

The Aesthetics of Perception: Form as a Sign of Intention

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Abstract

Aesthetic judgment has often been characterized as a sensuous cognitively unmediated engagement in sensory items whether visual, auditory, haptic, olfactory or gustatory. However, new art forms challenge this assumption. At the very least, new art forms provide evidence of intention which triggers a search for meaning in the perceiver. Perceived order excites the ascription of intention. The ascription of intention employs background knowledge and experience, or in other words, implicates the perceiver's conceptual framework. In our response to art of every description we witness the incorrigible tendency in humans to construct meaningful narratives to account for events. Such meaningful narratives always implicitly involve the ascription of intention, even when the agent of the intention is not explicitly acknowledged or even clearly conceived. This principle of intention-in-order may seem incompatible with another truism which is that art is a source of novel ideas and essentially a critique of prevailing values and norms including conceptual schemes. I argue on the contrary that the human impulse to read intention in order is a precondition of art's critical edge. Creativity is possible even though there is no raw perceptual data to which we have conscious access. That is, there are no sensory items, unmediated by the concepts we have internalized through our interaction with our communities, to which we have conscious access.

Signs of Intention

The incorrigible tendency to read intention in order is essentially the principle of aesthetic form. No perceptual experience of art consists in cognitively unmediated sensations. The idea is rather that the artist constructs an item which exercises perceptual form for its own sake rather than as a vehicle for an explicit message. The audience then, rather than read off a literal message which would in turn close off reflection, is brought into a contemplative state with the object as their focus. The perception of order triggers a story of intention. However, it is not just the act of ordering that takes hold in one's reflection. Whatever items the artist has included in their work, the very items that are in effect "ordered," in turn lend

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their representational content to the story that unfolds in the mind of the perceiver. The perceptual order in itself takes the place of the syntax/grammar of language and the specific items provide the reference.

Consider the following perceptual objects:

Witches hats neatly lined up in a playground or on an isolated beach;
The small intricate pattern on a tiny tortoise shell glimpsed through undergrowth;
A walking track, neatly edged with an assortment of burnt-out tree trunks.

Such perceptual objects evoke a narrative. We perceive intention in the *order* of the items. Our minds construct the story of their motive: for example, the order of witches hats might represent a section of the playground set aside for a special activity or on the beach perhaps children playing a game; the intricate pattern on a small item might be evidence of a creative mind or our wonder at such patterns in nature is related to the possibility of such order without apparent intention; the arranged remnants of tree trunks might be the work of a budding artist, bored children entertaining themselves in the forest or a ranger marking out a path.

The difference between the trigger provided by the order of the witches hats, intricate pattern or burnt-out tree trunks mentioned above and our reception of art, is that art invites an added, if you like, meta-layer to our engagement. We find the order or form to be a trigger for intention-ascriptions but then in addition, we reflect upon the attitude the artist exhibits toward the representational content of the item. For example, the burnt-out tree trunks arranged along the walking track that we stumble upon in the forest, might be the idle pastime of some children seeking an opportunity for play on an otherwise dull walk with their parents. We can all understand the motivation here. However, had this same ordering of burnt-out tree trunks been found in an art gallery, we would attribute more significance to the attitude shown to the items by so ordering them. Perhaps we would perceive an attitude to the destruction caused by bush fires, or alternatively as a sign of contrasts, the destruction giving way to the regeneration of the forest. We might interpret the work as an expression of hope or alternatively resignation to the forces of nature. Any item the artist includes can turn reflection in a completely new direction. For example, imagine the inclusion of a burnt crumpled drink-can in among the assemblage of burnt-out tree trunks. Our reflection will turn in the direction of the impact of our life styles on the natural environment.

Art exploits our incorrigible tendency to read intention in order. There is no literal message to harness our attention. Instead, a reflective attention takes hold. However, when an object provides competition between literalness and reflection, the literal message will trump the intention-in-order I have been discussing every time. Literal meaning confines

consciousness to what can be expressed in propositions. Consider how difficult it is to reflect upon the order exhibited by the structure of a sentence uttered in the course of a normal day-to-day interaction. The literal meaning exhausts what you can hold in mind unless perhaps you maintain the perceptions of an artist or poet.

Language is grounded in the intention-in-order capacity, but it has evolved to relate intentions specifically tied to determinate outcomes, desires and needs.¹ The communicative dynamics we find in the literal use of language, triggers an engagement of literal means-ends thought processes. This is the default position of our orientation to each other it would seem. Nonetheless, language-use can deflect this engagement by frustrating means-ends dynamics as we see in poetry. Poetry's non-literal use of language prompts our intention-in-order response.

The Art of Daniel von Sturmer

We can represent the argument so far in terms of two principles: (i) the principle of aesthetic form as a capacity to find intention-in-order and (ii) the principle of art which is the meta-narrative excited by conceiving of something as art where one attributes to the artist not only the intention to make something for other's reflection but to exhibit a particular attitude, orientation or feeling to the items included in the artwork. The upshot of the principle of aesthetic form and the principle of art is that art is demanding. The meaning of a particular art work is not simply read off like a set of explicit instructions nor is it a non-cognitive response to sensory items. Any artwork may be open to a range of interpretations depending on the cultural back ground and experience of the perceiver.

The problem that arises is how to understand the details of this process. Apart from the intricate structures and patterns that artists/composers/film makers inherit and from which they develop their own styles and "orders," there is the question of inherited conceptual schemes which we may have learnt to associate with certain styles, genres, "orders." While my account of the principles of aesthetic form and art are relatively simple, their application is made complex and nuanced by cultural traditions.

The question we will pursue now is to what extent art can be said to act as critique when the nature of its representational content is so nebulous. Many philosophers of a historical materialist persuasion and contemporary artists of a conceptual kind believe that art functions as critique.² We will now begin to examine the implications of such a claim.

The question of aesthetic form is often linked to the question of art's autonomy. We have identified the principle of aesthetic form as intention-in-order. The notion of aesthetic

autonomy that the eighteenth century philosophy Immanuel Kant defended was grounded in this principle. It was the idea that the way aesthetic form engages us and means something for us is autonomous from the way language communicates and hence not directly constrained by means-ends dynamics. This concept of aesthetic autonomy, Kantian aesthetic autonomy, is often confused with the more prosaic idea that art is independent from the moral and political realms. The latter idea originated in the nineteenth century and is now equated with the art-for-art's-sake attitude to art. However, this view is not an implication of the aesthetic form or aesthetic autonomy of Kant.

Theodor W. Adorno's own conception of aesthetic form draws out some key aspects of the Kantian conception. Adorno argued that it was in virtue of aesthetic form and art's autonomy that art offered a genuine opportunity for critique of prevailing values and norms, and that art was a genuine source of revolutionary ideas.³ However, if art is a critique, is it more accurately thought of as a facilitator of critique, the concepts originating in the interpreter and her community, or might art by its principle of aesthetic form combine with its token additions of representational elements to evoke the formation of new concepts and in so doing serve in some respects as critique of prevailing conceptual schemes? The latter possibility would attribute the greater significance to art.

The emphasis that Adorno placed on aesthetic form as an alternative ground of communication that by definition evoked reflection rather than conveyed a literal message can be explored by considering an actual process of artistic creation. Daniel von Sturmer is a Melbourne-based artist. He creates installations often consisting of one or more small video screens mounted on small plinths. They relay simple experiments using items like small cubes, sheets of colored acetate, shredded paper, paint or small geometric objects. The items fall, overlap, pour, crumble or roll across, within, through, under or over confined or defined spaces.⁴ In some cases an object seems to launch, push or fling another object. Sometimes a causal link is suggested between the movements of two or more objects without there being any actual physical contact between them.

In *The Field Equation* 2006, each scenario is designed economically with a minimum of detail and the movements, shapes, forms, colors and textures are always sharply focused, precise and vivid. Our attention is drawn to the kinds of movements involved, the degree of freedom and restraint imposed by the particular context, the relation between the objects and the relation between the objects and the artist. Relations evoked that underpin the movements we perceive are causes or reasons, accidents or purposes, mechanical or qualitative and so on. While the visual clarity is enjoyable to behold, the works draw our attention to the close relation between the kinds of movements it is possible for objects including ourselves to make and the predominantly spatial metaphors which pervade our concepts.⁵ According to von Sturmer:

[Art] operates within existing language frameworks and alters them in the process ... [there is the] potential ... for artistic practice or even a single artwork to fundamentally challenge the way we think about the world, the larger world, our habits of being.⁶

Yet von Sturmer is not proposing that artistic ideas originate independently from other cultural domains. “Somehow the new ideas can only be born from existing ideas ... because they’re all operating within the same cultural framework. But it is the subtle combination of complex [ideas] ... and out of that is forced some new way of thinking or new idea.”⁷

Von Sturmer’s approach captures a midway position between art as facilitator of new ideas and art as generator of new ideas. Von Sturmer seems to suggest that art does generate new ideas but it does so by using references which rely on language. At the same time he is not prepared to treat art as having a monopoly on this process. According to von Sturmer: “The studio is a kind of active zone of experimentation where there’s a lot of thinking that goes on, a lot of thinking about how things are or what things are ... Trying things out. Trying at least not to be too fixed about the direction things might take.”⁸ This experimental quality is evident in works like *The Field Equation*, 2006 (figure 1) and *The Cinema Complex*, 2010 (figure 2, p. 414).

Figure 1 (following pages):

Artist: Daniel von Sturmer

Title: The Field Equation, 2006

Medium: 8 screen (7 Sequence) digital video installation (6 single channel videos, 1 dual channel video), 8 custom built screens, 17 objects, 59 plinths

Dimensions: various

Venue: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia

Acknowledgements: Helen Macpherson Smith Trust Commission 2006. Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery.

Photos: Andrew Curtis

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Figure 1.



Figure 1 contd.



Figure 1 contd.

The Contents of Visual Experience and Ontology of Sound

Contemporary theories of visual and auditory perception provide a theoretical grounding to the processes that von Sturmer describes. In particular, there is philosophical work which corroborates the move away from the non-cognitive bottom up account of perception and as such supports the view that perceptual experience does not consist of cognitively unmediated sensations.

The view that is well and truly superseded is the idea of perception as sensation (in the Reidian sense⁹) where perception either notes what is out there in a neutral way, as affordances (in the Gibsonian sense¹⁰) or as ‘affect’ where perception is constituted by the effect that the consciousness of objects has upon the subject. In contrast, a current view developed by Susanna Siegel¹¹ is the Rich Content View, according to which visual experience or perception includes not only what might be deemed sensory items like color, shape, form, and texture, but also kind-properties or classifications such as the kind of object, event, action or feature represented. The significance of this is that background knowledge and experience permeates visual experience. It is not a matter of picking up non-

cognitive items and then processing them into cognitive units such as propositions or units of experience one can reflect upon. Instead the kind-properties or classifications at one's disposal will determine in part the contents of visual experience.

The distinction drawn by Siegel in her account is a distinction between kind-properties and causal properties.¹² This distinction relates back to various conceptions of the human being concerning the degree to which all our actions are caused by events beyond our control (the typical conception of animal behavior) as opposed to engaged in freely (an exercise of human agency). In the nineteenth century art was championed by German Idealists and English Romantics as the domain of human endeavor where human agency was to the fore. Von Sturmer addresses this very dichotomy by creating art about causes and calling them experiments. In his video installations we see representations of the varieties of mechanical causation as discussed and demonstrated by Albert Michotte (1963/1945): plain launching, where an object approaches a stationary object and on contact both objects move along in the same direction; launching-by-entraining, where the first object pushes the second object along; and launching-by-expulsion, where it seems that the second object is thrown by the first object.¹³ Here the variety of mechanical causes is employed to serve expressive intention, as an object of reflection. Whereas typically 'experiment' is thought to hollow out intention by uncovering the objective facts, von Sturmer's use of 'experiment' reveals the objective facts to depend upon human interests and intention.

This visual representation of the complex interaction between causes and agency nicely demonstrates a point made by Siegel in relation to causes. She argues that "becoming sensitive to property instances has an effect on overall phenomenology."¹⁴ That is, once one develops the ability to distinguish a property, an ability which relies upon experience and understanding, one's visual experience changes accordingly. However, Siegel has not come to this conclusion through relying on what people report about the contents of a visual experience.¹⁵ She argues that there is no way to separate out background belief and experience from the contents of visual experiences by listening to such reports when such reports are of single events or objects. However, she does think some ground can be made on this by what she calls phenomenal contrast. Siegel uses the example of perceptions which represent causal relations to show this.

The weight of a cat in a hammock results in the hammock appearing to be closer to the ground than when the cat is not sitting in it. The perceptual experience of the distance of the hammock from the ground factors in the causal properties connected to the weight of the cat. Compare now the visual experience of the event without the causal properties included: the hammock is a certain distance from the ground; the cat jumps onto the hammock; the hammock is now less distance from the ground. Without the causal property of the weight of the cat influencing the stretch of the hammock fibers, the three perceptual objects are not

connected and lack meaningful information. Once causes are brought to bear the perceptual object is experiencing as more unified and hence more meaningful. This demonstrates the effect of background knowledge and experience on the contents of visual experience.

Siegel contrasts a visual experience where two events are perceived as happening in temporal succession but unconnected in any way and one where the same two events are perceived as causally connected, the one causing the other (qualitative causation, where there is no actual continuity of motion between apparent cause and apparent effect). Siegel argues that the contrast in phenomenology between the two experiences is due to non-causal contents; that is, the contrast is between the unity of the experiences where positing a causal connection unifies the experience. We might say that the inclination is to unify rather than to posit causality per se. This would open the way to argue that the contents of visual experience are not completely individuated by the objects perceived but only in part by those objects. It is not a non-cognitive response to an environmental trigger that determines what constitutes the visual experience of an object, event, action or feature but rather other features of the perceiver's ability to classify, understand and apply concepts.

Siegel's metaphysics of the contents of visual experience is corroborated by an ontological theory of auditory perception developed by Casey O'Callaghan.¹⁶ O'Callaghan rejects the philosophical view that sounds are secondary qualities (a mental phenomenon, simply part of us) and also rejects the scientific view that sounds are part of the fabric of the non-human world, in particular, "waves that propagate through a medium".¹⁷ According to O'Callaghan, sound is a distal event, that is, it is a sound of *something* and it is temporally extended.

Recent philosophical analysis of scientific research on auditory perception concludes that sounds are not synonymous with sound waves nor correctly understood as supervening on properties of sound waves. Sounds originate from wave phenomena but are not themselves wave phenomena. Instead, O'Callaghan argues that sounds are events and that "The event understanding not only allows for veridical auditory experience where the wave view does not – in the experience of location and duration – but predicts auditory illusions where the wave view cannot."¹⁸ This ontology of sound implicates both subject and object such that sound is understood as a perception of an object. While on the one hand, sound is always objective; it is perceived as the sound of some object,¹⁹ on the other hand, it is always relative to subject (perspectival²⁰) as the sound indicates spatial location and temporal qualities of that location relative to position of perceiver (accept in recordings or via loud speaker). Without perspectival content, according to O'Callaghan, sound would collapse into mere sensation.²¹ One could say that sound *represents* the world for us by locating aspects of our environment both spatially and temporally. By treating sound as an event, O'Callaghan demonstrates in what sense sounds are not simple, unmediated, sensory items.

O'Callaghan suggests there are common sensibles that are accessible to more than one perceptual modality. However, O'Callaghan's discussion of cross-modal perception confirms he is not suggesting perception is cognitive in an explicit sense or inferential. While O'Callaghan argues that there are common sensibles across modalities suggesting perception is the result of "integrating, weighing, comparing, and extracting significant information from the senses considered collectively"²² he nonetheless argues that this cross-modality is "neither cognitive nor inferential, but results from cross-modal perceptual interactions."²³ However, this is compatible with the possibility that certain ways of structuring perceptual sensibles is trained over time through certain kinds of experience with certain kinds of perceptual objects.

O'Callaghan's theory of sounds is nonetheless conducive to treating the perceptual object of art as cognitive in the sense that he scuttles the foundationalist empiricist notion of perception according to which each modality "delivers a discrete snapshot of the world from its unique perspective that is recognizably distinct from each of the others."²⁴ This is called the composite snapshot conception of perceptual experience.²⁵ This is a view O'Callaghan rejects based on a series of arguments designed initially to undermine the "sounds are sensible qualities" view, either primary or secondary. However, the representational nature of sounds (they represent spatial and temporal properties) as argued by O'Callaghan can serve as a basis from which to develop a cognitive theory of the perceptual experience of artworks.

The main upshot for the purposes of this paper is that our engagement with art is not a wallowing in the sensuous, unmediated by conceptions of various kinds. Art employs as a basis for rational communication, a principle of perception rather than the syntax of language; namely, the predisposition to read intention in order given order is something that is intentional and applied to perception by the perceiving subject both subpersonally as a condition of perception (as demonstrated by Siegel and O'Callaghan) and furthermore as an intended conscious reflection that brings us into contact with the values of our community.

Aesthetic Autonomy and the Senses

When we posit background knowledge or inherited conceptual schemes as the constraint on our meta-perception of artworks, the question of creativity comes to the fore. Creativity would seem to be premised on the possibility of autonomy from entrenched conceptual schemes. This is sometimes thought to imply that if creativity is possible, access to cognitively unmediated perceptual data must also be possible. However, there is an alternative way to understand the possibility of creativity and aesthetic autonomy.

Representation may be used in an artwork but it is not in the explicit content of the representation that the critical significance of art is to be found. The meaning we attribute to an art work is best understood in virtue of its relation to other works. How this relation is conceived is beholden to the conceptual schemes we have internalized through interactions within our communities. If the experience of the artwork as critique requires the mediation of concepts and literal language, then art at best might consolidate, reinforce and cement a new critical stance but not actually generate it. One might only recognize the critical stance of art toward some aspect or issue if one already has the concept of the particular critique in one's conceptual scheme.

In contrast, according to Kant, aesthetic autonomy reflected a human capacity. It might manifest variously in different historical or cultural settings, however Kant treated aesthetic autonomy as a principle of our cognitive apparatus. For Kant, aesthetic autonomy was an important feature of the human system of the mind and one he drew upon to explain the possibility of human agency (as opposed to the idea that the human being was defined by determinism, an idea which emerged into the mainstream during the enlightenment).

Von Sturmer would not characterize the principle on which the communicative capacity of his work is based as a matter of convention. Yet neither would he understand the content of his work as raw or unmediated. The concept of experiment that he employs and which he draws from the empirical sciences suggests something fundamental is intended, yet his art making employs configurations and relations which establish their own language. As can be perceived in the development from *The Field Equation* 2006 to *The Cinema Complex* 2010, his working process is generative where the elements suggest ever more combinations and inclusions as though each successive work in some sense generates itself. This is a common description of the creative process among artists, not only visual artists, but composers, writers and choreographers. In this sense, visual art is a language without employing literal determinate meanings.

Figure 2 (following pages):

Artist: Daniel von Sturmer

Title: The Cinema Complex, 2010

Medium: 7 screen HD video installation

Dimensions: Various

Venue: Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney, Australia

Acknowledgements: This project has been assisted by the Australia Council for the Arts. Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery.

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Figure 2.



Figure 2 contd.

Returning now to Adorno's aesthetic theory, aesthetic form is understood to be the basis of art's critical capacity in virtue of its non-discursive (non-literal) inner consistency. He discusses the basis of art's communicability indirectly in various passages such as, for example:

Although artworks are neither conceptual nor judgmental, they are logical ... Its logical process transpires in a sphere whose premises and givens are extralogical. The unity that artworks thereby achieve makes them analogous to the logic of experience, however much their technical procedures and their elements and the relation between them may distance them from those of practical empirical reality.²⁶

And:

In contrast to the semblance of inevitability that characterizes these forms in empirical reality, art's control over them and over their relation to materials makes their arbitrariness in the empirical world evident ... Paradoxically, it is precisely to the extent that art is released from the empirical world by its formal constituents that it is less illusory, less deluded by subjectively dictated lawfulness, than is empirical knowledge. That the logic of artworks is a derivative of discursive logic and not identical with it, is evident in that art's logic.²⁷

Here, art is recognized as employing an inner logic that is nonetheless different though derived from the logic that underpins language. The paradox is that while the representational aspect of art has a communicative capacity, art, according to Adorno, conveys its actual critique not in virtue of representation but in virtue of its particular aesthetic form (whose character, according to Adorno, depends on its relation to the system of art as a whole). The aesthetic form acts as a critical presence to the norms and conventions of the everyday.

Adorno is on the right track linking aesthetic form to a logic derived from discursiveness or language and is also right in the respect that art's significance is to be found in its exploitation of aesthetic form. However, his historical materialism is an obstacle for him when he seeks to find the grounds of aesthetic form. His reliance on the historical relations within the system of art does not go far enough. It is left to one of his students, Jürgen Habermas who, not limited by the same theoretical commitments, was able to find the foundations that would vindicate the significance Adorno attributed to art.

Habermas develops a neo-pragmatist theory of meaning and language. However, in Habermas's hands, aesthetic autonomy names the process of conceptual renewal rather than

a process unique to art. It is as if Habermas returns to Kant's original formulation of aesthetic autonomy and succeeds where Adorno does not, in replacing Kant's metaphysics with materialism – in Habermas' case a neo-pragmatism – without distorting the original concept of aesthetic autonomy. Habermas provides an updated theoretical foundation for the critical approach with which artists like von Sturmer approach their arts practice. In this case we will see that, neither creativity nor aesthetic autonomy implicates a primary or raw aesthetic perceiving.

Language and the Senses

The world is revealed to us through the concepts we have internalized throughout our lifetime. Our instinctual non-conceptually mediated sensing lasted as long as it took for us to learn to organize our experience into the units compatible with language. In other words, whereas infants see the world in terms of affordances to satisfy appetites, we perceive the world. After socialization and all that it implies, consciousness is concepts all the way out so to speak. The aesthetics of perception is no more the aesthetics of an unmediated given any more than the aesthetics of a chess game. How then is creativity possible?

A theory of language is relevant to this account to the extent that it explains how it is that art operates like a language but outside language's conceptual limitations where innovation and creativity is concerned. In an interesting twist to this issue, Habermas suggests that the very process whereby concepts evolve is due to the principle of aesthetic autonomy which he does not conceive as a principle confined to the world of art but rather in a Kantian vein, as a principle of meaning and language which can explain the possibility of human agency (creativity and conceptual innovation).

Habermas attributes to art the capacity to express aspects of experience that are not exhausted by literal language.²⁸ He writes that if art enters into everyday communicative practice then it “reaches into our cognitive interpretations and normative expectations and transforms the totality in which these moments are related to each other.”²⁹ This is the sense in which art can take place across the boundaries and at the edges of conventionally entrenched and endorsed concepts, norms and values. For Habermas, however, aesthetic autonomy is not unique to art; art simply takes its place along with other cultural artifacts that engender and occasion the development and communication of values and norms.

Habermas's interest in aesthetic autonomy does not originate nor remain with an interest in art per se. His interest is in the possibility of innovation. According to Habermas, the terms and concepts that make up a language precede the objects that they refer to in the world. The terms and concepts are determined by human interests as they emerge within

communities of language users.³⁰ Habermas recognizes three types of interest: technical, social, and emancipatory.³¹ Technical interests pertain to our need to control our environment by understanding it. Social interests relate to our need to form communities, while emancipatory interests pertain to our need to conceive of ourselves as free and autonomous in our actions and thoughts. While these human interests are constant, they manifest in a variety of ways in the context of different communities of language users. Consequently, the relation of concepts or words to the world is not fixed.

For Habermas, discursive practices get their traction on reality through the interaction between the social and natural realms in lived experience. When our concepts (and hence our terms) lead to failed predictions, frustrated actions and so on, they are revised. However, the nature and degree of disparities we perceive will be contingent to a significant extent on the conceptual framework we bring to bear on such occasions and this depends on the cultural perspective of the perceivers. This idea is exemplified in von Sturmer's response to a question concerning the public's reception to his work:

Twenty years from now I can't guarantee that my thinking is going to be such that I can really ... [reconstruct a particular installation] in the same way, so I might need those instructions to go back to and ... revisit the work if you like ... key concepts within the work may be enduring ... but then who is to say that a painting made 600 years ago is the same painting that we look at now. You can't say that.³²

For Habermas, the term "aesthetic" names the very process by which it is possible for sense perception and the construction of meaning to acquire a history. Aesthetic autonomy can be understood as a formal component of Habermas's formal pragmatics. Understood in this way, aesthetic autonomy is compatible with Kant's conception as it allows for human innovation, creativity and agency without postulating any principle over and above that required for cognition in Kant's system or language in Habermas's system. Of particular significance to our purposes is that aesthetic autonomy as conceived by Habermas, extends Kant's conception to provide the grounds for understanding the cognitive mediation between world and art as something other than literal concepts which would thwart genuine creativity. Instead the rational foundation of aesthetic form is what I have referred to as the capacity to find intention-in-order. Von Sturmer:

Any space we create mediates our experience within it. But further than that ... [our experience is] mediated by language ... things we know intimately ... become springboards in their own way for much more complex philosophical thinking by virtue of the fact that they are framed by the video [artwork].³³

An understanding of aesthetic autonomy grounded in Habermas's philosophy of meaning and language, fleshes out the principle of aesthetic form and art. The principle of aesthetic form represents a principle of language, and in particular, that principle which makes conceptual innovation and renewal possible. The potency of this notion of aesthetic autonomy is that it brings art into the realm of society, as a critique of society in virtue of this very autonomy. We need not rely on a naïve conception of unmediated visual experience in order to ground the possibility of creativity.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that art can be understood as having a critical function not in virtue of literalness but in virtue of the principle of aesthetic form understood as a human capacity to perceive intention-in-order. Furthermore, when the principle of aesthetic form which is derived from Kant's aesthetic theory is understood as a key principle in language evolution, we can understand this capacity as a core feature of our communicative capacity rather than a peculiar feature of art postulated in an *ad hoc* fashion. The ubiquity of intention-in-order in our way of construing experience, and our elevation of this tendency to the highest of values, is seen again and again in all domains of endeavor from the discovery of the principles of perception and cognition to the awe and wonder experienced in the natural world to the constraints that artists place upon their practice.

I have introduced two principles to account for our response to art: (i) the principle of aesthetic form as a capacity to find intention-in-order and (ii) the principle of art which is the meta-narrative excited by conceiving of something as art where one attributes to the artist not only the intention to make something for another's reflection but to exhibit a particular attitude, orientation or feeling to the items included in the artwork. The upshot of the principle of aesthetic form and the principle of art is that meaning in art is not simply given. On the one hand, it prompts the construction of meaning when it provides the appropriate triggers to the intention-in-order response. On the other, from the intricate structures and patterns that artists inherit and from which they develop their own styles and "orders," to the inherited conceptual schemes which we may have learnt to associate with certain styles, genres, and "orders," an artwork may be open to a range of interpretations depending on the cultural back ground and experience of the perceiver. The senses are subsumed under such constraints. We can conclude that the aesthetic of the senses involves concepts all the way out.

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Von Sturmer, Daniel. Unpublished interview transcript, in interview with Jennifer A. McMahon, Melbourne, 2nd December 2009.

¹ Jürgen Habermas's theory of language will be drawn upon to ground this claim. There are many mediating factors in the evolution of language. Key concepts in Habermas's account are: colonialization, reification, and discourse ethics. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, T. McCarthy (trans.), Vols. 1-2 (Boston: Beacon Press 1984-87).

² If the idea of art as critique is not precluded by treating experience as conceptualised all the way out in a manner broadly enough construed to encompass the ideas of William James, Adorno, Habermas, John Dewey and John McDowell, then we are owed an explanation as to why not. Habermas's theory of communicative action does most to address the possibility of genuine innovation. Compare: William James, "The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience," Chapter 5 in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York: Longman Green and Co, 1912): 137-154; Jay. M. Bernstein, "Re-enchanting nature" and "McDowell's response" in *Reading McDowell: on Mind and World*, edited by Nicholas H. Smith (London & New York: Routledge, 2002) 217-45 & 297-300 respectively. Bernstein criticises McDowell for not accommodating the possibility of genuine innovation and creativity in his theory of the realization and actualisation of conceptual capacities "all the way out" so to speak. In contrast, where Habermas is concerned, if art is a genuine avenue for critique, it would need to operate outside the "colonisation" of the "life-world" by the dominant corporate and government institutions.

³ Adorno is much maligned by certain philosophical traditions but among other things he is a very useful source for interpreting Kant's aesthetic theory. Adorno may situate Kant's concepts within a historical materialism after Hegel yet they are illustrative of Kant's ideas nonetheless. However, as Adorno does not entirely succeed in freeing himself from the Idealist legacy, there is a certain clash of theoretical commitments between Idealism and historical materialism resulting in the often paradoxical nature of Adorno's key concepts where the artwork is concerned.

⁴ Daniel von Sturmer represented Australia in their main pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2007.

⁵ This is an idea explored by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁶ Daniel von Sturmer interviewed by Jennifer A. McMahon in Melbourne 2nd December 2009.

⁷ Von Sturmer in interview, 2009.

⁸ Von Sturmer in interview, 2009.

⁹ Thomas Reid. *An Inquiry into the Human Mind: On the Principles of Common Sense*. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1774/1997).

¹⁰ James J. Gibson. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

¹¹ Susanna Siegel. *The Contents of Visual Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹² Siegel, *Visual Experience*, 87.

¹³ Albert Michotte. *The Perception of Causality* (New York: Basic Books, 1945/1963).

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- ¹⁴ Siegel, *Visual Experience*, 115.
- ¹⁵ Siegel, *Visual Experience*, 117-121.
- ¹⁶ Casey O'Callaghan. *Sounds: A Philosophical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- ¹⁷ O'Callaghan, *Sounds*, 91.
- ¹⁸ O'Callaghan, *Sounds*, 92.
- ¹⁹ O'Callaghan, *Sounds*, 168-171.
- ²⁰ O'Callaghan, *Sounds*, 147.
- ²¹ O'Callaghan, *Sounds*, 157.
- ²² O'Callaghan, *Sounds*, 171.
- ²³ O'Callaghan, *Sounds*, 172.
- ²⁴ O'Callaghan, *Sounds*, 170.
- ²⁵ O'Callaghan, *Sounds*, 169.
- ²⁶ Theodor Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory*, 1970, trans. and ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor. (London: The Athlone Press, 1999 paperback) , 136.
- ²⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 138.
- ²⁸ Jürgen Habermas, 'Extract from Questions and Counterquestions' 1984, in Clive Cazeaux (ed) *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (London & New York, 2000) 278-81: 280.
- ²⁹ Habermas, *Counterquestion.*, 280.
- ³⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, T. McCarthy (trans.), Vols. 1-2 (Boston: Beacon Press 1984-87), Vol.1, 100.
- ³¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Jeremy J. Shapiro (trans.) (London: Heinemann 1972), 311-4.
- ³² Von Sturmer in interview, 2009.
- ³³ Von Sturmer in interview, 2009.