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Abstract:

The question of the relationship between art and knowledge and whether and in what sense art can be regarded as a form of knowledge has been addressed from different perspectives but it still does not have secure grounds in contemporary aesthetics. The argument involves rather skeptical attitudes – from Plato to Kant and throughout the dominance of positivist tradition in Western philosophy in the first half of the 20th century – as well as cognitivist approaches, such as James O. Young's view of art as a source of knowledge, which has the capacity to provide both propositional and practical knowledge. The "linguistic turn" in contemporary thought and the ensued iconization of language in western culture led to the identification of cognitive potential with discourse, resulting in inequitable disregard of sensory awareness and turning the human experiences and cognition into the product of language. The submission of iconicity to semantics and reducing the pictorial to interpretable text without sensory significance led to the questioning of the cognitive aspect of visuality.

The hermeneutical perspective, drawing upon Michael Polanyi's view of all knowledge as established in relation to tacit thought, considers art as embodying tacit knowledge and emphasizes the importance of the inherent inexhaustibility of meaning in art that can contribute to the inquiry. Recognizing that knowledge is not always reducible to language, such perspective liberates knowledge from the dominance of the propositional and provides further insights for the phenomenology of art as a creative practice.

CAN ART PROVIDE KNOWLEDGE?
ON THE COGNITIVE VALUE OF IMAGES

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No doubt that the ways of representation in arts are fundamentally different from those in the sciences and both realms contribute to knowledge in radically different ways. However, while the ways to explicate how art can enhance the faculty of judgment and practical knowledge might be relatively obvious in literary works, the question of how visual works can provide the same kinds of knowledge is more ambiguous. Consequently, the question of epistemic potential of visual representation is even more challenging.
Image as a system constructed according to the immanent laws with its own iconic sense - which determines its difference from reality as well as from discourse – challenges perception, because a conceptual, abstract tendency of perception is incompatible with a sensual particularity of the image (Boehm). At the same time, it allows a multiplicity of experience made possible by simultaneity inherent in the image provided that we understand the act of seeing as comprising simultaneity and consecutiveness as well as the unconscious, pre-conceptual processes. It is the expressive potential of the pictorial and the specificity of art as an experiential and perceptual modality embodying representational meanings that distinguishes it as a distinctive form of knowledge. In an endeavor to defy the approach of semiotics and the epistemology of science that insist on amodality of knowledge and its dependence on discursive context, this paper rejects the reducibility of knowledge to language and embraces the approach that advocates „disestablishing the view of cognition as dominantly and aggressively linguistic“ (Stafford).

Keywords: Visual art; pictorial representation; art and knowledge; aesthetic cognitivism

Before delving into the complex relationship between art and knowledge, I shall make a methodological remark. The question poses a broad intellectual scope encompassing a diverse array of discourses and entailing multiple philosophical and psychological perspectives. Consequently, it is essential to underscore the limitation of this endeavor, as providing an exhaustive account of the epistemology of art would be a formidable task in this confined space. This paper will focus on elucidating the complexity of the issue, accentuating key aspects, and providing general observations and perspectives without technical scrutiny of the particulars.

The question of whether and in what sense art can be regarded as a form of knowledge has been addressed from different perspectives but it still does not have secure grounds in contemporary aesthetics. The argument involves rather skeptical attitudes – from Plato to Kant and throughout the dominance of positivist tradition in Western philosophy in the first half of the 20th century – as well as cognitivist approaches, such as James O. Young's view of art as a source of knowledge which has the capacity to provide both propositional and practical knowledge.

The root of the core complexities within the presented discourse lies in the very intricacies inherent in the concepts of knowledge and cognition. With the aim of illuminating the complications and reimagining the epistemological dimensions of art and artistic encounter, I will concentrate on what I perceive as the critical tasks within the presented discourse. This involves challenging the perspectives of semiotics and the epistemology of science that insist on amodality of knowledge and its reliance on discourse, thus rejecting the reducibility of knowledge to language. Furthermore, while acknowledging the subtle boundaries between different aspects of cognition and rejecting a sharp segregation between the intellectual and the artistic or the epistemic and the aesthetic realms, I intend to illustrate the importance of recognizing the integrity of aesthetic experience as a cognitive process.

The first clarification that needs to be established pertains to the conceptual underpinnings of knowledge. Firstly, a distinction must be drawn between knowledge and information. Not all that qualifies as knowledge is propositional or counts as information; there is also knowledge of how to do something or practical knowledge. Furthermore, we must differentiate between verbal knowledge and experiential knowledge – the latter being particularly relevant within the context of aesthetic experience –

as well as between the empirical realm of scientific knowledge and the intangible dimensions of artistic domain and aesthetic comprehension. Another important remark within the presented context relates to a seemingly evident but not always unequivocal observation that the areas of inquiry into which arts and sciences provide insight are different and complementary. It is a mistake to compare knowledge obtained through art with knowledge obtained through sciences and to seek equivalents for scientific attributes in the artistic realm. Both fields contribute to knowledge by enhancing our understanding in radically different ways. In our inquiry, knowledge is comprehended as encompassing understanding and entailing not only a conceptual aspect but also a kind of sensitive awareness connected with perception or experiential knowledge – knowledge of (as well as through) our inner experiences. And when we consider learning from art and cognitive engagement, we imply the broad concept of cognition as involving not only intellectual but sensory and non-conceptual aspects as well.

The necessity for the above elucidations arises from the preceding philosophical underpinning of contemporary Western culture. The "linguistic turn" in contemporary thought and the ensuing iconization of language led to the identification of cognitive potential with discourse, resulting in inequitable disregard of sensory awareness. From Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, structuralist and post-structuralist theories brought about human experiences and cognition taking a back seat to the dominance of discourse, turning them into the product of language. The subordination of iconicity to semantics and reducing the pictorial to interpretable text without sensory significance led to the questioning of the cognitive aspect of visuality, necessitating alternative views of "intelligence of sight" and the need to "disestablish the view of cognition as dominantly and aggressively linguistic" (Stafford 1996, 7). Elliot Eisner goes even further and "blames" Plato for shaping our traditional approaches to the conception of knowledge, claiming that the model that Plato's ideas have provided has impacted our conception of intelligence and of rationality itself, and hence, they should have provided the model that has shaped our conception of science (Eisner 2007, 4).

However, even before the views about the foundations of knowledge rooted in positivism and scientism were called into question by developments in the hermeneutic tradition, and before the shifts in philosophical

method marked as the "visual turn" and "interpretive turn" took place, Michael Polanyi had stated that we know more than we can tell (Polanyi 1966, 4). This statement illuminates the inherent limitations of language in encompassing the entirety of human understanding, thus challenging the dominant paradigm of rationality. This is a profound philosophical insight that goes beyond explicit knowledge and recognizes that knowledge is not always reducible to language. The hermeneutical perspective, drawing upon Polanyi's view of all knowledge as established in relation to tacit thought, considers art as embodying tacit knowledge and emphasizes the importance of the inherent inexhaustibility of meaning in art that can contribute to the inquiry. By acknowledging its diverse forms and sources, it liberates knowledge from the dominance of the propositional and provides further insights into the phenomenology of art as a creative practice. Encompassing a broad range of implicit, experiential, and intuitive knowledge that is not conceptually explicable, this notion of tacit holds art as a creative process embodying implicit non-discursive knowledge to which artworks owe their expressive power and ability to evoke emotions. This perspective suggests that art has the capacity to show what we cannot say and aligns with Ludwig Wittgenstein's assertion that "what can be shown cannot be said" (Wittgenstein 2010, 45). The placement of art and aesthetic experience beyond the realm of intelligible and the claim that they cannot be fully articulated by conceptual analysis allude to the importance, and perhaps the primacy of implicit knowledge, i.e. our immediate experience and non-conceptual cognition in artistic understanding.

The perspective which embraces the irreducibility of aesthetic experience to discourse and acknowledges the significance of embodied experience in our understanding necessarily entails the capability of art to evoke a pre-reflective, non-discursive understanding. This inherent capacity art can manifest in diverse ways across various artworks and unfolds peculiarly within the pictorial medium. In Gottfried Boehm's *Hermeneutik des Bildes,* the capacity of visual medium to elicit a pre-conceptual form of comprehension is ascribed to the particularity of the visual language as a field of "iconic difference". According to Boehm, image as a system constructed according to the immanent laws with its own iconic sense – which determines its difference from reality as well as from discourse – challenges perception, because a conceptual, abstract tendency of perception is incompatible with a sensual particu-

larity of the image (as cited in Bryl 1995, 96). This distinctiveness of the pictorial medium brings the conceptual aspect of perception to a halt forcing it to move back to the pre-conceptual stage (ibid.).
Hence, it is the pictorial identity and the pictorial potency of the artwork that enables activating deeper meanings and triggering profound interpretations in the viewer. This brings us to another fundamental elucidation that in the context of the cognitive potential of art, particularly, concerning pictorial representation, it is essential to acknowledge a work of art as a field of meaning creation and to prioritize its significance as a realm where meaning is generated, rather than perceive it primarily as a visual material conveying information. Simultaneously, we must not overlook its essential dimension as an artwork, thereby recognizing its artistic integrity as well as the aspect of pure visuality.
Undoubtedly, a picture can be a valuable source of information serving as a document or a testimony (a sketch or a photograph); it can function as a historical artifact, or as a pictorial scheme capable of concisely communicating a vast array of information or providing a laconic visualization of ethical and aesthetic systems within a specific time and place. However, in such cases, a picture does not necessarily represent in the interpretive sense; rather, it primarily functions as a mere illustrative testimony. A work of art has a cognitive value as a representation, which enhances and enriches our understanding of the world and ourselves. In the case of visual arts, it is specifically the employment of pictorial expression that distinguishes artwork as a distinctive form of knowledge. Unlike Plato who viewed art as a distorted picture of reality taking us further away from it and considered art misleading precisely due to it being a representation, James.O.Young argues that the cognitive value of artworks depends on their being representations (Young 2001, 34). Moreover, he restricts *arthood* to works with a cognitive function claiming that only works of art that are important sources of knowledge have a high total aesthetic value (ibid., 127). Other aesthetic cognitivists are not so radical in this respect. According to Berys Gaut, the aesthetic value of a work is partly determined by its cognitive value, and even without having cognitive significance the artwork can have other aesthetic merits (Gaut 2006, 123). Similarly, Gordon Graham believes that some works are valuable only for their aesthetic or hedonic value (Graham 2005, 58). But what makes a work of art cognitively significant? And how exactly does it perform this function? Even those who are skeptical of the cogni-

tive potential of art agree that art can cause certain states in the audience by arousing emotions or provoking thoughts and has an ability to provide deep insights into human nature in general. The point where complication arises is when a dichotomy between the cognitive and the aesthetic or the cognitive and the emotive is discerned and when the cognitive potential of art is established against its truth value.

The source of the entanglement related to the division between cognitive and emotive aspects of aesthetic encounter lies in a disregard for the integrity of the experiences integral to artistic contemplation. This misleading differentiation is reflected in Nelson Goodman's statement in *Languages of Art* where he writes: "On the one side, we put sensation, perception, inference, conjecture, all nerveless inspection and investigation, fact and truth; on the other, pleasure, pain, interest, satisfaction, disappointment, all brainless affective response, liking, and loathing. This pretty effectively keeps us from seeing that in aesthetic experience the emotions function cognitively. The work of art is apprehended through the feelings as well as through the senses" (Goodman 1968, 247-48). Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge art as a tactile, sensory modality and comprehend the image as a sensory experience. The sensual and the sensually perceptible – from textures and sensations to emotional states – can be portrayed by visual means; abstract concepts can similarly be captured and visualized through color, texture, or light, evoking aural experiences. Some great works even grasp and convey the ontological depth of human condition (Martin Heidegger's analysis of Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes could serve as a profound exemplification of how a work of art can be the disclosure of truth of being (Heidegger 2008, 158-162). Aesthetic appreciation is unattainable in conceptual contemplation, without engaging sensory and affective aspects of our perception. Mikel Dufrenne tried to show the importance of feeling in our responses to art and describe a distinct kind of sensibility realized in aesthetic experience. He introduced the concept of "affective a priori"[1] claiming that affective aspects, such as emotions, moods, and sensations, which are part of our pre-reflective experience, play a fundamental role in shaping our aesthetic judgments and responses. Dufrenne considers

1 Building upon Kant's notion of a priori knowledge (which is independent of empirical content and is innate and universal), this concept implies that our knowledge of the expressiveness of aesthetic objects is not derived from empirical generalizations, but is rather "immediately immanent in feeling".

the source of a form of knowledge we gain in aesthetic experience to be feeling or affectivity which he understands as a mode of perception: "feeling is simply another direction which perception can take…feeling, in which perception is realized, is not emotion. It is knowledge. Feeling is…a capacity of receptivity, a sensibility to a certain world, and an aptitude for perceiving that world" (Cothey 1990, 81). Therefore, the root of the problem lies within unjust neglect of the cognitive significance of the emotive and affective aspects of the aesthetic response. If we recognize these as cognitive modes of perception, the cognitive potential of art would no longer be questionable; as it is beyond doubt that representation is perceptual and art is primarily a perceptive modality. The second moment that has given rise to controversy pertains to the question of the truth value of artworks. More precisely, complications arise when the concept of truth is conceived in propositional terms. A cognitivist approach entails that a work of art as a sensual representation unites two integral features – the truth and the aesthetic aspect. In Hegelian terms, whereas philosophy is a conceptual grasp of the truth, art presents the truth by means of sensuous images. This implies that truth can be expressed in non-propositional form. However, it is essential to recognize not only various forms in which truth can manifest beyond traditional propositions but also a different mode of truth. The truth as an aim of cognition is categorized as scientific truth which is propositional and empirically verifiable and poetic or artistic truth which, because works of art are works of imagination, cannot be subject to external reference and empirical verification. The only such test that it can be submitted to is testing it against our own experience. Hence, while propositional truth is established based on objective criteria and in relation to actual facts, artistic truth does not necessarily need to correspond with what is objectively true. The artist's perspective cannot be true or false; it can only be such in relation to its own artistic aim. Therefore, artistic truth is not established in relation to propositional truth, but on the contrary, it concerns its own truth. Aristotle, whose ideas can be considered the earliest cognitivist account of art, maintains that art is capable of capturing and portraying universal truths stating that "poetry is something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history; for while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts" (Aristotle 1965, 43-44). However, it would be incorrect to assume that cognitive theory attributes

the utmost importance to the meaning and truth embodied in a work of art. In fact, cognitive theory does not establish itself in terms of truth and this is an essential point to make. Neither Goodman nor Graham speaks of art in terms of truth; Graham even emphasizes that cognitivist theory should be regarded as a claim about understanding rather than truth. However, even though he rejects Douglas Morgan's criticism against the cognitivist theory[2] precisely by replacing the concept of truth with understanding, for Peter Lamarque this very claim is an indication of the slipperiness of the concept of artistic cognitivism. While Lamarque does not deny that works of art can convey truth and impart knowledge, he rejects that truth is an artistic value (Lamarque 2006, 127).

The viewpoint that it is not a prerequisite for an artwork to have cognitive merits for it to be aesthetically valuable and that some works are to be valued for their beauty or capacity to give pleasure is not entirely unquestionable. Needless to say, there are values other than truth, and pleasure and beauty are among them; but without an aim behind our aesthetic cognition, is not the experience of beauty aestheticism, and experiencing pleasure hedonism? Precisely because Graham draws a distinction between the cognitive and the aesthetic, Lamarque calls his cognitivism "half-hearted".

While Lamarque's claim against aesthetic cognitivism can be rejected by acknowledging that he understands truth strictly in propositional terms, he is perhaps right when he remarks that cognitivists "tread a difficult line between, on the one hand wanting to keep a conception of truth sufficiently like that employed by philosophers or scientists to give weight to the idea of cognitive value, and, on the other, seeking to secure something special about the truth achievement of the arts" (ibid., 129).[3] Nonetheless, it seems that the underlying source of the problem is again, a distinct separation of the epistemological and aesthetic aspects of art. The simplest way to show that such demarcation is not justifiable is to look at the examples of literary works where their interdependence is most evident. It is obvious how an exquisitely written literary work with several aesthetic merits would lose its artistic value if it conveyed unethical messages or was a meaningless narrative. To provide

2 In his essay 'Must Art Tell the Truth?' (1969) Morgan develops an argument, which implies that 'cognitive significance' must be spelled out in terms of true propositions.

3 This problem extends further to the contemporary humanities in general, which strives to rival the exact and applied sciences in their aspiration for the same extent of verifiability.

the example from visual art, let us once again refer to Van Gogh's painting: if the depicted object in the painting (a pair of peasant shoes, in this case) only had aesthetic and hedonic value – meaning if it were merely pretty or beautifully rendered – the painting would hold only decorative significance. It would lack the capacity to unveil ontological truth and the existential depth of the human condition. Hence, it is evident that the two aspects are necessarily interdependent. If a work of art holds a high degree of aesthetic significance, it will inherently possess cognitive value and vice versa.

Both literature and visual arts employ illustrative representation based on mimetic expression, achieved not only through the mimesis of form but also by evoking appropriate experiences. An abstract painting can evoke specific emotions and non-visual experiences through the use of combinations of lines and colors. Precisely because the viewer grasps the similarities between the experience of actual objects and the depicted image and instinctively forges pertinent connections, the aesthetic experience unfolds.

If we agree that only cognitively significant works of art can possess aesthetic value, then we can assert that cognitive value of the artwork defines its aesthetic, and consequently, hedonic value. From this, it follows that there always is a cognitive aim behind aesthetic enjoyment. No doubt, we experience pleasure when we contemplate a beautiful painting but unlike enjoyment derived from sensations where the sensation is an aim in itself and an object of enjoyment, aesthetic pleasure is a far more complex experience. While it is obvious that aesthetic pleasure can, in some cases, be related to sensations, it is also clear that aesthetic enjoyment can be derived from seeing beauty and harmony in natural artifacts or art, or beauty of mathematical proof. In such cases, it consists in experiencing some type of internal sense which is integral to experiencing beauty. In the process of contemplating beauty realized in art, we gain access to our inner states which become evoked and resonate with external stimuli. In other words, we perceive something as beautiful because our senses recognize the harmony and proportion that exists within the object of perception. This act of recognition and appreciation is a cognitive act, as in this process, we uncover the unfolding inner experience which grants access to a previously concealed dimension of being. If experiencing beauty and pleasure (both cognitive and aesthetic) is a human requirement and if there is a cognitive aim

behind aesthetic enjoyment, also if (as Kant argued (Kant 1994, 98) the satisfaction which determines the judgment of taste is "disinterested" and aesthetic experience has no aim external to itself, then the only candidate for such internal aim is self-knowledge and self-realization.
Just as drawing rigid boundaries between the epistemological and aesthetic aspects of the artwork would be misleading, so too a sharp differentiation between art and intellectual inquiry would be limiting – clearly, not suggesting that they are identical. The first claim, as we just showed, can be substantiated by observing the peculiarity of the process of aesthetic experience and the logic of the artwork itself. As for the latter, aside from the phenomenological aspect, the argument rests on the way art functions. While art does not present an argument, by providing a perspective it can have an impact on our perception. Through directing our perception, and hence, our mind, artworks illuminate our experience of a particular issue and can prompt us to conceptual thought. In this sense, and more importantly, also because of its specificity as experiential and perceptual modality embodying representational meanings, art is a form of knowledge, as "sensual experience, as an aspect of mind, is not a matter of passive seeing and hearing but of active looking and listening" (Graham 2005, 64).
While a work of art can undoubtedly influence our perception and enhance our understanding, the means of representation in art are different from those employed in other forms of inquiry. As has already been mentioned above, it is the representative power of the work that enhances understanding and establishes the artwork as a source of knowledge. To delve deeper into how art fulfills its cognitive function, further exploration of art as representation is essential. Distinguishing the sort of representation employed in the arts from the representation employed in the sciences is crucial due to prevalent misconceptions and problematic implications that arise when art is regarded as a semantic representation. Semiotic theories of representation tend to focus on generating meaning through a system of signification and on interpretative aspects of representational meaning in art rather than the direct perceptual experience. Such an approach undermines the importance of sensory experiences and the aesthetic dimension of the artwork and neglects to recognize art as "constitutive, not merely illustrative, of basic mental operations, such as intuiting, inferring, associating, hallucinating, feeling arousal, and categorizing" (Stafford 2007, 2).

To demonstrate the inaccuracy of considering the language of art as a semantic signification and to highlight the distinct nature of visual language governed by its unique logic, it is necessary to elucidate the substantial differences between the discursive and the pictorial realms. One of the key distinctions concerns the interrelation between representation and representational meaning. Unlike semantic representation which is strictly conventional (a propositional statement is defined by a finite set of linguistic elements and rules), visual conventions are considerably more general. While a specific statement can be expressed in different ways using different interchangeable words, without undergoing any alterations in its underlying meaning, modification of formal elements in illustrative representation will change its representational meaning. Furthermore, propositional meaning is contingent on specific linguistic conventions that establish particular sequential interrelations (changing the sequence of words in a sentence would lead to a loss of its meaning). Conversely, visual representation does not adhere to a finite set of pictorial components with fixed meanings; Instead, various objects can be depicted using the same visual conventions (e.g., lines and colors), and a specific object can be represented in multiple ways. In response to semiotic theories which hold that representational meaning depends upon pictorial structure, Richard Wollheim even notes that "in the relevant, or combinatory sense, pictures lack structure" (Wollheim 1998, 218). What is implied here is the impossibility of functional categorization of the picture according to the importance of the parts in relation to the whole. In his theory of representation, to describe the way a viewer perceives images as representing something other than what is explicitly depicted Wollheim introduces the concept of 'seeing-in' – a special perceptual skill, which is prior, both logically and historically, to representation. The phenomenology of a respective experience (where it manifests itself) implies being visually aware at once of the pictorial surface and what it represents – the feature he calls "twofoldness" (ibid., 221), identified with two simultaneous perceptions, as opposed to two alternating perceptions suggested in Gombrich's account (as cited in Wollheim 1998, 221).[4] This simultaneity – which distinguishes the nature of the pictorial from the linear logic of text – is a fundamental

4 Later, Wollheim reconceived the term and understood it as a single experience with two aspects – configurational and recognitional (Wollheim 1998, 221).

feature of image perception and, as an "accumulated possibility" inherent in the image (which involves the dynamics between the parts and the whole), allows a multiplicity of experience and even simultaneity of diverse experiences.

The relation between consecutiveness and simultaneity of the image in which the seeing is performed is essential in determining and understanding the sensual emergence of meaning and relates to the apprehension of an artwork as a whole, as a unity of meaning and pure visuality. Aesthetic appreciation is achieved in the act of seeing and dwelling in a work as a whole. As soon as we begin to elucidate the particulars of a complex entity such as a work of art through close scrutiny and conceptualization, essential meanings slip away and the wholeness of the entity is destroyed. As "It is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning" (Polanyi 1966, 18). *Indwelling* is the most appropriate interpetaion of the artwork.

In recent psychological research, useful empirical evidence is provided for the claims of aesthetic cognitivism. Regarding simultaneity as a distinctive feature of image identity and image perception, as Semir Zeki has shown, despite each pictorial element being processed by a different micropart of the visual brain, all layers are reflected in consciousness at the same time (Stafford 2007, 36). When contemplating a painting as a complex representational system, the viewer not only absorbs information and follows the compositional logic of the image but also translates unconscious impulses and sensations into a conscious response. Recent studies in neuroaesthetics suggest a correlation between aesthetic experiences and cognitive engagement and provide compelling observations of how the brain processes and responds to aesthetic stimuli. With regard to art's cognitive function, findings in the field of neuroimaging studies are particularly interesting: neuroscientific research using the techniques such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) has shown that engaging with aesthetic stimuli causes the activation of certain brain regions associated with cognitive processing.[5]

5 The following are a few examples of studies in neuroaesthetics which suggest correlation between aesthetic experiences and cognitive engagement: "Impact of Contour on Aesthetic Judgments and Approach-Avoidance Decisions in Architecture" by Vartanian, O et al.; "A Model of Aesthetic Appreciation and Aesthetic Judgments" by Leder, H et al.; "Neural Correlates of Beauty" by Kawabata, H., & Zeki, S.

While psychological, behavioral, and critical responses to art may vary depending on the viewer, artistic engagement is not a unilateral process that excludes the reverse trajectory. By presenting a point of view and a perspective, works of art guide us to new cognitive states. And as we direct our mental and sensory projection toward an artwork, we simultaneously view the world through its lens. As Barbara Stafford argues "sophisticated sensory modalities of art are phenomenological and epistemological structures that simultaneously help us differentiate as well as construct aspects of our experience" (Stafford 1996. 3).

This brings us to the point which is essential to our inquiry and which pertains to the significant contribution art makes to knowledge by providing a unique perspective. It is precisely this particular moment which sets apart aesthetic enjoyment derived from art and that derived from natural artifacts. If the sole purpose of aesthetic enjoyment were merely to experience pleasure then appreciating the beauty in art and experiencing the beauty of natural artifacts would be indistinguishable. However, what we seek in engaging with art is the artist's viewpoint, the possibility of interaction, and acquiring a fresh perspective, which reveals what might otherwise have gone unnoticed and offers new ways to interpret the world. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, employing the full expressive potential that the pictorial has to offer is essential, as it is the iconic sense of the visual medium that determines its identity as a unique entity. Devoid of this essential constituent, the nuanced aspects of the artistic encounter become absent, thereby depriving the observer of the profound subtleties that imbue aesthetic experience.

Conceptual art stands as an illustration of how the diminishing significance (in some cases, even complete elimination) of the visual and material elements can limit art's potency when it becomes a mere statement. Henry Flynt's declaration of the concept art as a kind of art of which the material is language (Flynt 1963) entailed the view of art as a discursive entity intertwined with science, mathematics, and logic. The view of art as a research method parallel to the methodologies of natural and social sciences, which should be engaged in the study of art itself as a method of inquiry transforms art from a subject of interpretation to an object of investigation concerning the nature of art itself. The absence of the material object i.e. the transformation of the signifier into conceptual information replaced the dialectical encounter with the artwork with social-economic and political critique.

W. J. T. Mitchel categorizes self-referential imagery as "metapictures" (Mitchell 1994), images that are not merely representations of something but reflect on their own nature, the nature of pictorial representation itself. While the notion of images as self-theorizing entities might seem to challenge the conventions of representation, one can argue that the self-reflexivity and self-consciousness of such pictures can sometimes lead to a repetition and a reproduction of traditional norms rather than challenging them,[6] or that the notion of imaging formulating its own questions and generating its own answers undermines the sensory experience of the artwork.

To return to the artworks which primarily use semantic representation (in fact, self-referential images could be counted among them) they rely upon additional discourse to be interpretable and becoming acquainted with the discourse rather than the immediate artistic experience is a necessary component of their apprehension. While such images can offer a perspective and an insight, in the condition of the absence of pictorial significance within a work of art, one might question whether language could serve as a more effective means to convey the meaning. Indeed, to explore the complex relationship between representation and reality, or to address the question of the limitations of representation, one would rather consider reading Plato's work than contemplate Magritte's "The Treachery of Images" or Kosuth's "One and Three Chairs".

The idea of self-referentiality of an image and the notion of art as a form of intellectual inquiry is rooted in conceptualism which in turn, was inspired by the activation of linguistic theories in Anglo-American analytical philosophy as well as in structuralist and post-structuralist continental philosophy. Contemporary artistic practices that regard art as a form of research, including practice-led research or practice-based research and arts-informed research also share connections with the approaches discussed above, particularly the philosophical legacy of conceptual art.

Nonetheless, if we acknowledge that creative aesthetic knowledge is more basic than conceptual knowledge and recognize the primacy of the non-discoursive structure of consciousness, then it follows that art can reveal deeper truths about human nature. Kant's separation of cogni-

6 See Rosalind E. Krauss's "The Originality of the Avant-Garde" in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Krauss 1985).

tion (which, in his view, can only be conceptual (Kant 1998, 133) from imagination (which relates to sensory intuitions (ibid., 256-57) allows for a distinct mode of aesthetic perception where the faculties of imagination and understanding precede conceptual thought; they are freed from the conceptual constraints and allow an immediate contemplative engagement with the aesthetic object. If we accommodate the idea that aesthetic experience involves non-conceptual aspects of apprehension and that direct knowledge gained through art is primarily perceptual, while also rejecting Kant's view that all cognition is conceptual, many complications will be resolved.

As a final point of our inquiry, I draw upon the statement by Michael Brötje, the founder of the existential-hermeneutical science of art, which, in my view, aptly underscores the distinctiveness of art as a unique form of knowledge. "It is absolutely out of question – remarks Brötje – to treat the history of art as an aesthetic commentary paralleling the general history of humankind. Through art, humankind writes "another history" – the history of constantly renewed self-assurance as to what is ultimate and unconditioned" (Bryl 1995, 102-103). Transcending the confines of discursive and propositional limitations and recognizing diverse forms and origins of knowledge enables us to rise above the binary division between the epistemic and the aesthetic. This recognition allows us to acknowledge the inherent integrity of human nature and aesthetic apprehension, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of artistic experience as a distinctive source of knowledge and a pathway to self-understanding and self-realization.

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