

Cognitivism

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(Aesthetic Cognitivism)

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Latin *cognoscere* = to learn, to know

“cognitive” = having to do with learning, knowing, thinking

Plato (Greek, ~400 BC)

- Arts are not helpful in understanding the world
- Art makes “copies” of real things
- Real things are copies of “true” ideas
- Art is a copy of a copy

Aristotle (Greek, ~360 BC)

- Art can help us understand the world
 - We learn by imitating
- Imitative art (mimesis) can be instructive
- “Catharsis” in theater/story =
 - by re-experiencing emotions through art
 - we are “cleansed”, “renewed”
 -
 - Leads to deeper emotional understanding

Martin Heidegger (German, 1889-1976)

- Art can “unconceal”...
 - that which is concealed / hidden in the world
- Art can reveal profound truths about human life
- The best art *does* reveal profound truths
- “*lichtung*” = a clearing
 - as in: a clearing in the woods

Ernst Cassirer (German, 1874-1945)

- Humans are “symbolic animals”
Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (1923-1929)
 - All our thinking is by means of symbols
 - verbal language
 - myth/story
 - ...

Rudolph Arnheim (German, 1904-2007)

- *Visual Thinking* - (1969)
- Visual perception is a cognitive act
- Seeing is...
 - not simple
 - not passive
 - not automatic
- Seeing requires active filtering, processing
- These are a form of “thinking”

Suzanne Langer (American, 1895-1995))

- Art is not about “aesthetics” (attractive visuals)
- Art is a symbolic activity
 - (cf. Cassirer)
- Art uses expressive symbols:
 - represent the “inner life” of artist
 - represent human emotional life
 - meaning of symbols changes from one artwork to another
- We come to understand human emotional life better

Nelson Goodman (American, 1906-1998)

- Detailed study of symbol systems
 - different kinds of symbols & how they work
- Humans build / construct understandings of the world
 - ...through symbol systems
 - *Ways of Worldmaking* - (1978)
- Symbol systems include:
 - science
 - verbal language
 - visual art
 - music,....
- All are cognitive processes
 - that is, ways of thinking

Nelson Goodman

- science and art are both trying to do the same thing
 - => understand the world
- “epistemology” = study of how we know
Art is a branch of epistemology
- *Languages of Art* (1968)
 - Several different kinds of symbols
 - Important for art is the “exemplification” symbol
- Exemplification
 - The symbol is an *example* of the referent
 - It points to (symbolizes) something
 - But also possesses what it symbolizes

Nelson Goodman

- A tailor's swatch exemplifies...



- It points to (symbolizes) the color and texture
- It also possesses the color and texture

Nelson Goodman

- Music can “exemplify”....
sadness, joy, chaos, order, etc.
- Strokes of color...
- A dance movement...
- A drawing...
 - can exemplify a concept or emotion
- They point to it because they are similar to it
- The artist uses the symbol system of art
 - to think
 - to understand
 - to convey his/her understanding

Howard Gardner (American, 1943 ->)

- theory of multiple intelligences
- Several different kinds of intelligences:
 - verbal/linguistic
 - logico-mathematical
 - visual/spatial
 - bodily/kinesthetic
 - inter-personal
 - intra-personal
 - musical/rhythmic
 - naturalist
 - existential
 - moral
- Some forms of intelligence are the **artistic intelligences**

Cognitivism in the arts

- Art is a way of thinking about our world
 - of making sense of our world, of our selves
 - of understanding our world, our selves
 - of constructing an understanding of our world

Cognitivism – for the Artist?

- Artist figures things out through making his/her art
- In representing emotions through art,
 - we come to understand emotional issues better
- In representing ideas through art,
 - we develop, refine our ideas
- Making “good” art is very difficult
 - It involves thinking very hard about complex things
- Good art is very thoughtful

Cognitivism – for the Viewer?

- Viewer understands things differently
 - as a result of viewing the art
- Good art can be hard to understand or accept at first
 - because the thoughts are new, different, difficult
- Good art can be profound
- When we are very moved by art,
 - it is because we understand something profound
 - which we had not understood before