

Image Aesthetics and the Stance of Interpretability: Subject/Object Relationships

Dr BOUREGBI Salah ,
University of Badji Mokhtar—Annaba,

The problem of the relationship between the mind and the object is longstanding and complex. The shift toward emphatic identification, in which the object contains no inherent meaning or significance other than that which the mind projects onto it, represents a psychological turn that ushers in modernism. Such standing point is characterized by the notion that “life can no longer have meaning; it can only produce meaning.”⁽¹⁾

As the critic Peter McCormick points out, representation relies on the “problems not only with the notion of interpretation, but with its uses in reading history.”⁽²⁾ The history of modernist aesthetics, then, involves the complexities of the subject/object relationship, which constitutes the central problem of modernist aesthetic investigation: Whether we talk of language, pictures, ideas, or beliefs, every representation has two sides, one as an ordinary thing *in the* world and the other as an icon *of the* world. So representations seem to be both inside the world and outside it. (3)

Faced with this epistemological problem of whether the mind receives meaning or creates it, the modernist relationship with the object is complicated by the question of whether the mind and the object maintain an intuitive symbiotic relationship as in the Bergsonian notion of ‘flux’⁽³⁾, or whether they are irreconcilably separate as in the Moorean rejection of idealism. Balancing idealism and materialism, G.E. Moore insists that objects exist apart from our perception of them, but that consciousness is also a reality.⁽⁴⁾ Indeed, although the mind must have the external world to respond to, the responses are most important. There are certain states of mind that take precedence and are “the *raison d’être* of virtue”; these, G.E.

Moore writes in Principia Ethica, “may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects” (32). Moore, who is the promoter of the aesthetic vision in the Bloomsbury Circle, emphasizes the concept of ‘states of mind’. As described by John Maynard Keynes, a Bloomsbury member: “These states of mind were not associated with action or achievement or with consequences. They consisted in timeless, passionate states of contemplation and communion, largely unattached to ‘before’ and ‘after’. Their value depended, in accordance with the principle of organic unity, on the state of affairs as a whole, which could not be usefully analysed into parts.”⁽⁵⁾

The Bloomsbury critic, Roger Fry, maintains that content and form are intertwined and inseparable. Such position is essentially due to his encounter with Cézanne’s paintings. The literary critic Gillian Naylor describes Fry’s famous discovery of Cézanne as a ‘revelation’ that seems to revitalize his notion that form and content are not forever separated: they are interconnected. The need to ‘represent’ external reality as the source of internal reflection is now being replaced by empathetic identification in which internal reflection ‘expresses’ external reality, opening the way for a new modernist abstraction: Fry’s discovery of the significance of form enables him to re-evaluate his ideas about the nature of content. Content could now be divorced from the need to represent or symbolize appearances, and become an end in itself.⁽⁶⁾ There is a dialogical tension between formal presentation and representation itself.

In Cézanne’s numerous paintings of inanimate objects, such as his series of apples, a new tension is created between representation and a strong sense of form as an expression of feeling. This was a distinct break with impressionism and led the way toward cubism and other form—conscious abstract art. Fry had experienced a series of setbacks in the years prior to 1910, the year of his groundbreaking Post-Impressionist Exhibition.

As long as reality is valid as an artistic expression, it is as valid as any other ‘representation’ of reality, including the realism that has always been taken for granted as the only valid ‘aspect’ with which the artist could engage. That is, content and form are collapsed into one another, in an attempt to reach a purely abstract visual art.

In his influential book, Vision and Design (1920), Fry makes the case for what he calls the ‘imaginative life’ as one in which “the frame of the mirror, then, does to some extent turn the reflected scene from one that belongs to our actual life into one that belongs rather to the imaginative life.”⁽⁷⁾ Fry’s formalist aesthetics calls for a strict separation of art and life. A work of art is just a work of art. Frames and techniques, such as preserving the picture plane, serve to remind the viewer of the relationship between content and form. Fry places perception between these two poles:

The artist’s attitude to natural form is, therefore, infinitely various according to the emotions he wishes to arouse. He may require for his purpose the most complete representation of a figure, he may be intensely realistic, provided that his presentment, in spite of its closeness to natural appearance, disengages clearly for us the appropriate emotional elements. Or he may give us the merest suggestion of natural forms, and rely almost entirely upon the force and intent of the emotional elements involved in his presentment. We may, then, dispense once for all with the idea of likeness to Nature, of correctness or incorrectness as a test, and consider only whether the emotional elements inherent in natural form are adequately discovered, unless, indeed, the emotional idea depends at any point upon likeness, or completeness of representation. (37-8).

Fry concludes his book, Vision and Design, with an explanation of his and Clive Bell’s celebrated concept of ‘significant form,’ in which the modernist empathetic epistemology can clearly be seen: “I think we do all agree that we mean by significant form something other than agreeable arrangements of form, harmonious patterns, and the like. We feel that a work, which possesses it, is the outcome of an endeavour to express an idea rather than to create a pleasing object. Personally, at least, I always feel that it implies the effort on the part of the artist to bend to our emotional understanding

by means of his passionate conviction some intractable material which is alien to our spirit.”(Vision and Design 302)

For Fry, the central aesthetic issue, as Allen McLaurin states, is the “balance between representation and autonomy.”⁽⁸⁾ Perhaps the most often repeated distinction, Fry makes in his art criticism, is between what he calls ‘actual life’ and ‘imaginative life’. Despite Fry’s “fondness for dualist formations, such as linear and plastic, order and variety, vision and design and so on,” (23) he remains committed to the notion that the imaginative relationship with the object is transcendent, and that art, whose purpose is to express an idea through objects, should be free from all traces of what he calls “associated ideas” (242) of daily experience.

In a gesture that looks forward to the New Criticism of the 1930’s, Fry’s aesthetics stresses the autonomy of art, not only visual art, but verbal art as well. In fact, Fry never fully resolved the issue of form versus content in visual or verbal art, despite the frequent associations of Bloomsbury aesthetics with the privileging of form. Regarding content versus form in visual art, Fry received some help from a friend, the French critic Charles Mauron,

Mauron’s article “The Nature of Beauty and Literature,” published in 1926 is a cornerstone of the new artistic direction of Fry. Fry translated the article and found it enormously useful: “It enables us for the first time dimly to grasp what it is of which the relations are felt by us when we apprehend aesthetically a work of literature.”⁽⁹⁾

Mauron’s conception of aesthetics, in contrast to the theories of formalist art critics like Roger Fry and Clive Bell, returns us to the original Greek meaning of the word *aesthesis* –sense experience. In Aesthetics and Psychology, Mauron reproaches Fry and other formalist critics for having unsuccessfully traded feeling and perception both rooted in human experience, for untenable abstractions.⁽¹⁰⁾ If Fry tries to evade the presence of individual peculiarities into his aesthetic theory, Mauron, by contrast, insists that such peculiarities actually define the aesthetic response. Mauron maintains that art “is not the reproduction of nature but a deformation of nature, a kind of extract destined to bring into relief certain relations, which would otherwise be lost among insignificant details.”⁽¹¹⁾

As an extract from the larger world, art affects us only if it is composed and selectively arranged so as to provoke sensations and responses that, while vaguely familiar, nevertheless astonish us with their strangeness. It is unfortunate, according to Mauron, that the words typically used to explain art, such as ‘symmetry’ and ‘proportion’ demand a precision that art itself consistently denies.(33) For, although an artist’s process of selection may resemble a scientist’s careful attention to detail and arrangement, Mauron claims that his final goals are quite different. Unlike the scientist, the artist tries to transmit an infinite complexity that cannot be reduced to definite terms, mathematical laws or formulas: “If the aim of science is the creation of a formula that of art is the creation of the object” (34). What differentiates definition or formula from artistic object is sensation: “[One] can add as many terms as one likes to a formula; it can never in any way attain the character of a sensation” (35).

Dismissing formulaic definitions of art and aesthetics as having no more than a Platonic value, Mauron asserts that future attempts to discourse upon art or the theory must take place in what he refers to as the ‘vital zone’: “There must be [...] a vital zone placed between the Formula and the Chaos, and experience alone can fix its limits”(37-8). This ‘vital zone’ is a place, where impressions are coloured as much by sensation as by intellect. The aesthetic attitude, then, rests on a “curious mixture of sensation and inhibition—the first depending on the second for its keenness, richness, and duration” (33). The mind finds itself suspended “at the point where pleasure becomes manifest, between the stimulus and the response” (38).

According to Mauron, then, art depends on a sensibility keenly aware of what he terms the “murmur of echoes” (39). Artistic production involves the experience of perceiving an external object or event while simultaneously undergoing an interior, corporeal response to that externality. The aesthetic response requires both an artist and a viewer to register not only the externality, but also the bodily events. It is precisely this ability that distinguishes artists from non-artists.

Mauron provides Fry with a new term that connects inner qualities with outer ones in an empathetic identification that, as D. Dowling points out, seems “to connect shape with emotion in a more precise, scientific way than Bell has in his rather mystical assertion of

‘significant form’.”⁽¹²⁾ The trance state, a state that Mauron also presents as essential to the creative art, enables a moment of belief that is simultaneously a moment of ‘transport’. In other words, the trance is the vehicle by which the imagination is rendered mobile.

Virginia Woolf’s corporeal creativity anticipates Mauron’s assertion that the ideal state of mind for the artist consists of a contemplation kinetically charged by a keen awareness of the body and its myriad sensations. Between 1916 and 1920, Woolf, Fry and Bell (Bloomsbury members) explored the relationship of visual and verbal arts. Bell’s views on significant form eventually appeared in his Art (1914):

Certainly the essence of a boat is not that it conjures up visions of argosies with purple sails, or yet that it carries coal to New castle. Imagine a boat in complete isolation, detach it from man and his urgent activities and fabulous history, what is it that remains, what is that to which we still react emotionally? What be pure form, and that which, lying behind pure form, gives it its significance. (142-43)

Bell’s statement reflects the Bloomsbury’s redefinition of ‘essence’, which involves the perceptual relationship between subject and object.

As the intellectual leader of the Bloomsbury, then, it was Fry above all whose views mattered at the time, and his sense of the ‘internal forces’ of art (Vision and Design 9) could clearly be heard. There is a shift from its traditional position of idealistic universality to internal function that Fry calls ‘creative vision’ in which the artist combines inner and outer to form pattern that rely on both, but are ‘crystallized’ in a process of empathetic identification with the exterior: “The artist’s main business in life [...] is carried on by means of a kind of vision, which I will call creative vision” (51).

Fry’s search for the most evocative term for the combination of sympathetic and empathetic identification that characterizes his understanding of Cézanne’s *réalisation* takes him from Bell’s ‘significant form’ to his own ‘creative vision,’ to Mauron’s ‘psychological volumes’.

Woolf develops visual aesthetics in which the empathetic perceptual self, consisting of the eye and memory, combines with the exterior to create the “inner landscape” (85). This visual aesthetics resides in light and its different spectrum of colours (the prism). Prismatic colour is the key to Woolf’s aesthetics.⁽¹³⁾ This colourism is seen as challenging to Fry’s and Bell’s aesthetics.

There is a change in Fry’s conception of Post-Impressionism between the First (1910) and Second (1912) Post-Impressionism Exhibitions. In 1910, Fry saw Post-Impressionism as “colour-broad” (Transformations 128); in 1912, colour was replaced by Bell’s “more rigid doctrine of significant colour” (130). Fry does not see Post-Impressionism as replacing Impressionism, but as learning from Impressionism’s romantic emphasis on a pure light. By form or ‘design’, Post-Impressionism completes the data of sense-impressions or ‘vision’. Fry’s claimed revisionism lies in his notion of ‘plastic colour’, the achievement of form through colour planes. As for Bell, “colour is in fact form,” and it is “structural”, an androgyny of colourist ‘vision’ and formalist ‘design’.

Sense-data are momentary. Each patch and arrangement of colour represents “any turn in the wheel of sensation” (To the Lighthouse 9). Fry’s mechanism is also a kind of roving camera, incorporating “the rhythm that obsesses the artist” (Vision and Design 52). A painting may group fragments of different common-sense objects. Fry maintains that:

In such a creative vision the objects as such tend to disappear, to lose their separate unities, and to take places as so many bits in the whole mosaic vision. The texture of the whole field of vision becomes so close that the coherence of the separate patches of tone and colour within each object is no strong than the coherence with every other tone and colour throughout the filed. (51-2)

The frame confers the unity on the painting’s patches of colour. It imposes the order: “the square draws its lines round us, and here is a chair, a table, glasses, knives” (Collected Essays II 297); a flower becomes a whole when “ a ring enclosed what was the flower.”⁽¹⁴⁾ Each visual patch for the artist, admits Fry, “is related to other visual

patches in the surrounding” (Vision and Design 52). For Fry, the painting’s frame assembles patches of colour into unknown ‘objects’ with no name but the painting’s title.(63) Such frame pattern is a multiplicity that becomes unity as in Cézanne’s geometrical pattern. Fry writes: “The more one looks the more do these dispersed indications begin to play together, to compose rhythmic phrases which articulate the apparent confusion, till at last all seems to come together to the eye into an austere and impressive architectural construction, which is all the more moving in that it emerges from apparent chaos.” (Cézanne 79) But from that interpretation to the idea that specific colours furnish an iconographic code is a step justified by the evidence.

Fry’s theory of an art, which does not seek to imitate form, but to create form, not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life, becomes very significant (Vision and Design 239). His art, then, is transformational. “Life is not only transformed, but effectively disappeared in line with the impersonalising tendency of modernity”(337).

So, the aesthetics interpretation is firmly grounded in the body, and that images, whether represented through colours or words, are living forms to be savoured and appreciated not merely for the meaning they convey, but also for the sensations they arouse.

Endnotes

1- Art Berman, Preface to Modernism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 46.

2 - Peter McKonrick, Fiction, Philosophies and the Problems of Poetics (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1988): 4.

3 - Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Date of Consciousness, Trans. F.C. Pogson, 1910 (London, New York: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, The Macmillan Co., 1921): 101.

4 - G.E. Moore, Principia Ethica, 1903 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960): 30.

5 - John Maynard Keynes, Two Memoirs (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949): 83.

- 6 - Gillian Naylor, Bloomsbury: Its Artists, Authors and Designers (London, new York: Bulfinch Press, 1990): 49.
- 7 - Roger Fry, Vision and Design, 1920 (New York: Meridian Books, 1956): 20.
- 8 - Allen McLaurin, Virginia Woolf, The Echoes Enslaved (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973): 23.
- 9 - Roger Fry, Transformations (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980): 12.
- 10 - Charles Mauron, Aesthetics and Psychology, Trans. Roger Fry, and Katherine John (London: Hogarth Press, 1927): 20.
- 11 - - -, The Nature of Beauty in Art and Literature (London: Hogarth Press, 1927): 12-3.
- 12 - D. Dowling, Bloomsbury Aesthetics and the Novels of Forster and Woolf (London: Longman, 1985): 16.
- 13 - Jane Goldman, The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 135.
- 14- Virginia Woolf, Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings, 1976, Rd. Jeanne Schulkind (London, New York: The Hogarth Press, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985): 71.

AESTHETICS: PHILOSOPHICAL AESTHETICS Many elements appear common to aesthetic and religious experience. Both are modes of apprehending and articulating reality. Theorists of both have affirmed that aesthetic and religious insights or intuitions afford direct, nonconceptual apprehension of the real, and that they are dependent on inspiration, genius, or other forms of giftedness. Foremost is that of art itself—techné, or know-how: the recognition of an end to be aimed at and the knowledge of how best to achieve it through the skillful use of appropriate materials and means. Poiesis, Plato's term for aesthetic making, broadly designates all craftsmanship and more narrowly refers to the making of poems, plays, pictures, or sculptures. Each dependent has a name, birthdate and relationship with the employee. Entity, Entity Set and Entity Type. An entity is an object in the real world with an independent existence that can be differentiated from other objects. An entity might be. An object with physical existence (e.g., a lecturer, a student, a car). An object with conceptual existence (e.g., a course, a job, a position). Entities can be classified based on their strength. A strong, or identifying, relationship exists when the primary key of the related entity contains the primary key component of the parent entity. Examples include: Course(CrsCode, DeptCode, Description). Class(CrsCode, Section, ClassTime) Types of Relationships. Below are descriptions of the various types of relationships. Key for understanding the relationship between systems of symbols and the moods and motivations that are instilled in individuals who partake in such systems is the recognition that all cultural patterns have, as Geertz terms it, an intrinsic double aspect. That is, cultural patterns are simultaneously both models of and models for reality. There are, he suggests, three specific points where the limits of interpretability threaten to bring forth just such a chaos. Interpretability: Subject/Object Relationships. Dr BOUREGBI Salah , University of Badji Mokhtar Annaba, The problem of the relationship between the mind and the object. is longstanding and complex. The shift toward emphatic identification, in which the object contains no inherent meaning or significance other. than that which the mind projects onto it, represents a psychological. turn that ushers in modernism. Such standing point is characterized by.