

Aesthetic Cores: A Proposal for Objectivity in Art Suggested by Charles Peirce's Dynamic Object

Núcleos Estéticos: Uma Proposta para a Objetividade na Arte Sugerida pelo Objeto Dinâmico de Charles Peirce

Carl R. Hausman

Emeritus Professor of Philosophy
Penn State University
carlhausman@aol.com

Abstract: I assume the hypothesis that there are aesthetic cores that ground each artwork. The main examples referred to are musical compositions; but I believe that with modifications, my hypothesis can apply to instances in the visual arts. Cores evolve over time yet they remain identifiably the same from one performance to another and from one experiential encounter to another. Drawing on Peirce's ontological idea of dynamic objects, I suggest that an aesthetic core is a dynamic center of constraints, in part created by composers and by appreciators interacting with the core. The core is an evolving center of constraints effective for creators and appreciators as they interpret the artwork. The upshot of this claim is that there is a condition of objectivity that resists the extreme relativism that would regard all interpretations of artworks as equally true. Various objections are considered when these ideas are explained and developed.

Key words: Core. Objectivity. Dynamic object. Artwork. Outward Clash. Constraints. Feed-forward.

Resumo: *Assumo a hipótese de que existem núcleos estéticos que fundamentam cada obra de arte. Os principais exemplos aos quais se referem são composições musicais; mas acredito que com modificações minha hipótese pode se aplicar a exemplos das artes visuais. Núcleos evoluem ao longo do tempo e eles permanecem identificavelmente os mesmos de uma performance a outra e de um encontro experiential a outro. Com base na noção ontológica de Peirce de objetos dinâmicos, sugiro que um núcleo estético é um centro dinâmico de restrições, em parte criado por compositores e apreciadores interagindo com o núcleo. O núcleo é um centro de restrições em evolução eficaz para criadores e apreciadores à medida que interpretam a obra de arte. O resultado desta afirmação é que há uma condição de objetividade que resiste ao relativismo extremo que considera todas interpretações de obras de arte como igualmente verdadeiras. Várias objeções são consideradas quando estas ideias são explicadas e desenvolvidas.*

Palavras-chave: *Núcleo. Objetividade. Objeto Dinâmico. Obra de arte. Confronto externo. Restrições. Feed-forward.*

Purposes

The title of this lecture immediately raises the questions, what are cores, and what do they have to do with artworks? In order to answer, I must begin with an explanation of the assumptions on which the answers depend. But also, I should begin with a few words of caution. I do not claim that the idea of cores will offer rules for settling specific interpretive disputes. In fact, in the conclusion, I shall insist that the idea of cores implies that there are no final and ultimate interpretive decisions. What I want to suggest is that keeping the idea in mind can be a way of guiding interpreters and accounting for why creative artists pursue their efforts to create. It may help to begin with a brief anticipatory statement.

The first section, Part One, will summarize an ontology that is intended to explain the assumptions that lie behind my idea of cores. The summary is intended to be a verbal, sometimes figurative, account of an unorthodox Realism in which reality consists of both a mind-dependent and an extra-mental reality, and the latter is independent of cognitive as well as perceptual experience. Part Two will translate the ontology into aesthetic contexts.

One of my chief motivations for attempting this project has been to suggest why I believe that there is a condition of objectivity, which accounts for why there are disputes about aesthetic judgments and meanings. I agree with those who insist that interpretation imposes preconceptions and cultural practices on whatever is being interpreted; However, I am also convinced that something objective, something – not reducible to cultural and individual contexts – that constrains interpretations. The condition of objectivity is not fixed in the sense of being invariant and permanent, some ultimate, guaranteed, teleological End; nor is the condition a finite system of determinate objects. Instead, it is an effective source of forces on thinking and feeling. And it remains authoritative although indefinitely variable *in accordance with its interaction with interpreters*.

One reason (although not the only reason) I believe that artworks have objective conditions is that during interpretations and the creation of artworks it seems necessary to assume that what is being attended to is the same work from moment to moment and generally for longer time periods. We at least presuppose that it is the same work or set of works, or we could not appreciate it or discuss it from moment to moment. When I ask how you liked the performance of Brahms's Requiem last night, I expect that you and I heard the same performance, even though each of us has our own experiences of it. And I also expect that if, on a different occasion, we heard another performance of a work with the same name and sounds resembling those of the earlier performance, we would assume it to be of the same work. But more important is that when we interpret what we heard, we assume that our interpretations are not completely arbitrary, as if any other interpretation is not subject to various constraints on what is relevant to the work. With these ideas in mind, I turn to a summary of the ontological foundation that, I believe, supports my claims.

Ontological assumptions

The idea of cores originated in part in my understanding of one of Charles Peirce's most important ontological presuppositions: that the basis for semeiotic processes is a pre-interpreted "object." Signs generally, both directly and indirectly, refer to what

he called the real or "*dynamic object*." A dynamic object is the occasioning referent of an original interpretation. It belongs under the category of Peirce's Secondness, and might be thought of as a "second". "When interpretation has been completed, it has evolved into what is called the "*Interpretant*," and its object is "*the immediate object*," that is, the interpreted object. The dynamic object in itself cannot be described, since that would require that it already had been interpreted. This idea, of course, suggests a Kantian thing-in-itself; we know not *what* it is, but only *that* it is. Time restrictions permit only this brief account of how, I think, dynamic objects are not things-in-themselves. Unlike things in themselves, dynamic objects are directly experienced. They are vaguely seen, heard, read, or thought, and they are felt and thought as resistances prompting interpretation. They are presupposed as necessary conditions of the need for developing experience so that it is intelligible and brought under critical control.

The idea of a dynamic object is supported in part by Peirce's assertion that there is what he called an "*outward clash*" that occurs in connection with our conceptual schemes. There are inevitable resistances to what we do, feel, and think. These, he said, are overlooked by Idealisms such as Hegelian and Roycean metaphysics, both of which overlook an outward clash, the experienced reference to externality. The idea of dynamical objects suggests a source for a sense of externality – recognition of resistances to our minds when it negotiates experience.

Some help in understanding Peirce's idea of dynamic objects is exemplified in Peirce's account of the formation of perceptual judgments. These judgments begin with an awareness of a percept. Peirce refers referred to percepts in two ways. The first way is to the referent with which interpretation begins, before it has been completed in a completed perceptual judgment. The percept that initiates formation of judgment about *what* it is at first is vague and is what might be called by the coined word "unintelligized." As unintelligized, the vague beginning is – necessarily – intelligible in the sense of being capable of being made meaningful – but not yet meaningful in the sense of knowledge of *what* it is, before having been intelligized. I suggest that the *unintelligized*, *preintelligized* percept is a manifestation of a dynamic or what Peirce also calls a real object. Thus, the source of that which interpretation begins is the dynamic object.

With this brief condensed version of my ontological commitment, I turn to the next issue of moving from Objects to Cores.

From objects to cores

To turn from Objects to Cores is to shift focus from the ontology of things in general to the ontology of art (specifically when the word "art" refers to music and literature as well as the visual arts). I should make clear that I do not mean by "ontology of art" studies about the ontological *status* of *kinds* of artworks. My attention now is turned to a different kind of issue. As I mentioned at the beginning, I want to suggest how artworks are grounded in something objective. And I suggest that objectivity resides in an external source indicated by the presence of resistances or constraints encountered during creative and interpretive processes. These constraints influence or at least partially control creating and interpreting artworks. They are effects like those percepts have on forming judgments. In order to make this clearer, let me offer an illustration.

Constraints

I. A. Richards offered an insightful account of the point that is relevant to encountering a constraint during the creation of art. Creating or interpreting an artwork often involves an instance of resistance experienced as feedback. The feedback in a sense is a lucky backfire. Its force is not simply against what fed forward. It also has the effect of turning what initiated the force that is resisting a decision into a forward thrust toward continued development of the work or interpretation. Richards says, for example, that in trying to start or continue a poem, one sometimes considers a word or phrase but then says, “No [...] that’s not it at all.” There is then a “feedback,” which at once becomes what he calls a “feed forward.” A constraining word may feed forward in the sense that it leads to “open or close possibilities” for what follows.¹

Richards’ observation formulates well my concern about the importance of encountering constraints while creating or interpreting. But it also suggests the point of the second issue – that there are sources for the constraints, which I call cores. It is the infantile, developing core and the interpreting or creative agent of the evolving work that together yield subsequent constraints on creating and interpreting. The core evolves with the artwork, which means that the agent discovers as he or she creates. The discovery is the effect of the objective aspect of creating. The creating is the effect of the agent’s part in the process. Moreover, I trace cores one step further, proposing that from the objective perspective, they seem to function as expressions of dynamic objects, that is, immediate objects. But it is crucial to emphasize that the sources I call cores are not independent predetermined entities; cores themselves evolve as the interactive process of art – agent and the constraints interact.

Directing attention to the agent’s side of creating and interpreting, I acknowledge that artworks generally have been interpreted as linked to their social, cultural contexts that are common to humans within those contexts. And I again go a step further in suggesting that humans in all contexts are not completely disconnected from one another. Not only are most humans dependent on one another but their behavior and a fair amount of mental as well as physical structures are shared; thus, if it is a human agent who interacts with something external to that agent, not all elements of the outcome of the interaction could be completely and finally individualized in every respect. Further, the shared element or structure must have its source in what is external – the outward clash – as well as on what is a possession of the individual variation on what is common.

Of course, my claim that the source is external is a suggestion, a presupposition as well as experiential. And the proposal leads me into the dangerous domain of metaphysics! In any case, at minimum, I claim that although cores are emergent outcomes of interactions between agents (interpreters or creators) and something that imposes constraints. Some elaboration on these ideas is possible through answering the question, why is the term “core” applied in aesthetic contexts more appropriate than the term “dynamic object”?

1 “The Secret of ‘Feedforward,’” *Saturday Review*, February 3, 1968, p. 14-17.

Constraints and objectivity

Let me first consider the point that there are external objective conditions for constraints or influences not all of which are in themselves pre-interpreted. These are obviously empirically evident, felt rather than only inferred. And they both incite and influence creative and interpretive processes. There are uninterpreted effects of interpreted sources such as the song of a bird, the view of the frieze on a Greek temple, a Greek vase, and even the assonant sound of several words in sequence that may trigger the writing of a musical expression or a poem: "flight" and "insight" for instance, or dramatic pounding of timpani and thunder. Imagining a story of an historical event may lead to an artist's depicting a scene in a painting. However, these objects and events are not dynamic objects or cores. They are, in Peirce's terms, Immediate Objects. They already have been interpreted, and in the context of creating, they are interpreted inspirations or triggers. Artists obviously also are influenced by their own predispositions and idiosyncratic personality traits. At issue here, however, are the constraints felt after creative activity has begun, when various pre-interpreted constraints – not apparently completely controlled by the artist – intrude. These help determine the course of the process and where it is headed. This account can be illustrated in artists' reports, the observations of art critics and historians, and of my own experiences. Following are some additional examples.

There is evidence of the presence of an external source of constraints in Mozart's reported protest that he could not add to or subtract even one note from his finished compositions. He did *not* say that since he was the composer, he was the only decision determiner of the correct number of notes. Instead, he implied that the determination was dependent on the demands of the music, the referent of the written score, as if a choice of notes and the place to end the composition was discovered by the composer.

There is also William James's account of his continuing to finish narratives in order to find out what happens.² Or consider Theodore Adorno's reference to the "sense" of a piece of music, which seems to be a way of appealing to a controlling condition internal to the work – a condition for how to interpret it. Artists in various media sometimes refer to *anticipating* necessary developments during the creative process. Michelangelo, for instance, claimed that while sculpting he looked for the figure hidden in the marble.

Another kind of example is Toscanini's asking Verdi whether he would endorse a small change in the score of one of Verdi's compositions, and Verdi's agreeing and saying that the change better expressed what he wanted to achieve. This is consistent with the thought expressed by authors or composers in the words, "what the work wants to be."

Cores and percepts

The relation between the externally but evident influences on the art process and on the artwork that completes the finished work seems to parallel Peirce's analysis of the relation of percepts to perceptual judgments. Pre-interpreted percepts, I think,

2 See the Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*.

are appropriately regarded as expressions or indicators of dynamic objects. They are the initial evidence that there is something there to be interpreted. Likewise, pre-interpreted triggers and inspiring objects and events, which prompt art processes and their interpretations, function as pre-interpreted percepts do for perceptual judgments. However, at least in the case of art, I suggest that there are intervening sources between dynamic objects and direct experiences of them. Such experiences are responses to the compelling expressions occasioned by the interactions of creative agent or interpreter. I consider “core” an appropriate term for them. They are directly experienced sources for artistic constraints.

It could be asked whether the word “Object,” aesthetically construed in some way might not be more appropriate than “core.” I have avoided using the word “object” because it could be too easily associated with a solid, three-dimensional physical thing. Cores, like objects, may suggest stability and centrality, but what I think is crucial is that cores also have a dynamic relation within the generation of constraints that function influentially.

Dynamic objects and cores nevertheless are not identical. Cores are expressions or *manifestations* of dynamic objects, and not themselves dynamic objects. Cores are counterparts to pre-interpreted percepts. Their constraining action on creating and interpreting depends on their interactions with creator and interpreter.

The un-interpreted, vague presentations that initiate and occur during creating and interpreting seem to parallel the function of un-interpreted percepts as they evolve into perceptual judgments. Vague experiences such as perturbations or moods and indeterminate images invite interpretation through art processes. Once they have been interpreted, they are candidates for appreciation by interpreters and the creator as well. Yet, in the case of non-verbal artworks appreciators have the problem of articulating, at least verbally. Non-verbal artworks seem verbally indescribable literally, unless, of course, the unlikely interpretation is in the same medium – a painting for a painting or a musical composition for another. Verbal language inevitably misses being adequate to the non-verbal presentation. Thus, if verbal language is used to interpret or invoke admiration, a transformation into the different medium is required. The interpretation by an appreciator or critic involves transforming what is experienced into a different presentation and usually into a different medium – for instance, in an analysis of an artwork, which requires verbal expression applied to visual qualities, the interpreter turns primarily to a figurative version of the original. What is the relevance of these remarks on relating things in different media? The issue raises the question, Is the core for the transformation the same as the core of the original?

It would be foolish to attempt an adequate answer here, if one could ever be given. But let me suggest that the transformed interpretable outcome would at least have a core that shares a complex relational structure of constraints with the original. I have contended that the interpretive and analytical account would share a metaphorical interaction of qualities with the artwork that the account addresses.³ This suggests that the verbal interpretation should be an attempt to aim at a core that approximates the core of the work it interprets, with, of course, some qualities that conventionally can only be attributed to what is non-verbal.

3 My attempt to support this idea was offered in *Metaphor and Art*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Returning to what has been said about the originating experience of beginning an artwork, there is the example of the idea that art processes begin with vague, uninterpreted experiences found in R. G. Collingwood's view that feelings or disturbing moods may lead to attempts to clarify them. He says that in beginning a painting or composing a poem or a musical composition, an artist may have an experience such as a feeling of "*perturbation*," a term I used earlier with Collingwood in mind. Such a feeling seems to be uninvited and forced on consciousness. Further, the outcome of the art process may be an artwork that is a creation, that is, something that is not simply a work of craft, but an outcome that is unprecedented, unpredicted, unpredictable, and unique. In such cases, what initiates the process is comparable to forming a perceptual judgment from a raw percept. As suggested, the constraints, on the clarification act through feedback to feedforward, thus acting positively. It is necessary at this point to expand on the importance of the role of constraints.

As already stressed, artists and interpreters also may recognize that something thought of or attempted moved was resisted; it seemed wrong. Nevertheless it moved them forward. Being wrong, as Richards suggests, may result in feedback. Examples of feedbacks have been cited and discussed some years before Richards introduced the figurative but apt idea of feeding forward.

Vincent Tomas, describing creative processes, referred to *kicks* that apparently occur to artists when they create.⁴ Although the term "kicks" may seem overly dramatic or excessive, his point was that there are moments in creating when artists sense resistance to making certain decisions such as the next brush stroke in a painting or the next word in a poem. It seems obvious that the sense of recognizing "no, not that," is a constraint felt as an instance of feedback. Such experiences occur almost instantaneously, when the possible stroke or word comes to mind. But the feedback then leads to a feedforward. The kick or nudge, then, can spark a positive reaction by suggesting anticipatory effects. One who is kicked may be nudged away from something but also recognize a change in direction forward and the presence of possibilities.

It may help to relate my claims about cores to an approach considered by E. D. Hirsh in 1967. I do not claim that Hirsh would agree with my idea of cores, but his ideas about accounting for attempting to settle differences in interpretations of artworks can be applied to the idea that there are cores. Disagreements about interpretations of the same artwork interact with one another and must, or at least may, be temporarily resolved by Hirsh's idea of finding a *consensus* that settles on an interpretation.

The referent of the interpretation then implies the possibility of an *ideal* consensus. If such an ideal consensus could be actualized, it would refer interpreters to one, at least provisional, interpretation dependent on a core source of constraints that tentatively limit a meaning for the artwork. Thus, the consensus implies that meanings congeal, giving coherence to the artwork.

This, however, does not account for the origin of the core, in the sense of an independent source external cause for the core. The core, after all, results from an

⁴ Vincent Tomas, "Creativity in Art," *Philosophical Review*, 67 (1958) 1-1. I also proposed an approach in Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984. (Originally published by Martinus Nijhoff, 1975.)

interaction between the creator or interpreter and the constraints. And the interaction originates an outcome that exhibits what is unprecedented and unpredicted. The claim that the core originates with this interaction suggests two major objections to my idea that there are cores external to interpreter and creator.

Objections

The suggestion that there are *external* sources for constraints, then, invites at least two criticisms: the first is that what I refer to as mind or consciousness-independent has its source in unconscious or pre-conscious sources. The second criticism is that if artists are responsible for creating artworks, the source of constraints must be within actions for which the mind of the creator rather, than an extra-mental reality, is responsible. I shall address these in order.

The Unconscious as Source

In addition to the examples of consciously experienced influences, there are, at least according to various theories (especially psychoanalytic), unconscious and preconscious impulses, innate drives, cultural inheritances, and generally causes not at the surface of consciousness. Two early and influential examples are the Freudian Unconscious and the Jungian archetypes. More recent studies could replace the Unconscious with accounts of brain processes that are correlated with conscious experiences. Presumably, these are sources of the influences referred to earlier as conditions that initiate creative acts and interpretive conclusions. The below-consciousness influences are causes that are not experienced directly but are inferred from symptomatic speech and behavior and data gathered from studies of the brain. Thus, these unconscious causes affect what is consciously recognized in their outcomes, especially in artworks. An objector to my idea of cores then may insist that the source of the outward clash and its constraints can be traced to unconscious or lower level mental processes, rather than to something extra-mental.

In response, I should first state that this challenge implies the rejection of what I understand to be Peirce's idea of the outward clash. I have assumed that Peirce referred to an outward clash that is independent of Mind in all its functions. Otherwise, he would not have referred to it as overlooked by Hegelian and Roycean Idealism.

Furthermore, I should point, as already indicated, that I do not claim that all constraints and positive influences are encountered as outward clashes. Some constraints surely are the primary effects of inherited schemata and inherited predispositions, memories, immediate felt emotional events, and unconscious drives. However, for the objector, the conditions for such effects are in part, probably in large part, traceable to genes and environment as well sub-conscious sources.

Why aren't these more fully explanatory than dynamic objects, which Peirce introduced as necessary antecedents for the resistances experienced in outward clashes? My much too short answer to this question rests at least in part on my conception of what it is to create. I am assuming that constraints occurring during creative and interpretive actions are effects of originative forces, effects not simply of precedent dispositions ingredient in anything unconscious or previously experienced. Antecedent conditions in turn have their own origins. And if a causal series, or some

set of necessary conditions, is being claimed or at least implied, either these would, for human understanding, have a beginning in something initiating the series, or the series would regress infinitely. The option I (and what I interpret Peirce to have meant) assumes that interactions of interpreters and creators with dynamic objects, or in the present context, cores, are followed by *ex nihilo* (spontaneous) events. It follows that there is no comprehensive explanation that can be given for the function of cores. Further attention to the idea of *ex nihilo* will follow in an elaboration of the two objections.

Crucial to my idea of cores are the constraints that are relevant to *individual* outcomes: the creation and interpretation of individual artworks. And when individual artworks are being considered, the congealing of the many influences, conscious and unconscious, are focused on the uniqueness of the outcomes. In addition, I propose that the center around which various creative possibilities and interpretive means gravitate is the artwork's core. But this leads directly to the second objection.

Origins in artist and interpreter

The second objection conflicts with my view of creativity in art. And it relates to one of my answers to the first objection: the point that creation implies origins within the artist rather than from external sources.

Artists, historians, critics, and art appreciators generally accept the idea that artworks that have been deemed *masterworks* are regarded as having been the works of creative agents. And to be created means that an outcome, the creation, emerged from an activity that includes at least a moment of spontaneity. Thus, a creation exhibits something new – new not as another particular thing added to the world, but new as exhibiting a new form or style, is exemplary in initiating one or more new schools – schools of painting, poetry, music, or literary styles. And if the new aspect of the artwork is unexpected and unpredictable, then the source of constraints that occurred may be claimed to lie only in the creator.

However, if the process is creative, whatever its locus, then the outcome is untraceable completely to causal antecedents. And the conditions leading to the innovation must be *ex-nihilo*, without cause. The creative agent is a vehicle, the nurturing conduit, for the occasion. An instance of spontaneity, then, does not justify finding sources for spontaneity *only* within the knowable resources of the artist. It is also essential to emphasize that once innovation is initiated, not only do constraints occur within an interaction between artist or interpreter and the work, but also the interactions and their outcomes do not conform to unbreakable laws. Peirce's Tychism and his view of evolution support the inevitable possibility of spontaneity. Indeed, the idea of there being causal sources for it misses the very meaning of spontaneity. The spontaneity and the innovation are not the same. The innovation *follows* the break in continuity. To say that spontaneity must have sources only within the artist tacitly assumes that there is a cause within the agent; and this implies no causal discontinuity, which is to deny spontaneity.

Crucial to what I am proposing is that explaining spontaneity itself is impossible in principle. However, accounting for the work is not. An account can be given through analytic interpretation and attending to actual and probable constraints and possibilities that may have occurred to the artist. In addition to an analytic-critical account of the

artwork, the account of it also may include consideration of the initiating condition that is counterpart to the percept – that is, the kind of external condition referred to earlier as triggering inspirations, fully conscious initiating feelings and ideas.

The discussion of parallels between cores and percepts and what I said about Collingwood's idea of perturbation as a beginning of artistic expression parallels the initiation of perceptual judgment in a percept. And the dynamic structure of the process is inconsistent with a theory that purports to successfully *explain* the origins of creating in antecedent mental and physical causes. A perturbation is like a *shout*, a cry to be noticed and a way of asking to be developed. The beginning agitation or spark requiring attention is like a request to be born; and birth and life depend on two interacting sources. The seed must be brought to maturity by the agent's creating or interpreting through attention to the constraints that simultaneously accompany the agent's action. But in the case of art, until the artwork or the interpretation is finished, the process lacks one developed partner, the realization of a resistant and promising *referent* of the artist's efforts. Likewise, during creation, the core is not yet complete in the sense of being what it is to become. In process, it is a complex of possibilities – possibilities that far more numerous than those that are finally actualized on the outcome.

Additional illustration

Before concluding, I must attempt to show in what sense if any the discussion has practical implications. One of the most relevant questions is whether it is helpful in deciding about adequate interpretations of artworks. Let me propose one or two examples of how constraints on varying interpretations of artworks can provide ways to focus an interpretation that might promise leading to an ideal consensus. It may help to begin with a few comments about examples that support what was said about the appearance and relevance of constraints and the role of cores.

There surely is more than one interpretation of Dylan Thomas's crucial revealing lines in the poem, "Do not go quiet into that good night." One could quickly form an interpretation based on focusing only on the line without considering information about Thomas's father, who was dying. And still more, the interpretation could be formed without acknowledging the additional information that his father had not treated Thomas kindly. Adding the information that Thomas's father was dying leads to the possibility that the poet was demanding that his father fight to live. Other interpretations certainly are possible. And these should include suggesting why the author permitted the grammatical error, "gentle" rather than "gently," why the night was called good, and how these fit in relation to the text of the entire poem. But what is directly to the point of my claims is that within a manuscript in Thomas's hand, there is explicit evidence that constraints were at work. Words scratched out and changed appear even at the beginning of the first line of the poem. Close attention to what is rejected by an author, musician, or visual artist can be helpful, when related to other evidence in the work, for deciding what the artist was struggling to clarify.

Another kind of case

Consider a piece of music, interpreted radically differently by two different conductors. For instance, compare Stokowsky's orchestral version of Bach Toccata and Fugue

in D minor with E. Power Biggs' version on an organ. Each began using the same score, or inscriptions of the same score that was originally inscribed by Bach. The orchestral version of course varied the original through its transcription as well as Stokowsky's variations of pace and intensity and crescendos and decrescendos. But both are recognizable as performances of the general structure identified as Bach's Toccata and Fugue – not only because the initial score is the same for both, but also because, for instance, if one has not seen or cannot read the score but has only heard the performances. The constraints remain within limits such that we can recognize that it is the Bach toccata. Such limits can be breached at some point, perhaps if the score were played by a steel band that had sufficient freedom to change rhythms and dynamics. In cases of extreme departure from performances more closely approximating one another and showing closer attention to the written score the performers could be creating a different core.

This point, however, raises the question whether there is one master core for different versions of it, each of which obviously manifests the same core. Or are there two, even multiple cores, each with subtle differences in musical features and called by the same name, yet both dependent on the master core. We could say that there is one core with two or more subordinate, species cores. But it would then follow that every performance is constrained by a different subordinate core. And that would suggest an indefinite number of Bach D minor toccatas, each core, as subordinate, responsible for constraining in its unique way what is regarded as *the* artwork.

Before continuing immediately to the conclusion, these last questions suggest that I should at least mention another critical question.

The idea of a master and subordinate cores raises a broader issue illustrated by the question whether there are cores for scientific and technological theories and whether are they of a different *kind* (having different kinds of functions) from cores for artworks? I believe there are different kinds, once they have been completed through the interaction of agent and constraints. The purposes of the agent and the function of the constraints would be different in kind, requiring different practical purposes and expectations. There are not a pre-existing cores waiting to be discovered; a core is an emergent joint project. At the same time, the pre-interpreted condition for the outward clash has different kinds of possibilities – mathematical, for instance, and lacking the dominance of aesthetic qualities. A core of a developing hypothesis in science relates to its pressures and constraints differently dependent on the actions of the interpreter and the constraints of circumstances and laws of nature. The Peircean dynamic object obviously is relevant here, which raises the ontological context. However, I do not think a definitive answer needs to be provided here. Nor is this the place to pursue the ontological issue.

I must emphasize that I see no way in which the human mind can peek behind the screen distinguishing pre-intelligible from intelligible Reality, thus describing pre-intelligible factors waiting for interaction with an agent of scientific thought. The best the human mind can do is remain alert to the directions and intensities of the pressures, which will be as responsive to as well as actively constraining the decisions of the interpreter. Thus, the pressures will be different when reacting to different purposes of the creator and the interpreter. But these differences are always relevant to both the initiating force of the core and the actions of artist and interpreter.

Conclusion

There is one question that probably has been thought about by anyone who has followed my thoughts this far. What practical applications are suggested by the idea of artwork cores? I must acknowledge, as I did at the beginning of this discussion, that the idea of cores does not yield a formula or set of guidelines for interpreting, much less creating, artworks. Yet I believe it provides two ways of thinking about artworks.

First, it proposes an account, if not an explanation, of the most general reasons why creators and appreciators have a sense of going wrong and a consequent need to search for decisions that do not meet with constraints. Second, the idea of artwork cores may and should direct attention to being sensitive to experienced constraints when interpreting artworks. I think it is easy to overlook the importance of these negative occasions. Attention to what leads to specific critical interpretations focuses so quickly on the result of each interpretation that the negative factor, what alerted the creator or the interpreter to their decisions. For example, when I asked a musician why Thomas used the adjective “gentle” rather than the grammatically correct adverb in referring (presumably) to his father, the musician said that it was to preserve the beat. This is true, but also a richer interpretation, is that the relevance of the father suggests that the words “gentle into the good night” suggests, “do not die as a gentle father.” Thus, the likely resistance to the apparent grammatical error could be a factor in finding additional, perhaps enhanced, meaning. Preserving the beat provides additional meaning. The grammatical resistance prompts searching for the additional meaning of Thomas’s reactions to his father’s condition.

However, the question lingers, is there any additional advice that might contribute to the practice of interpretation? And I reiterate that I do not intend to suggest a formula or recommended procedures. What I must do is emphasize the *heuristic* value of keeping the idea of cores in mind. The pre-intelligible resistance of a core should be kept peripherally in awareness when interpreting an artwork. Awareness of its compulsive force can motivate continuing creative or interpretive work. Generalizing, this suggestion applies to inquiry in science as well as art. No interpretation, not theory, is absolutely final. No dispute should be regarded as forever over. And crucial to my purposes is the rejection of the claim that any interpretation is as good as another. As Peirce suggested, to be relative is not to be arbitrarily autonomous, but is to be relative *to* something.

The idea of cores, then, is intended to support my would-be mantra: Variability without Relativity. With this in mind, my final concluding proposal is that what is pre-intelligized should be kept at least peripherally in awareness when interpreting or creating an artwork. The relevance of it is heuristically valuable, and it should be acknowledged as the compulsive force that motivates continuing creative work and interpreting, revising, and all inquiry. There is always more, always “residue” to be brought into the domain of intelligized experience.

References

HAUSMAN, Carl R. *Metaphor and Art*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

_____. *A Discourse on Novelty and Creation*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984. (Originally published by Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

JAMES, William. "The Preface". In: JAMES, HENRY, JR. *The Spoils of Poynton*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

PEIRCE, Charles Sanders. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 8 vols. HARTSHORNE, WEISS, and BURKS (eds.). Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1931-1958.

RICHARDS, I. A. "The Secret of Feedforward". In: *Saturday Review*. n. 3, p. 14-17, February, 1968.

TOMAS, Vincent. "Creativity in Art". In: *Philosophical Review*, n. 67, p.1-15, 1958.

Endereço/ Address

Carl R. Hausman
Department of Philosophy
Penn State University
240 Sparks Building
University Park, PA 16802

Data de envio: 25-05-2012

Data de aprovação: 27-05-2012