

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
 - that which is not understood
- Art can reveal profound truths about human life
- The best art *does* reveal profound truths
- Art creates a “*lichtung*”
 - a “clearing”
 - as in: a clearing in the woods

Martin Heidegger

The Origin of the Work of Art (1935-1960)

“work” = “what art does / accomplishes”

- not “the art object / thing”
- not “*l'objet d'art*”

Vincent Van Gogh painting of shoes



- not physically “accurate”
- not mimetically accurate
- painting reveals something – about ?

How do humans think?

How do humans understand?

Charles S. Peirce (American, 1839-1914)

- study of signs and symbols (semiotics)
 - icon, index, symbol

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 of sense data
- These are a form of “thinking”

Nelson Goodman (American, 1906-1998)

- Detailed study of symbol systems
 - different kinds of symbols & how they work
 - including in the arts
 - *Languages of Art* (1968)
- Symbol systems include:
 - science
 - verbal language
 - visual art
 - dance
 - music,....
- All are **cognitive** processes

Nelson Goodman

- Science, art, music, dance are...
 - ways of thinking
 - ways of trying to **understand** the world
- Humans construct an understanding of the world
 - through the sciences & the arts
- *Ways of Worldmaking* - (1978)

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

So...?

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, because...
 - it involves thinking very hard about complex things
- Good art is very thoughtful art

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

