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PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

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Artist, Artwork, and Audience: An Empirical Foundation for Psychoanalytic Aesthetics

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The key premises of psychoanalytic aesthetics receive much support from diverse scientific inquiries. This includes experiments specifically designed to test hypotheses about creativity, pictorial symbolism, and viewer responsivity, as well as much empirical research conducted apart from art. The interaction among artist, artwork, and audience may be conceptualized as follows: Creativity is associated with distinct personality traits and psychodynamic processes; artists do express and represent private meanings, both unconscious and conscious, in the content and form of their art. Artistic intention does not fully constrain the interpretation of a work, as art incorporates both private and public systems of meaning. Different viewers will discern, distort, or project meanings into art, depending on cultural resonance, semantic knowledge, enduring traits, and temporary states. Psychoanalytic theory, proceeding in tandem with scientific investigation, has developed an increasingly solid foundation for legitimate and potent engagement with the

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field of art history. Traditionally, psychoanalysis has been dismissed on the basis of two claims: It rests on dubious premises and it is riddled with conservative biases. Yet empiricism responsibly sorts fact from fiction and minimizes bias. Psychoanalysis, reframed accordingly, cannot be disqualified conscientiously from the field of art history.

Many of the key premises of psychoanalytic aesthetics receive empirical support from diverse fields of scientific inquiry. This includes experiments specifically designed to test hypotheses about creativity, pictorial symbolism, and viewer responsivity. Also relevant is a large body of research conducted apart from art, in areas such as the psychodynamic unconscious, the nonverbal communication of emotions, and visual—verbal information processing.

Clinical wisdom, scientifically evaluated, suggests the following model: (1) Creativity is associated with distinct personality traits and psychodynamic processes; artists do express and represent private meanings, both unconscious and conscious, in the content and form of their art. (2) Artistic intention does not fully constrain the interpretation of a work, as art incorporates both private and public systems of meaning. Once an artwork is born, it achieves a certain degree of autonomy from its creator. Autonomy varies substantially according to cultural context, which itself metamorphoses over time. The autonomy continuum can be clarified by two extreme examples. Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) still remains deeply rooted in biographical explanation, despite semiotic exhortation; conversely, the mandala, cross, and yin—yang symbols are anonymous, timeless, and universal, virtually uprooted from their original iconographical contexts. They have become autonomous because they elegantly embody primordial formal opposites within a unified whole, thus symbolizing or accommodating any and all conflict and resolution, whether intellectual or emotional, healthy or pathological. (3) Different viewers will discern, distort, or project meanings into art, depending on

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cultural resonance, semantic knowledge, drive—defense configurations, enduring traits and temporary states. The concept of “meaning” encompasses cognitions (judgments and interpretations), affects (preferences and other emotional responses), and motivations (diverse wishes and needs). Aesthetic communication—the current that flows from the artist through the artwork to the audience—is a complex and fascinating process whose “accuracy” and “success” varies as a function of multiple parameters, many of which are now well understood.

The empirical findings have direct bearing on Kuspit's psychoanalytic challenge to the art world's “old” and “new” interpretive paradigms. They unequivocally contradict many of the positions and theories held near and dear by the gurus of each camp. For example, old world connoisseurship is challenged by the finding that personality variables, rather than training in art, predict accuracy in discerning the emotionality of visual stimuli (Scribner and Handler, 1987; Mayer, dePaolo, and Salovey, 1990). And in the realm of aesthetic judgment, art professionals perform no better than a random sample of undergraduates in picking the correct orientation (as opposed to upside down or sideways) of a large batch of abstract artworks (Lindaauer, 1984). As for the new guard, their fiat excluding personality from artistry is debunked by the accumulated wisdom of psychodiagnosis and art therapy (McNiff, 1998; Malchiodi, 1998). And their claim that pictorial meaning is reducible to a semiotic or linguistic sign system is easily undone by a look at the brain's two hemispheres and visual—verbal information processing (Weiskrantz, 1987; Bowers, Bauer, and Heilman, 1993; Bucci, 1997; Ettinger, 1998).

The scholarly literature also bears directly on the stature of psychoanalysis within the art world itself. Traditionally, psychoanalysis has been dismissed on the basis of two claims: It rests on dubious premises and it is riddled with conservative biases. Yet the integration

of psychoanalysis with science responsibly sorts factual from fictitious premises, and provides

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checks and balances to eliminate or minimize bias. Psychoanalysis, reframed accordingly, cannot be disqualified conscientiously from the field of art history. Of course, “conscience” (“con-science” denotes “with-knowledge”) plays almost no role in the art world’s turf wars. Insofar as psychoanalytic “knowledge” inflicts narcissistic injury on a megalomaniacal field, one should not anticipate a scholarly dialogue, much less a standing ovation. As Kuspit writes, “art history will go one way or another entirely on the basis of power politics. The struggle for dominance among discourses will no doubt shape the field.” Bluntly stated, scientific psychoanalysis will disseminate into the art world only to the extent that its practitioners are assertive and tenacious, perhaps even fanatical.

We now turn to the empirical foundations of psychoanalytic aesthetics, with one preamble. In practice, artists are simultaneously spectators of their own work, empathizing with or sharing the audience’s sensibilities (Wollheim, 1980; Geller, 1993). Conversely, viewers actively create new and variegated pictorial meanings, through projection and diverse transformational mechanisms (see Erdelyi, in this issue). Not surprisingly, artistic creativity and aesthetic appreciation involve overlapping experiences and processes, such as adaptive regression (compare Pine and Holt [1960] with Gould [1976]). Keeping this parallel in mind, we will now proceed serially, from artist to artwork to viewer.

Research on psychoanalytic hypotheses emerged in force in the 1950s, and Kris’s (1952) “regression in the service of the ego” was a hot topic. Robert Holt, along with his colleagues at the New York University Research Center for Mental Health (especially Joan Havel, Fred Pine, and Leo Goldberger), developed the “PriPro Manual” (Manual for the scoring of primary process manifestations in the Rorschachs; 1956-1970). Primary process responsivity includes motivational, affective, and cognitive dimensions: libidinal and aggressive content organized according to the formal mechanisms of condensation,

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displacement, and symbolization. Secondary-process responsivity is captured by various Control and Defense scores. The Adaptive Regression Index (ARI) combines measures of the need for defense against primary-process material as well as the effectiveness with which it is controlled. Holt and his colleagues have compared creative-noncreative groups as well as high—low creative individuals who share the same arts career (including painting, jazz music, literature, and architecture). High Creatives are selected on the basis of outstanding professional achievements, as recognized by the gatekeepers of the field; conversely, Low Creatives are selected for their relative lack of originality or innovation. Creativity has also been assessed using the nonpsychodynamic creativity tests developed by Guilford, Torrance, and others. Overall, PriPro results demonstrate that High Creatives manifest more extreme (vitalized and explicit) primary-process ideation coupled with robust, adaptive secondary-process controls (securely defended High Creatives exhibit less need for control). Visual artists most consistently fit this profile—perhaps because the Rorschach inkblots are visual stimuli. Kris’s (1952) hypothesis is largely substantiated by PriPro research (e.g., Pine and Holt, 1960; Wild, 1965). Curiously, adaptive regression is predominantly evidenced by male artists, although High and Low Creative females do differ in ways consistent with the underlying theory. Our communal grasp of gender differences is still maturing, to say the least.

The PriPro manual is quite complex, opting for ecological validity over tidy reductionism. It has circulated internationally as an unpublished research manuscript, evolving in a dozen drafts over twice as many years. Happily, it will be published shortly (Holt, personal communication). Meanwhile, Exner’s Comprehensive System has become canonical for Rorschach interpretation. Despite its utility for assessing psychopathology, it remains a diamond in the rough for creativity researchers. Most notably, Holt’s PriPro system successfully discriminates creative (adaptive) from psychotic (maladaptive) forms of regression, whereas Exner’s system consistently yields false positives for visual artists. Naturally so: Exner does not incorporate

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Holt’s quantification of drive expression (Levels I and II) or his elaborate qualification of adaptive transformational maneuvers (Control and Defense measures). With this caveat in mind, we turn to an exemplary Exnerian study of creativity.

Kaltenbach (1986) administered the Rorschach to twelve highly successful visual artists (using Exner’s normative sample as the control group). The pooled artist Rorschach results are as follows ($p < 0.05$ for the following indices): low D scores (psychological liabilities threaten to outweigh available resources), high V and FD (negatively toned introspection), very high T (excessive unmet needs for closeness), high Sum-Shading (diffuse anxiety), high Color-Shading blends (tormented affective experience), high S (finding percepts in the space or ground, rather than the figure, indicative of oppositionalism and anger), High InCom and DR (thought disorder variables), and High X-%/low X+% (poor Form Quality, in disregarding the blot contours, suggesting poor reality testing). These variables, formulaically combined, yield highly elevated scores on three Psychopathology Constellations, albeit without meeting the full criteria: Depression, Suicide, and Schizophrenia ($p < 0.001$ for all three).

These are certainly intriguing results. Epidemiological studies have found artists to be overrepresented among the relatives of schizophrenics and mood disorder patients (Eysenck, 1997). Martindale (1998), reviewing the neurobiological evidence, has argued that many artists possess subpsychotic manifestations of thought and mood disorders. Artists are thereby able to harness the primary-process ideation characteristic of the disorders, producing unconventional and original ideas while remaining attuned to the ambient cultural

context.

To borrow Martindale's framework, Kaltenbach's artists manifest loose associations (the thought disorder variables), defocused attention, and novel ways of seeing the world (deviant Form Quality and the use of the ground as figure), a high

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degree of introspection (creativity involves turning inward—the regressive component), along with pain and turmoil (turning inward makes one vulnerable to chaotic and overwhelming emotions). Still, they do not evidence the full-blown psychotic deficits in thought, mood, or coping strategies that would most likely cripple their artistry. It would certainly be interesting to rescore these artistic protocols using Holt's Pri-Pro system, for a view of the defenses and control mechanisms at work.

Martindale's (1998) research also sheds new light on the age-old question of creativity and the cerebral hemispheres:

Several theorists have argued that the right hemisphere operates in a primary process manner, whereas the left hemisphere operates in a secondary process fashion. Their arguments are based upon findings that verbal, sequential, and analytical processes tend to be carried out in the left hemisphere, whereas global, parallel, and holistic processes are carried out in the right hemisphere. If this be the case, then we can again “neurologize” Kris's theory of creativity: Because creative people have more access to primary process cognition, they should show more right hemisphere—as compared with left hemisphere—activation than less creative people, at least during periods of creative activity.... In these experiments, the creative task was to make up a fantasy story or to make a creative drawing. Hemispheric activity during creative activity showed the same pattern in all experiments: Highly creative subjects exhibited more right than left hemisphere [EEG] activation; those of lesser creativity showed asymmetry in the opposite direction. The creative act involves the discovery of an analogy between two or more ideas or images previously thought to be unrelated. This discovery usually does not arise from logical reasoning but, rather, emerges as a sudden insight. Most theories of creativity reviewed say the same thing—that creative inspiration occurs in a

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mental state where attention is defocused, thought is associative, and a large number of mental representations are simultaneously activated. Such a state can arise in three ways: low levels of cortical activation [linked to more divergent and less stereotyped thought], comparatively more right than left hemisphere activation, and low levels of frontal lobe activation [linked to cognitive disinhibition]. Creative people do exhibit *all* of these traits, *and specifically while engaged in creative activity* [pp. 8-9].

Psychodiagnosis—from Holt's PriPro system to Kaltenbach's Exnerian research—has taught us much about the psychodynamics of highly creative individuals.¹ Art therapy harnesses the creativity of everyday life for the evaluation and treatment of psychopathology. Unlike creativity research, art

¹ Kaltenbach's (1986) chief purpose was to test Winnicott's (1951) theory, which locates the wellspring of creativity in the transitional object of early childhood. As Spitz (1985) puts it, “The small child hugging a ‘ba’ is an archetypal Pygmalion” (p. 146). Kaltenbach also conducted intensive interviews, and found that “the results confirm the applicability of Winnicott's general model and the concepts ‘potential space,’ and ‘transitional objects, processes, and phenomena’ to the understanding of creativity” (p. 2). Among the findings, this sample of artists evidenced “a marked preference for ambiguity and paradox ... not inconsistent with Winnicott's view that acceptance of paradox is a critical aspect of the child and mother's functioning during the separation phase” (p. 183). To clarify, “acceptance of paradox” refers to preoperational cognitive processes. A stuffed toy can become mom when she's absent, and a “ba” to be shared with mom when she's present—it exists in that transitional space “Between reality and fantasy” (Grolnick and Barkin, 1978). Kaltenbach's sample of artists also reported a sense of being intensely absorbed, while being connected to something mystically larger than the artwork per se. And “they frequently defended their work by saying ... that it represented their world, and was organized according to their rules” (p. 186). Also, art seemed to them to externalize internal psychological issues. Emotionally, they “reported calming or soothing effects of ... being engaged with the creative product” (p. 191).

Winnicott and Kris converge in an important respect. The transitional object mode represents a regression to (or the persistence of) an earlier, more primitive, undifferentiated object relationship. These artists do manifest a willful or nostalgic cultivation of fluid boundaries (primary-process ideation), but at the same time they clearly possess a mature awareness of differentiated self/object boundaries (secondary-process logic).

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therapy follows a patient's psychological growth over a long period of time, through a large sample of creative works, in an open-ended dialogue. Art therapy opens a different window from which to view the creative process (Cohen, Hammer, and Singer, 1988).

Art therapy makes two major contributions to the psychoanalysis of art, in its elucidation of products and processes. Patients with different diagnoses produce different types of art, distinct in both content and form (Williams, Agell, Gantt, and Goodman, 1996). Gantt describes an experiment where therapists were asked to sort one thousand drawings into six categories (major depression, schizophrenia, mania, organic mental disorder, mental retardation, and nonpatient). For all categories, there were more correct classifications than mistakes (exact significance levels not provided). When content was held constant, and form alone was adjudicated, accuracy increased tremendously. This research has culminated in Gantt's Formal Elements Art Therapy Scale (FEATS), comprised of thirteen items (energy,

integration, line quality, detail, color, and so on). The FEATS reliably discriminates patients from nonpatients ($p < 0.005$ for each item). As Gantt (1996) writes, "I would be the first to declare that the subject matter selected by the artist is of great importance, especially in actual therapy. However, we need to investigate more fully how form communicates to us, since form generally seems to be outside one's conscious control" (p. 20).

Art therapy makes a second major contribution in its elucidation of the process of symbolization, awareness, integration, and growth. Artistry is a process of discovery, wherein unarticulated experience, often stored in visual or bodily codes, is unearthed and given tangible form. Once the flux of chaotic inner experience is safely externalized in art, it can be examined, using language. Through the magic of shared words, trauma can be tamed, controlled, relabeled, restructured, and reintegrated, all of which facilitates healing and emotional growth. This is clear in art therapy with children (Neale and Rosal, 1993; Malchiodi, 1998),

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especially abused children (Kaufman and Wohl, 1992; Ettinger, 1998) and the art of adults who were abused as children (Kluft, 1993).

There has been much empirical research in this area, due to the overlap with cognitive psychology's multiple code theory, as well as the current controversy surrounding the recovery of repressed memories (Singer, 1990; Brakel, 1993; Bucci, 1997; Bornstein and Masling, 1998). For example, consider cerebral lateralization again. The right brain predominantly controls the somatosensory system, facial—gestural postural information, the broader nonverbal affect lexicon, and nonverbal memory codes; the left brain is specialized for language and analytic reasoning. As Gardner (1982) writes, "The brain seems better conceived of as a set of complex, multifaceted computational devices: included are specific mechanisms for dealing with linguistic, graphical, musical and other forms of symbolic information ranging from the numerical to the interpersonal. Each of these domains involves its own neurological substrates" (p. 319). Solso (1994) illustrates and discusses the prototypical PET Scans obtained under two stimulus conditions—visual (watching a moving object) and linguistic (listening to words). Clearly, visual and verbal stimuli activate distinct neural substrates, mapped via brain imaging techniques (Solso), EEGs (Martindale), and neurosurgery (Gardner).

In the past few decades, complex psychodynamic theories of viewer responsivity have become amenable to empirical examination. Returning to Holt's PriPro system, Gould (1976) examined adaptive regression scores in a sample of high and low aesthetically responsive subjects, as measured by the Barron-Welsh Art Scale. Significant correlations were obtained, as predicted (although gender differences remain a thorny problem). In a further study, Machotka (1979) linked viewer preferences for art depicting sexual and aggressive themes with defensive styles. Winner (1982) summarizes: "people who value the expression of emotion tend to use art to gratify unconscious

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needs that cannot be fulfilled in reality; those who are repressed, possessing strong inhibitions, seek in art qualities to support these inhibitions.... The study showed that art services different needs for different people, and the aesthetic choices of individuals extend and support their normal method of coping with the world" (pp. 75-76). Emotional types prefer art that overtly expresses personalized libidinal drives, whereas nonemotional types prefer art devoid of such contents, or art that represents the triumph of defense over drive (see also Juhasz and Paxson, 1978; Dudek and Marchand, 1983).

The psychodynamics of repression-sensitization influence gazing style as well (the decision as to which aspects of a picture to attend to and process further). Gazing style becomes increasingly automatic, through reiteration, and shades off into perceptual defense-vigilance (Erdelyi, 1974). Luborsky, Crits-Christoph, and Alexander (1990) describe an exemplary experiment:

In their ten-second inspections of each of the ten pictures, the sixteen subjects showed a style that was related to their defensive style.... The more repressive the style, the less looking about.... One measure of looking about is the scatter of eye fixations around the picture, which correlates -0.70 ($p < 0.01$) with the RIRS [Rorschach Index of Repressive Style]. The trend is stronger for the threatening pictures, but it is not confined to them. Two of the three sexual pictures ... most clearly fit the trend ... the repressors may look less at the sexual contents of each picture.... [Comparing] two subjects' looking patterns for a sexual picture[:] The isolator subject spent considerable time looking at the woman's breast, while the repressor spent no time looking at the woman's breast, except for a very peripheral part of it [p. 286].

My own laboratory work on Picasso's Cubism, circa 1907 to 1916 (Ettinger, 1989, 1996), began with a number of observations of vitalized latent contents lurking beneath the whimsical

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manifest scenarios, cleverly disguised by the complex pictorial structure. The particular latent contents (such as face—torso condensations) are familiar to Picasso scholars; however, the grand narrative of Modernist art history does not accommodate such imagery prior to Surrealism, circa 1924. My purpose was to determine whether a large sample of indoctrinated viewers would discern the proposed imagery, and if so, under what conditions. The experimental design manipulated artwork contents and viewing conditions. Picasso's *Woman in an Armchair* of 1913 was selected, and its multilayered contents were isolated and examined via several control conditions. Different versions of the work were generated, artificially deleting each of the proposed latent contents. A closely matched Braque painting served as a further control, to assess the impact of the pictorial style per se. As for viewing conditions, all pictures were

presented in a Microgenesis series (ten trials with exposure duration increasing exponentially, spanning 2^2 to 2^{10} milliseconds) and a control Supraliminal series (ten matched trials with prolonged views). The finding was that viewers do indeed reconstruct Picasso's latent contents, and predominantly under early, rapid microgenesis exposures (where conscious apprehension is severely restricted, and nonconscious information processing holds sway). The strategy of isolating artwork properties (selectively altering content or form) and systematically varying viewing conditions (exposure duration) holds great untapped potential for psychoanalytic research on artistic communication.

Viewer responsivity to art has been studied outside of the psychodynamic paradigm as well. In the tradition of Fechner and Berlyne, the experimenter designs elementary visual stimuli that vary in properties such as simplicity-complexity and symmetry-asymmetry; the purpose is to operationalize and isolate enduring aesthetic principles and to measure viewer preferences. More recently, this line of research has deployed actual artworks that are rated, normed, and matched along these formal dimensions, looking at the impact of sexual and/

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or aggressive content as well (Heinrichs, 1985). Individual differences among viewers, and the impact of personality traits on preferences, judgments, and interpretations, are now routinely examined (Heinrichs and Cupchick, 1985; Takahashi, 1995). For example, Alexander and Marks (1983) instructed subjects to rate several paintings on a Preference Scale (like-dislike), as well as a scale tapping fundamental personality attributes (joyous-sad; practical-imaginative; childish-mature; and so forth). Next, subjects completed self-ratings on the personality scale, in two conditions: They were asked to rate the "real" self ("myself") and the "ideal" self ("the person I'd like to be"). This experiment found "a clear relation between liking [aesthetic preference] and similarity to the ideal self, and a weaker, although still reliable, relation between liking and similarity to the real self" (p. 384).

Viewer responsivity can be influenced by diverse priming procedures, which induce temporary cognitive and/or affective states. For example, artwork titles, when altered and switched, significantly sway pictorial interpretation (Lindauer, 1970; Franklin, 1988). A great example of this is a photograph of a fire hydrant titled *Androgyne*: a phallic body with two breast-shaped water spouts. Viewers automatically look to the artist's intentions, inferred from artwork titles, to interpret a work (in defiance of semiotic theorists). Background music sways cognitive—affective interpretations of abstract art, more so than art can influence the impact of music (Lindner and Hyman, 1987). The subliminal presentation of positive or negatively valenced stimuli (happy—sad faces; cake-gun) significantly influences the emotional reading of a subsequent artwork (Murphy and Zajonc, 1993). Similarly, the subliminal presentation of a neutral stimulus (such as a scenic lake), followed by a semantically related visual pun (such as Jastrow's "duck—rabbit" conflation), determines viewer disambiguation (the pictorial *double entendrevrill* be perceived as a "duck") (Bornstein and Pittman, 1992; Niedenthal and Kitayama, 1994). Note that the first two exemplars (artwork titles; background music) are supraliminal,

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consciously accessible, and routinely encountered in museums, whereas the latter exemplars (the happy—sad faces, the cakegun, the duck—rabbit) derive from subliminal perception research. As Bargh (1992) has written,

It is difficult to imagine a naturally occurring social situation in which an act of subliminal perception would actually occur—much less go on to influence judgment and behavior... It makes no qualitative difference for social psychological phenomena whether the subject is aware of the stimulus or not ... it is the lack of awareness of the stimuli's influence that is the critical variable. One can be as equally unaware of the influence of a consciously perceived stimulus as of a subliminally perceived stimulus, and the same effects are produced [pp. 236-237].

When a stimulus primes a psychological "state" (whether motivational, affective, or cognitive), it will normally influence apprehension of the external world (whether artworks, inkblots, or people). Conscious awareness of cause—effect relationships is *necessary* but not *sufficient* for escaping the aforementioned sources of influence. The cortex cannot volitionally overrule the limbic system when strong emotions are aroused, as clinicians and neuroscientists know (LeDoux, 1996). Also, longstanding personality traits and temporarily activated states interact, usually additively (Bargh, 1989).

Left brain (LB)/right brain (RB) functional asymmetry can be conceptualized as a special case of unconscious influence on viewer responsivity. Hemisphericity research, apropos of art, began with the observation that individuals with cerebral neuropathology develop bizarre artistic styles, with the specific brain loci determining the specific stylistic aberrations. As a general rule, RB damage impairs holistic spatial organization; LB damage is less dramatic, affecting the rendering of internal details (Gardner, 1982). As the RB governs the contralateral

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Left Visual Field (LVF), these patients often manifest hemineglect, omitting or distorting the left side of a motif they are drawing. As a renowned example, one RB patient rendered a clock with all the numerals assiduously packed into its right side.

Individuals differ in LB/RB dominance. Hemispheric dominance refers to a biologically based, practiced, preferred, and relatively automatic mode of dealing with the world. It can be assessed with the Cognitive Laterality Battery (Gordon, as cited by Kettlewell and

Lipscomb, 1992). The Battery is comprised of eight subtests known to tap LB functions (serial, analytic, and linguistic tasks) and RB functions (parallel, synthetic, and visuo-spatial tasks). The LB/RB scores indicate the direction and degree of dominance. The Battery omits one important item: The RB contains a “nonverbal affect lexicon,” specially attuned to facial, gestural, and other visual displays of emotional expression (**Bowers, Bauer, and Heilman, 1993**). In addition, individuals differ in LB/RB organization. Most notably, only 66 percent of lefties (“sinistrals”) are LB dominant for language, compared to 98 percent of righties (“dextrals”). Lefties are thus heterogeneously lateralized.

The importance of laterality for aesthetic responsiveness can be exemplified by three converging lines of research. In one experiment, Kettlewell and Lipscomb (**1992**) administered the Cognitive Laterality Battery to two groups with extreme preferences for Realist versus Abstract paintings. The results ($p < 0.05$) indicate that LB subjects prefer Realism (which can be analyzed serially and redescribed in a propositional narrative) and RB subjects prefer Abstraction (the dynamic interaction of shapes and colors requires parallel processing and attunement to nonverbal emotional expressivity). In a second line of research, Levy (**1976**) presented viewers with asymmetrical photographs in both proper and mirror-reversed conditions. Lefties were indifferent to mirror reversal, but righties consistently preferred photographs with the “main content” or the “weight” on the right side (a well-replicated finding). Why? In preferring

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the main content on the right, and subsequently fixating rightward, two goals are met (**Mead and McLaughlin, 1992**). The fovea, as always, optimizes acumen by fixating on the main content; consequently, the artwork falls within the LVF, which is first and foremost processed by the RB. A third line of relevant research concerns portraiture—as face processing is strictly a RB function. As Gross and Bornstein (**1977**) have written,

Asymmetries of pictorial space could arise from asymmetries in the brain or from cultural conventions.... One artistic asymmetry that appears to be universal ... is profile orientation. Portraits are rarely full-faced; one study found that of 1474 painted portraits produced in Western Europe between c. 1500 and the present, a majority faced leftward. Similarly, right-handed children and adults of both sexes have a strong tendency (74% of 9874) to draw profiles facing leftward. This was found in ... Egypt (where reading is right to left) and Japan (where reading is from top to bottom and right to left). By contrast, left-handed children were equally likely to orient their profiles in either direction.... Profile orientation appears to be a function of laterality, not direction of reading [or other cultural conventions], age, or sex. Thus the tendency for portraits to locate profiles in the LVF presumably reflects the fact that facial information there would be perceived more readily and accurately by the majority of people (i.e., right-handers). [Also, artists tend to work from living models, and therefore may favor the left profile because it is also more expressive—its musculature is controlled by the contralateral RB.] Similarly [with respect to frontal portraits], it is the expression on the half of the face in the LFV that usually determines the right-handed viewer's impression of it [pp. 35-36].

The asymmetrical brain evidently determines some of the important rules that govern the aesthetics of asymmetrical pictures. Both preferences and judgments are affected: Objects

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on the left appear closer, clearer, and more textured; objects on the right appear heavier, brighter, and more conspicuous. As for interindividual variance, righties/lefties manifest fundamental differences in “sight” as well as critical “insight.” In this, cerebral asymmetry can be considered a special kind of nonconscious influence in aesthetics.

Along similar lines, viewers do not have introspective access to the rules by which complex pictorial variables interact and produce their aesthetic effects. Content and form are each mysteriously multilayered, and they interact indeterminately. With respect to content, the conscious apprehension of public symbols shades off into private associations (which can be conscious, preconscious, or unconscious). With respect to form, the conscious apprehension of expressivity is mediated by the nonverbal affect system (which defies serial analysis and linguistic redescription). To the extent that introspection fails, tacit belief systems emerge, with the full gamut of faulty heuristics (in Nisbett and Wilson's sense); narratology comes to the rescue (in Spence's sense).

Turning to some empirical evidence, Lindauer (**1970**) found that potent life drawings, compared to those rated as bland, are subjectively experienced as brighter and more color saturated, when objectively, values are held constant across stimuli. Independently, cognitive science has found that emotional words, compared to neutral words, are perceived as brighter and in higher contrast to the background when actual illumination values are held constant (for reviews see **Kihlstrom, 1990**; **Bornstein and Pittman, 1992**). It is commonplace in twentieth-century art criticism to find incorrect assumptions about the rules that govern the interaction of pictorial cues (interposition; linear, texture, and atmospheric perspective; relative brightness, and so forth). For example, critics routinely suggest that circular shapes appear convex or concave due to the way they are modeled, whereas Helmholtzian “unconscious inference” designates the ambient light source as the actual determinant (**Kaufman, 1979**).

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The diverse processes itemized above interact haphazardly when the viewer enters the museum. Each viewer within the heterogeneous audience maintains unique drive/defense configurations (in psychodynamic terms) as well as enduring traits and temporary

states (in cognitive and social psychological terms). The museum bombards the viewer with potent social cues that exceed attentional resources—unnoticed events that can function as subliminal stimuli. As the viewer encounters a work of art, its title primes relevant trains of thought. If there is background music, it primes particular affects. Cerebral asymmetries circumscribe rudimentary perceptual processing. And inside the picture frame, a multiplicity of content and formal variables blend and clash, in mysterious ways. Diverse unconscious sources of influence dramatically affect each viewer's perception/conception of art. They are inaccessible, unknowable, automatic, and uncontrollable. As a consequence, subjectivity is confused with objectivity, which has proved to be a recipe for lively, if irrational, critical debates.

The key point is this: A vast accumulation of psychological research challenges the “old” art history's notion of elitist connoisseurship (the claim that credentials ensure accurate and valid interpretation). The patriarchal, ethnocentric, and capitalist biases that permeate this tradition spurred the “new” art history, but the same psychological research presents no less of a challenge to their own fanatical position (the claim that the *Zeitgeist* inscribes its impersonal signs on the canvas, which is structured like a language). While these two camps continue to slug it out, psychoanalytic psychology will continue to refine its empirical model of the artist, artwork, and audience.

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