditions of art — this restoration of the past tense in order to secure the proper aesthetic continuum of time is now under way’. (Abbs. P., 1989, p.173) This ‘reclamation’ becomes an aim within arts teaching according to Abbs generic arts manifesto. He writes enthusiastically:

“Indeed, even the traditional concepts of ‘rhetoric’ and ‘poetics’ are returning both to literary discourse and the practice of writing in the English lesson. These acts of conservation are all scattered signs of the new aesthetic”.


Given the recent developments within contemporary theory which offer exciting and engaging possibilities for thinking about the arts in epistemological, social and individual terms it seems extraordinary that such an aesthetic is being proposed which ultimately rests almost solely on perceptualist and phenomenological theories with no consideration of alternative approaches. The total rejection of Modernism, of any mention of sociological enquiry into teh arts or the corpus of Marxist criticism coupled with a view of culture and tradition that is reminiscent of Conservative rhetoric on ‘family values’, is depressing. The notion that Modernism and Progressivism have in some sense failed us is misconceived for both these movements were reactions against a stultifying social order which pervaded both the arts and education, at the end of the 19th century. A ‘conservationalist aesthetic’ seems remarkably like a reaction in the
other direction and a further example of the either/or position which presently occupies theorising in arts education.

While Abbs' position argues for a central role for the arts in education it

a) takes no account of developments in visual theory and faces the possibility of becoming moribund.

b) takes no account of individual and social difference of the social history of art and of issues of cultural relativism.

c) in adopting an either/or position does not take account of the composite nature of rationality which it is argued must inform thinking about art and thinking about knowledge.

While it is accepted that modernism is inadequate as a theory of art and progressivism is inadequate as a theory of education the conservationist aesthetic is also inadequate as it fails to take into account the above noted issues. If education is the pursuit of knowledge then the pupil needs to be made aware, at a level appropriate to his or her level of development, of all of these positions in order that he or she is able to make a rational choice on the basis of all the available information. If we accept Hudson's formulation as applied to both a theory of art and a theory of education then we can argue for a central role for the arts in education not as bodily knowledge or propositional knowledge but as something much broader and much more dynamic. By strictly adhering to the notion that art is either/or one or another form of knowledge we lapse into conformity and are in danger of bigotry and the charge of indoctrination. If we present the pupil with different theories if we maintain the balance between conformity and criticism, that is, Hudson's matrix of tension, then we are then fostering the critical attitude which is at the heart of the pursuit of knowledge and the liberal ideal.
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