

# *An Artist's View of the History of Art from the Perspective of 'Analogic Representation'*

Michael Joseph Winkler

In his Book, "After the End of Art" (1997), Arthur Danto argued that initially art was based on 'imitation', then it was based on 'ideation', and now, contemporary art needs an entirely new critical theory. I disagree. The history of art is better understood by discussing its focus on various approaches to 'analogic representation'. Until quite recently, the visual arts had always dealt with analogic representations of the phenomena of natural, staged, or symbolically narrative visual events. A painting of a still-life or landscape is a two-dimensional visual analogy created from paint which attempts to express something about the painter's actual or imagined experience of a multi-dimensional materiality at a given time and place—an example would be Frederic Church's "Twilight in the Wilderness" ( [wikiart.org/en/frederic-edwin-church/twilight-in-the-wilderness-1860](http://wikiart.org/en/frederic-edwin-church/twilight-in-the-wilderness-1860) ). Then in the 20th Century, the Abstract Expressionists were focused on presenting analogic representations of the dynamic patterns and structures of Nature's presence in the formulation of their own consciousness—as Jackson Pollock famously remarked, "I am Nature" ( [www.guggenheim.org/artwork/3482](http://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/3482) ).

Even works of conceptual art have dealt with analogic representation. An example would be Joseph Kosuth's "One and Three Hammers." In this work, the analogic overlap of natural processes of cognitive apprehension are explored using: an actual hammer, a photograph of a hammer, and the linguistic description (definition) of a hammer - all three manifestations of the concept are analogic representations of each other ( [pomeranz-collection.com/?q=node/210](http://pomeranz-collection.com/?q=node/210) ).

Some artist's have based works on analogic representation by applying a direct opposition of the concept. Until Duchamp's snow shovel (purchased at a local hardware store) was placed in an art exhibition, the idea that an artistic statement could be made using an actual utilitarian object was not considered. Duchamp's act pointed to the key role of analogic representation in art by putting a utilitarian/non-art object into an art exhibition. His 'action' was art but, despite his own comments, it didn't change the snow shovel into a work of art. In fact, if it did, his artistic statement is nullified. Commercial foundries had been manufacturing artists' sculptures which contained exact copies of utilitarian objects long before Duchamp. It was the 'functional/utilitarian' nature of Duchamp's object which set it apart—if that aspect is negated, the artistic statement is negated. But in art history the shovel itself has been treated as a work of art ( <https://g.co/kgs/5MMxu3> ). This has led to a common acceptance of appropriated objects being treated as such. From my perspective, these contemporary artists are just restating Duchamp's 'act'. They're not actually creating new works simply by choosing different utilitarian objects—it's the idea that the object is 'utilitarian' that makes an authentic artistic statement, not the specific utilitarian function (the snow shoveling purpose of the tool is conceptually irrelevant). Cultural theorists tell us contemporary art is now about process rather than signs but they continue to treat the signs as the art rather than treating the "act" or "performance" (of the process) as the art. There is nothing 'inherent' in the nature of Duchamp's sign (the snow shovel) as a signifier of Duchamp's act—the historical attachment of the sign to the act is limited to a documentary capacity because the Saussurian assumption of the arbitrariness of signs has

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recently lost its logical foundation [1]. A borrowed sign can no longer be treated as being the signifier of an arbitrarily devised conception, just as the individual borrowed signs (each individual written word) of this text cannot become inextricably bound to its message. At this point, a strictly historical relationship between a sign and an event cannot be viewed as being an intrinsically functional association even if its widely accepted.

There are some contemporary artists who still place their focus directly on signs. Approaches vary but they often explore illuminations of how human experience interacts with Nature by playing against our natural tendency to formulate comparisons based on analogies. We think of dissimilarity as being the opposite of analogy; however, 'similarity' is the root concept of 'dissimilarity.' A better opposite is 'ambiguity.' Throughout art history, artist's have experimented with ambiguity as a means of thwarting or misdirecting analogic comparison. Sally Mann's photos of rawhide dog-chews are a recent example ([art21.org/read/sally-mann-dog-bone-prints/](http://art21.org/read/sally-mann-dog-bone-prints/)). James Turrell uses light to heighten awareness of our intrinsic relationship to Nature's manifestation of the materiality outside our minds and bodies. He uses the ambiguity created by a precisely balanced experience of the sensation of light to temporarily separate us from our experience of materiality, so we can become more acutely aware of it. We can't make an analogic assessment because, although we're receiving sensory information, the information is essentially formless. However, we do evoke a degree of formal content as a result of the nature of the neuro-psychological mechanism which is reading the experience ([jamesturrell.com/work/type/](http://jamesturrell.com/work/type/)).

Unfortunately, a lot of the contemporary art being celebrated at the present time reinforces our separation from the phenomena of Nature. It focuses entirely on detached theoretical constructs and non-empirical philosophical abstractions. Much of the art currently receiving attention elevates the importance of culture to the point that we mistakenly come to believe culture creates the world of our awareness. Contemporary philosophers and cultural theorists don't feel obliged to tie their arguments to any kind of analogic foundation in Natural phenomena because they believe such attachments are arbitrary. This idea relates to my previous discussion of Ferdinand de Saussure's assumption that the signs of language are arbitrary. Since language is the foundation of culture, Saussure's assumption is often extended to all types of signs. However, new discoveries about how words are actually read indicate Saussure's assumption was based on a false understanding of what constitutes the signs of language, there is no longer an empirical basis for it [1]. Contemporary cultural theory has lost one of its basic foundations.

Culture is ultimately constructed on the principles of formulation Nature bestows upon us (through the inherent neuro-psychological mechanisms of human experience). A culture can manipulate the perceived world but it can't create it (culture cannot give a sightless person the authentic experience of the view of a landscape). Most discussions of culture are entirely

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subjective; consequently, such discussions place the primary focus on the philosophical dialectic of the theorist rather than offering genuine insights into the nature of the phenomena. The result is that such approaches tend to be self-involved intellectual exercises—and most often they're designed to be argumentatively self-serving rather than genuinely enlightening. They spawn a view of materiality which centers on arbitrary relational conceptions which have no authentic connection to the genuine phenomena of Nature which actually underlies all human activity. The power of the interpreter is at its greatest when the art object makes no real statement of its own, so art which is open-ended (and, in many cases, simple-minded) is currently being preferred. Some contemporary artist's make clear statements, but when they do, it's often a matter of re-stating what the art establishment has already validated—for example, presenting beliefs already widely accepted in the art community concerning social issues (which collectors and curators can display as badges of their own enlightened attitude regarding the issues). It's much more difficult to create a work of art which actually provides a deeper insight into the 'Nature of human experience'.

It's especially important to assess all factors of analogic representation in the art of the 21st century because some of the tools of new media now have inherently designed features which impact the qualities of the representation. In short, the analogic structure is partly a result of the choices made by the creator of the tools, not just the user of the tools. The artist/theorist, Robert Rapoport has been dealing with this complex issue ([www.iterativeframe.com](http://www.iterativeframe.com)). There is also an excellent article on this topic by Lev Manovich, "Automating Aesthetics", which appeared in FLASH ART ([manovich.net](http://manovich.net)). To give a literary example, let's imagine what would happen to the dialogue in Mark Twain's work, *Huckleberry Finn* if it was auto-corrected for spelling and grammar. And we're all familiar with what happens when using automated tools for translations. However, there's a more sinister scenario where the auto-editing could be intentionally designed to subtly alter the message. If there is no assessment from the perspective of analogic representation, a false impression of authorship may be fostered by the designer of the tools used to construct it.

Although my current project is rooted in the concept of analogic representation, it's real purpose is to try to re-emphasize art's inherent attachment to Nature. I believe the underlying cause of much of our self-harming behavior with regard to both society and the environment is the lack of fully understanding the extent to which our bodies 'and minds' are manifestations of Nature—even extending to the mechanism of our consciousness. This lack of awareness of natural interdependence allows us to embrace products, services, and even political and institutional agendas which ultimately have a negative impact on the material and humanistic resources which sustain us. Henge Lab's goal is to demonstrate how, without any intention of doing so, we mirrored the basic proportions of the language of Nature in the structure of the signifiers of human languages. From the earliest artifacts of the emergence of the symbolic mind to the patterning hidden in the codified structure of the signs of modern language, we replicated the

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basic proportions which arrange the petals of a flower, align our planet within the solar system, define the shape of our bodies, and even structure the neuro-psychological mechanism which provides the means of our awareness.

There is clear evidence of our inherent relationship to Nature's preferred proportions. For example, the sound most preferred by the human ear is the harmony of the Perfect Fifth (two tones which vibrate in a simple proportional ratio of 2 to 3—for example, the musical note 'A' at 440 hz with an 'E' of 660 hz). The 2:3 proportion generates the Fibonacci Series which in turn generates the the Divine Proportion and Golden Section which recur throughout the patterning of Nature (Fibonacci Series: **2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89 ...;** Divine Proportion:  $89/55=1.618$ ). This same basic proportional ratio was one of the two foundations of the entire ancient Egyptian Mathematical System [4]. But modern mathematics has abandoned any interest in Nature's inherent connection to proportional relationships.

Henge Lab uses the concept of analogic representation to reveal that our consciousness is instinctively aware of the synchronicity in Nature which is unintentionally replicated in our own actions. When human beings create material or non-material structures or systems, they instinctively use the the same basic proportional concepts used by Nature. Most people don't fully embrace the extent to which human beings are part of the phenomena of Nature.

Neuroscience has now demonstrated that Nature's architecture even influences the manner in which we exercise our own freewill [2]). Henge Lab is being designed to demonstrate that a circular arrangement of 26 stones configured using only the proportion of 2:3, can reveal a synchronicity between: the patterning of the signs of language, the fundamental harmonies of sound and light, and the alignment of astronomical events such as the Summer and Winter Solstice.

In works of art, analogic representations can be developed using scientific information, but science cannot create genuine analogic representations. To create a genuine analogy, the contexts must be different. Science insists that its works be based entirely on rational associations rooted in quantitative expressions of it's own language of mathematics.

Mathematics can be a tool for developing/describing a shared aspect of an analogy but the difference in contexts can't be expressed in its language (because it cannot express specific qualities, only generalized quantities). Additionally, the strict focus on rigorous associations is anti-analogic because it severs the phenomena from all that is "unproven" or "unprovable"—which means it is severed from any references to aspects of awareness arising from intuitive sources. The rational mind can only compare one to one correspondences, while the intuitive mind operates akin to the workings of Nature—it can simultaneously incorporate a multiplicity of factors [3]. Nature never isolates the impact of one process from another. It always operates using the interaction of a multiplicity of processes. Since, science is solely concerned with rigorous features of isolated abstractions of the overall phenomena, it can never provide an

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authentic depiction of Natural phenomena [4]. A combination of rational and intuitive insights must be fostered to evoke a more complete sense of Nature's manifestations.

We talk about interdisciplinary approaches to research but our academic institutions segregate the humanities and sciences into entirely different schools. And even within those schools, information is further segregated into departments, subjects, and specializations. To become genuinely interdisciplinary, education must do away with the idea of the disciplinary boundaries which are at the very foundation of its institutional structure. The current structure was devised because it supports the dissemination of information for the purposes of creating products, providing practical services, and sustaining a careerist institutional hierarchy. But this segregation inhibits a genuine understanding of the inherent interrelationship of various aspects of human experience with the workings of Nature.

The references are all available through on-line resources:

1. "New Discoveries Should Reopen the Discussion of Signs", Michael Winkler. *Alternative Theoretics* (2015): <http://philpapers.org/archive/WINNDS>
2. "There's No Such Thing as Free Will", Stephen Cave, May 16, 2016, [theatlantic.com](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/06/theres-no-such-thing-as-free-will/480750/) (Health): <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/06/theres-no-such-thing-as-free-will/480750/>
3. "The Science of Decision-Making: 5 Surprising Ways We Make Life Choices", Susan Scutti, June 11, 2015, Medical Daily - [medicaldaily.com](http://www.medicaldaily.com/science-decision-making-5-surprising-ways-we-make-life-choices-337546) (Under the Hood): <http://www.medicaldaily.com/science-decision-making-5-surprising-ways-we-make-life-choices-337546>
4. "Signalglyph", Net Art project (2005) presented by [turbulence.org](http://turbulence.org) and the North American Center for Interdisciplinary Poetics (housed at the University of Buffalo): <http://turbulence.org/project/signalglyph/> (Egyptian Mathematics Reference: "Mathematics in the time of the Pharaohs", Richard J. Gillings, Dover Publications 1972, page 24.- Online excerpt link in [signalglyph.com](http://signalglyph.com) text).

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