

**Dena Shottenkirk\***

## **Global Grammar**

### Abstract

I argue that art is a kind of epistemology. It is a way we know the world. But it is not knowing the world in the way that old correspondence theory of empiricism claimed, nor what the rationalists wanted to believe: we cannot simply look at the world or have it conceptually come to us, unbidden, unedited, clear and distinct. There is no a priori “given.” Instead, the “world” comes at us with a plethora of data: massive bits of information, some of which is attentional and noticed consciously, some unconsciously, and much not noticed at all. We edit, we select. We do both as a result of being previously told what to notice (e.g., the usual designation of public objects), and as a result of selecting what pragmatically matters to each of us as individuals.

My view gives credence to the epistemic role played by art; I argue that the act of understanding art is an act that allows the viewer to enter the phenomenal experience of the individual artist—through the phenomenal experience’s symbolism encapsulated in the artwork—and allows that phenomenal experience to enter the domain of social facts. It is a transfer of knowledge, from a first-person account of being in the world to a third-person account. In this, individually experienced qualia (e.g., the artist’ experience) become socially constructed concepts (in the process of audience viewing and acceptance), and the non-linguistic experience of the artist is converted into the linguistic practice of the group. We are at a point in history where that is evident. That art is a kind of epistemic experience is evident in contemporary art because we have not only traveled past modernism, with its epistemic notions of progress and objective truth, but past post-modernism and its notions of relativism, and have arrived at a moment in history where the meaning in an artwork is not derived from the movement with which the art has aligned itself, but from the point of the individual artist. It is an experience that has at its fingertips the general rules, the general grammar, of post-modernism’s theories and modernism’s styles.

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It is a view of art that argues that art is not merely a pleasant leisure activity, not merely a search for beauty, but one of the important ways that we construct and understand our world. Art tells us what to see, how to parse the selected data into useful entities, and thus how to chunk, so to speak, the ontological world. Thus, art doesn't only make a subset of the data legible and meaningful, it also tells how to value that ontology: what to care about, and how to relate that to other things that we care about. It gives us the world we value.

Keywords

Aesthetics, contemporary art, philosophy, relativism, art theory

### **Intro: How History and Theory Matter to Art**

Where we are today with art theory can only be articulated if we have some sense of where we have recently been, and this necessary step is never uncontentious. To pull back, to rise up—the effort of trying to get a clear bird's-eye view: this is not easy. History—any kind of history, and this includes art history and the art theory with which it is coupled—is not self-evident and it is not a priori, meant necessarily to be a particular way. Grasping what has come before and putting what is happening now in the lap of what came before, thereby giving it parentage and identity—is an act of will(s). For history is editing. It is the conscious selection of a subset of events that are taken from the complete set of events that occurred; it is a story-line, it is constructed. And that is the result of political battles, fought in the minds of those who have come after. Some things are granted as meaningful and as progenitors to what has come later. Others are deemed to be missed turns, events without consequences—something that ultimately *doesn't matter* because its effects are no longer felt. History is a vicious rear-view mirror, letting some things live on and others not.

My view gives credence to the epistemic role played by art; I argue that the act of understanding art is an act that allows the viewer to enter the phenomenal experience of the individual artist – through the phenomenal experience's symbolism encapsulated in the artwork – and allows that phenomenal experience to enter the domain of social facts. It is a transfer of knowledge, from a first-person account of being in the world to a third-person account. In this, individually experienced qualia (e.g., the artist' experience) become socially constructed concepts (in the process of audience viewing and acceptance), and the non-linguistic experience of the artist is converted into the linguistic practice of the group. We are at a point in history where

that is evident. That art is a kind of epistemic experience is evident in contemporary art because we have not only traveled past modernism, with its epistemic notions of progress and objective truth, but past post-modernism and its notions of relativism, and have arrived at a moment in history where the meaning in an artwork is not derived from the movement with which the art has aligned itself, but from the point of the individual artist. The relationship truth has to art in today's contemporary world is clearly a truth that emanates from the individual's experience of the phenomenal world. It is an experience that has at its fingertips the general rules, the general grammar, of post-modernism's theories and modernism's styles.

This paper explains both this theory regarding the epistemic role of art and the historical trajectory. It has three sections, the first two being historical preliminaries for the last: What Art Was (History); What Art Should Be (Theory); What Art Is (Global Grammar). The first section recapitulates a brief history of the twentieth-century/western-world's modernism and post-modernism in order to both give the necessary background for Section III, e.g., contemporary art, and also to explain the notions of truth that were undergirding modernism and then post-modernism. Truth conditions also drive section II (What Art Should be (Theory)), which is an analysis of post-modernism's reliance of theory and philosophy, and an analysis of the general relationship of philosophy to art as well as the relationship of art to philosophy. The final section e.g., What Art Is (Global Grammar), is an argument for the view that today's art is distinct from post-modernism (and is not thus a re-mixing of modernism's styles with the attendant reliance on theory), but is rather governed by a universal grammar that is understood globally. Art is not now about movements; it is now the language of individuals. And viewing art is the epistemic experience of understanding those individual voices. This change is the result of two things: 1) the internet 2) global art fairs and marketing. I analyze how these two things have dissolved the pluralism of post-modernism and given art a more univocal voice and one that allows the voices of individuals as opposed to movements. I explain how this Global Grammar uses theory and philosophy differently than did post-modernism.

### **What Art Was (History)**

Knowledge has played very different roles in the history of modernism, post-modernism, and what some call post-post-modernism but what I'm calling the era of Global Grammar. Modernism's beginnings in the mid-nineteenth

century (some would say with Impressionism but I would say with Courbet's realism) were a full-frontal assault on the prettiness of art. This was the first move toward establishing the epistemic role of art as publicly acknowledged role. The easiness of traditional art had linked it to the non-intellectual, but with modernism, art was a means of confrontationally demanding that reality be looked at with the top layer, so to speak, of reality stripped off. Like scientists looking under the superficial layer of matter to see the real microscopic causal connections, modernist art laid bare social and psychological realities. Their message was that the real, *really real*, thing was not the superficiality of a scene, where each object sat contained and cleanly discrete from others. This was the aesthetic behind realism. The respect for individualized objects—for objectness itself—ceased with modernism. Reality was to be found *behind* appearances. What was real was seen when one looked a bit deeper and saw, for example, the shattering, destabilizing light in Monet's work, or the claustrophobia that pigment and color could cause in a Jean-Édouard Vuillard painting where one figure was on the verge of being vacuumed into another, or the underlying geometry of the world as seen in Cezanne that was both rational and disrupted. To the modernists, these visions were an improvement on the old kind of pretty and respectful art; they were a more accurate telling of the world; they were truth.

Progress is not a fact it is an idea, and it was the central engine that underwrote modernism. Hope governed. The belief in the virtue of the new governed the world. And thus, the era's art cannot be seen apart from the ethos of the Industrial revolution or the vast migrations that were to resettle the western world. Life could be better. And each new moment, each new tick on the time line, was an improvement on the one that had come before.

This hope, this line of the graph that went ever upward, was the psychological engine behind the avant-garde. Each few years brought with it a new iteration of the Young Turks, each imbued with the patricidal need to overthrow the previous movement's style. And it was style that was the keystone of modernism: visual styles—whether it be Impressionism, or De Stijl, or the Russian Constructivists, or the German Expressionists, or the Surrealists—were codified and the meaning encoded in their visual form made public. Manifestos were published, and membership in the group movement was clear. Though this is not to say that the modernists relied on theorists or philosophers or even quoted them. Theory, when it did exist, was more often quasi-political in nature or drawn from the quarters of the newly established practice of psychology. Quoting from philosophers and relying on theoretical constructs in order to make even initial sense of the visual object was something that would wait for its conditions of satisfaction in post-modernism.

While modernism's history is thought to encompass the period between the mid-nineteenth century and the mid-sixties of the twentieth century, I would draw a line between the first approximately seventy years and the last forty-five, for I would argue that an important divide happened after WWI. If one begins with Courbet's 1850 "A Burial at Ornans" (which seems like a reasonable place to begin modernism), the focus of that work sets out the rulebook for the modernist work to follow: this was Reality. But by the third decade into the twentieth century, I would argue that modernism changed. The focus on the outer became a focus on the inner. In other words, the focus on the objective flipped to a focus on the subjective. And the cause was WWI.

This war, burgeoning within four months from an assassination in Serbia to literally most of the world, thoroughly unnerved the world in ways that are unimaginable to us today. Few people discuss the first war today as it was eclipsed by the much larger losses of WWII (17 million for the first as opposed to 70 million for the second), but, if one is to read them, the shattering that was felt can be easily seen in the recorded accounts. As Max Ernst was quoted as saying in 1919: "Our chief object was to show how completely we were out of joint with all that had led to the war, and all that the war had brought to us" (Seuphor 1957, 79). Or in the words of Tristan Tzara, "Dada was never anything but a protest" (Seuphor 1957, 70). A war without obvious causes, it imploded consciences with its unexplained and pointless loss of life, and was probably the western world's biggest dislocation since the plague of the fourteenth century. This is important for present purposes as the shattering can also be seen in the art. It is a change that is often overlooked. The focus of art after WWI wasn't on the objective world, but on the subjective. Hence, the Dadaists, German Expressionists, the Surrealists, etc. from 1917 on, were all were talking about the psychological costs of life—measuring, recording, and taking account of that immaterial world.

This trend magnified itself with Abstract Expressionists after WWII and the migration to America, but I would argue that the Abstract Expressionists were a difference in degree and not kind. Too much has been made of the shift seen by the second world war when the center of the artworld moved to NY. The changes in art after WWII were insignificant compared to the changes after WWI. The art got bigger—thanks to billboards' influence on Willem de Kooning and his influence on others—but the art remained focused on the psychological, the Freudian/Jungian, the inner world of the artist.

But all this changed in the early 60s. Pop Art was a difference in kind. Shepherded by Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, it was the comics of Lichtenstein and the advertising images of Warhol that defined Pop Art as not only art that mirrored the objective world and didn't comment on the inner, but also put an end to the avant-garde, ushering in post-modernism. Pop Art was a reaction against the look-inward tendencies of modernism since the time of WWI; its viewpoint was anti-Freudian, anti-personal. I would argue that it wasn't primarily an attempt to eradicate the division between low and high art; that was a mere spandrel on the evolutionary path. The main thing selected for was the claim that art merely mirrored (external) reality. It just accidentally happened to be that external reality was largely a commercial (read: low) reality. The real enemies were the claims 1) that artists should delve into themselves and 2) reach for the new truth that would usher in progress. Now, truth was just the mirror. Thus, Pop Art was the cap on the end of the avant-garde; it was the end of the belief in progress.

### **What Art Should Be (Theory)**

And it was the beginning of the role of theory and philosophy in art. Arthur Danto argues both points in *Beyond the Brillo Box*; in regard to the end of modernism he states, "Art was no longer possible in terms of a progressive historical narrative. The narrative had come to an end" (Danto 1992, 9). In regard to the role of theory he states, "[...] it was with reference to an enfranchising theory that they derived their identity as works of art. [...] one had to participate in a conceptual atmosphere, a 'discourse of reasons' [...]" (Danto 1992, 5). Artwork wasn't just available as a visual phenomenon, it was an artifact of a theoretical phenomenon. Pop Art could not be understood if one didn't have some understanding of the theory behind it.

It is shortly after this moment that the rapidly changing practices of post-modernism emerge, and "neo" becomes a designation attached to simultaneously occurring sub-movements, such as minimalism (thought by many to be a neo version of Malevich's work in the early part of the century, though joined with the Platonism found in the abstract contemplation of industrial materiality), conceptual art (thought by many to be a neo version of Dadaism and Duchampian aesthetics), as well as the movements directly identifying themselves as neo including neo-expressionism, or neo-Pop (in the 70s and 80s).

The theory of truth underwriting post-modernism was radically opposed to the theory of truth that underwrote modernism. There was a singular truth in modernism, and each generation claimed to have found it. Like science, which is constantly being updated and changed, in art too the old version of truth was thrown away, replaced by a shiny and more truthful version of truth. But post-modernism didn't claim to a universal or univocal truth. It didn't sign on to the notion progress or the notion of universal truth that underwrites progress. For if there is "progress" then that definition of the right way to go, so to speak, is singular/objective/true. But that stopped with post-modernism. Like pluralism in metaphysics, pluralism in art was founded on relativism: many things could be true, it was merely a matter of what's true for you.

But that is not to underestimate to epistemic role for post-modernism; quite the contrary. While modernism had assumed the mantel of declarer of what was real, post-modernism did the same though with the added weight of theory. To reiterate, the art of post-modernism was not as readily understood by the viewer as had been modernism; the added dose of interpretative theory was needed. So, philosophical (or psychological or sociological) theories were enlisted, and even though this plurality of views, *as a plurality*, abdicates claims to universal truth and thus has the downside of merging truth with opinion, it does not though readily abdicate its claim to authority.

This relativism was in the air. Both analytic and continental philosophy of the time also showed preference for relativism, but more directly emanating out of art practice and often thought of as the starting signal for post-modernism was the architect Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, a book that argued for not only the recycling of different styles but also a mixing/ matching of styles, each style dragging with it the baggage from its original avant-garde (or older) sources. Symbolism and meaning was packaged and readily accessible, at least to those who knew the codes. Thus, theory was the keystone to post-modernism, replacing the more simple version of belief in progress and truth that had been the driving force behind modernism. Stasis had replaced progress.

But this is not entirely true as the stasis was in terms of the attainment of truth, not in terms of fashion. What I mean by this is that the truth-bearing function of progress had been thrown over-board—the guarantees of a better future that the avant-garde promised were gone; but the excitement given by the new-ness of fashion was still very much evident. Perhaps even more so. In other words, commerce had stepped in. The newest iteration of post-modernism, whether it was the "bad paintings" of the 80s or the large-

scale media work of the 90s, was each treated with the same excitement as the stylistic innovations of modernism, though without the fervor that greets claims of truth. Claims of cool are different. For coolness can be marketed in ways that truth can't.

Thus, it is important to be clear about the role of theory in post-modernism. To clarify, the term "theory" as applied to post-modernism has to be understood as being a plural term. This is the usage referred to by Danto: a specific art-theory used to explain a specific slice of post-modernism, and thus many different theories in the pluralistic stream of post-modernism. To reiterate the point, there is a theory explaining Pop Art, a theory explaining conceptualism, a theory explaining minimalism, etc. In other words, there was not, even during the theory-laden period of post-modernism, a relationship between the two fields such that certain kinds of art directly reflected certain philosophical perspectives. And of course you wouldn't want it that way, as the art wouldn't be art if it were doggedly following along behind philosophy; it would only be an depiction of the latter and not a thing itself.

That is a point worth taking another look at. The relationship between art and philosophy is somewhat fraught. Philosophy tries to own, as it were, other disciplines while art seeks to plunder for purpose. What I mean is this. Philosophy, as a practice, stands back from a subject and tries to determine the governing principles at work in that discipline. It asks, What makes this discipline what it is? Philosophy, in that way, throws a net over the entire enterprise in the act of trying to understand it. That is why I say it is a kind of ownership; and it is thus the source of the ancient designation of philosophy as "Queen of the Sciences."

Art, on the other hand, takes what it needs. Its relationship to other disciplines and systems of knowledge is extemporaneous and incomplete. It plucks, it steals, it takes a bit out of the whole and uses whatever it wants for the purposes at hand. More of a criminal than a tyrant, art just grabs and runs. In order to talk about what it is to *be in the world*—which is the whole point of art—art has to take from that world. But it has no need of studying and encapsulating the whole of a dialogue. Accuracy is not the goal, nor even a complete rendering of the facts. Because the job of art is to comment on experience, and since experience is always partial, art is always from the point of view of the individual at a particular time. In this, it's doing a different job than philosophy, or at least traditional philosophy. It is not out to encapsulate the whole. It is by its nature the story of an individual paying attention to the world. Art is about making a singular experience into a shared experience.



What can, then, philosophy offer art?

This is where “theory” as a singular term enters the discussion. Art doesn’t need philosophy to tell it what to do. It never has, even in the days of post-modernism. Art will always exist, as it is the most essential expression of being human, even more so than language. The latter allows us to name and hence negotiate the possession of objects in the world. But art allows us to see each other’s humanity. It is of far greater importance.

### **What Art Is (Global Grammar)**

And so, to ask the question again that was asked above: What does philosophy have to offer art? Stated simply, aesthetics is looking at art and giving an analysis of what happens. If this is thought of in the way I am arguing for, it is an analysis of what happens the moment we look at art: how does perception meet cognition and what is that we are understanding? If this explanation is done right, philosophy will then provide fodder for art; it will give artists a verbal explanation for what it is they already do, it will give them a teleology and an explanation of their already accepted presuppositions. In other words, if philosophy gives a correct picture of what it is that art is doing, then artists will find that correct definitional picture useful and can draw from it. That is what I propose to do in the following.

I argue that art is a kind of epistemology. It is a way we know the world. But it is not knowing the world in the way that old correspondence theory of empiricism claimed, nor what the rationalists wanted to believe: we cannot simply look at the world or have it conceptually come to us, unbidden, unedited, clear and distinct. There is no *a priori* “given.” Instead, the “world” comes at us with a plethora of data: massive bits of information, some of which is attentional and noticed consciously, some unconsciously, and much not noticed at all. We edit, we select. We do both as a result of being previously told what to notice (e.g., the usual designation of public objects), and as a result of selecting what pragmatically matters to each of us as individuals. I notice the smell of chocolate because I care about it. And on the basis of those things we have selected, we construct objects that are named, re-named, made anew.

The world is then “my” world—it is the phenomenal world as it has been edited and recognized by me. But it is not just solipsistic. I recognize objects because others have articulated and named them before and those semantic delineations have been passed to me, which now govern what I semantically recognize. Thus, I see “chair” and not just a lump of beans sewn into

a bag, I see “computer server” and not just a mess of wires, etc. Others’ subjective experiences have gotten passed along in terms of named entities and they thus were converted to inter-subjective realities. Therefore, we know the world not just through our own individual perceptions, but through the perceptions of others.

Art is an essential way that this fundamental human process of social cognition manifests itself. Art is thus an absolutely essential process. In this, *listening to others* is the most crucial epistemological act a person can do. And art is a form of listening. We pay attention—in that moment of experiencing an artwork—to the subjectivities and perceptions of another. We listen to their viewpoint, their truth, their experience. And we take what is useful, what seems uniquely true and previously unnoticed. We learn. We learn to see an object we’d not seen before and learn to care about that formerly unseen object.

More precisely it is a way we construct objects—e.g., assign properties to entities and thus delineate those entities—in an on-going and never-ending making of reality. Phenomenal reality does not come already “chunked” for us into what we call “reality.” What is real, what counts as a social object, is constructed by us through a process of editing the phenomenal world, which, like a sandstorm, comes to us. Thus, much of what exists around us is peripherally noticed by us; much more is noticed not at all. “Experience” is what we call the subset of that sandstorm that we have noticed and named, and that is a reality that we make. It is a reality that artists help us make.



Rachel Whiteread, *(Untitled) Bed* (1991)  
Museum of Modern Art, New York  
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/82209>

For example, look at Rachel Whiteread's piece entitled "Untitled (Mattress)" from 1991. In this sculpture, what is being pointed to isn't normally what we'd already be calling a thing—e.g., a named thing, antecedently defined. The plaster has four holes in it at approximately the corners of the rectangle, and though they do not go all the way through the plaster they are clearly reminiscent of the four corners of a bedpost. The size is almost right for a mattress, showing the presence of its former owners in the echo of their most vulnerable and intimate moments. Though absence is being pointed to in the Whiteread piece it is being pointed to in a more philosophically complex way than is immediately evident.

The plaster sculpture, seemingly pointing at first to what is familiar and named e.g., a mattress, is really pointing to something else instead. If one were an uninitiated viewer unfamiliar with Whiteread's work, the perplexity would at this time probably set in: not only does this part not make sense but it's clear that the plaster is too thick to be only the cast of a mattress. This is where the educational function of museum's plaques is useful and it in part reads: "[...] plaster casts of the space beneath an ordinary double bed, with the four round holes demarcating the space once occupied by the bed's legs... inviting us to see what is not there or to notice details that are normally hidden." If one didn't know before, one now knows. This is one of the ways that consensus is built.

It is pointing to what we don't normally name and isolate for view: the space under the mattress; *that* is what the plaster cast is of. Now we are looking at that and thinking of what that means. Whiteread has edited reality for us, pointing to things not normally ontologically delineated as a member set of particulars, things we wouldn't have noticed and named, and telling us to value them. Our world now has an additional constituent entity that it did not have before – the formerly un-named and not thought-of *is now an entity*: the space under the bed is now the-space-under-the-bed—it is *one thing*, united into an entity; it has been circumscribed off from contiguous bits of information and pointed to and named as one unit. Furthermore, and importantly, we are told *how* to view it: more forlorn than even the un-made bed itself, this space records, too, the former inhabitants but records them as ghosts whose physical impact on negative space echoes silently in their absence.

What is happening here is that the artist has taken her perceptual experiences of the world along with their associated subjectively proprietary qualities, what we call "qualia"—those felt experiences that are sometimes referred to as qualities, but just as often referred to as the (non-linguistic) "raw

feels” of lived experience—and converts those experiences into physically instantiated material e.g., art. The experience of the artist is made into the artwork, and the artwork thus encodes and transmits that experience. That is the core of what is called an artist’s “practice”—it is an artist’s take on the world, the artist’s awareness of the world—and it is stored as a procedure, a practice. It is not like quite like semantic naming, and is quite probably not activated in the same part of the brain that stores semantic memories e.g., the medial temporal lobe and midline diencephalic structures, making art more like riding a bike than like naming species of trees (Shottenkirk, Chatterjee 2010, 5–21). Thus, those “raw feels” of the artist are ones known very deeply by the artist, in a way similar to the way one experiences a tooth ache or other ineluctably private moments, and those private subjective moments are converted to a visual language that symbolically recreates some of that feel in the embodied moment the viewer experiences it. The “languages” of color, size, texture, surface, transparency, thickness, fast-moving gestures, geometry, etc., etc., are combined (the math of the possible combinations is dazzling in and of itself!) and gives over to the viewer some sense of the original qualia experienced by the artist.

It is thus that both the making of art and the viewing of art are central ways that we parse reality and are thus constituent parts of our cognitive systems. Perception of the world is not a passive act. We edit the world around us both consciously and non-consciously. The artist chooses a subset of the data, and presents that subset within a particular attitudinal framework that references the embodied experience itself. Art is thus a way of bridging the distance between the knowledge obtained by an individual (e.g., as the individual artist) and the knowledge adopted by a group (e.g., those who view the art). In other words, art is a kind of epistemology—a kind of knowledge acquisition. It is an epistemic practice that allows us to construct a world in the face of a bombardment of vast amounts of sense data, as well as to the associated mental responses to that data. And, as an epistemic experience that maintains our identity as embodied subjects, art is, importantly, one of the main ways we get our bearings in that world; one of the main ways we “cope with” the world.

It is a view of art that argues that art is not merely a pleasant leisure activity, not merely a search for beauty, but one of the important ways that we construct and understand our world. Art tells us what to see, how to parse the selected data into useful entities, and thus how to chunk, so to speak, the ontological world. Much is left out in that process, and all of it is open for valuation—to care or not care about what we choose. Thus, art doesn’t only

make a sub-set of the data legible and meaningful, it also tells how to value that ontology: what to care about, and how to relate that to other things that we care about. It gives us the world we value.

This is philosophy that gives something to art: it is a view of art that prioritizes the act of the individual artist and makes that act central to our acquisition of knowledge. It is a centralizing of the role of truth in art. But it is not objective truth as was seen in modernism, nor relativized truth as seen in post-modernism. It is truth as we create it, truth that is gained from the fundamental act of listening to one another; truth that is the synthesis of individual perspectives founded in both conscious as well as non-conscious or somatic experience.

This view of aesthetics sees a causal connection between the act of perceiving an artwork and the act of belief formation. The artwork acts to create the object of belief, which can then be viewed as a kind of non-universal abstract object. What Whiteread, for example, is getting us to believe in is the abstract object “the-forlorn-space-under-the-bed”. The referent is an abstract object, constructed object: non-a priori, non-eternal, non-platonist. This is not an antecedent reality which is being discovered by us. We make it up as we go along.

This view of aesthetics that I’m proposing is different than the usual view, which is generally the offspring of an idealist philosophy and thus prioritizes the faculty of judgement. In that view (the Kantian, for example) there is an ideal to be attained and what we are doing when we experience an artwork is judging whether the artwork has attained that ideal e.g., is it an instance of beauty? But judging an artwork to succeed or not doesn’t seem to be the point; we can judge something as “bad” yet in fact quite still like it or, more commonly, judge something to be “good” and yet not get anything out of it. What we are interested in is, instead, belief: I want to believe *that* point of view. I look at a work of art and experience the artist’s point of view: I understand something I didn’t before because I understand a point of view I didn’t before have access to. When we say “yes” to an artwork what we are saying yes to is belief in that point of view: more precisely, belief in that abstract object which represents that point of view.

Further, I argue that what an artwork means is not isomorphic with the artist’s intention. An artist’s intention is not fully what we are identifying when we identify what a work of art is about. In every artist’s oeuvre there are facets that correctly communicate her intentions whereas other intentions have failed to be encapsulated. This is because the process whereby an artist hones the realization of her intentions is the slowly developed conse-

quence of the back and forth between the artist's audience's critical responses to that artist's work and the artist's acceptance or rejection of those responses. Therefore, when we say "this is what that work is about" that content is the end product of a long process of consensus building and is constituent of the epistemological basis that form public language.

For example, what an Agnes Martin "means" was not there in the first instance of her practice. It took a great deal of time for the artist to hone her message, and that honing was done in response to the audience's reports regarding what was being communicated. Some of the artist's intentions are not realized within the work in a way that is successfully communicated to the audience and so that part is not constituent of the meaning. That's why an artist's early work is often of interest to the art historian but not to the collector. That part is not constituent of the abstract object to which the art (read: mature art) is referring. So, when we say "yes, I like it", what are we saying yes to? What is it that we've agreed to? When we say, for example, that we like Agnes Martin's work we are saying that we like what her art "is about". I am saying I like the content, the point of view, to which her work refers. The work points beyond itself and to the publicly constituted abstract object that is the referent of the artwork. I see her work as evidence of that viewpoint. That is the abstract object.

And now for an explanation of the title: *Global Grammar*. We are in a different era. We are past the point of post-modernism, with its mixing of styles and its reliance on the notion of a relativized truth. We no longer need the group—e.g., the movement—to define the workings of the theory. And artists don't feel the need to align themselves with a particular movement. Movements are a thing of the past.

The reasons for this are twofold: 1) the internet, and 2) artfairs and commerce. The internet has allowed the processing of information and accomplished a vast educational program that is the unintended consequences of that technology. Everyone can easily know about the history of modernism, about who Picasso was for example and who the Dadaists were, what was the idea behind minimalism, etc., etc. And it can all be known quickly, though often in truncated and incomplete form. The same is true of the consequences of the world's literally uncountable number of artfairs: anyone within a small distance from a metropolitan area (any metropolitan area, anywhere!) probably has the opportunity to attend an artfair—those wonders of art commerce that make the traveling salesman look charmingly benign. Art is no longer a rare bird, it is no longer out of reach of the ordinary person, it is no longer something requiring extensive education and years of study.

And as that fact is true for the viewer (do we still call someone that? Or is it the consumer?), a similar fact is also true for artists: the rules are known, and they are global. Art education is easy, both through the internet and through the multiplicity of international university programs, which more or less offer the same information. The rules are easily available, and knowledge about what other artists are doing is easily at the tip of one's fingers. Small clubs in Zurich don't have a monopoly on what art is, as they did in the heyday of Dada, nor do the movements that comprised post-modernism control the language of art. Those languages—those rules—are available to everyone. Hence, a global grammar.

It is interesting to also note that this global grammar allows for both the early modernists' focus on the outer physical world as well as the later modernists' focus on the inner world, while also allowing the coded adoption of styles vis-à-vis post-modernism. The most important change is the role of truth. Gone is the objective truth the modernists believed in and also gone is the de-stabilizing relativism of post-modernism. Today, there is a renewed interest in establishing consensual-based truth, a truth that takes as its constituents the summation of the particular experiences of individuals.

## **Conclusion**

What does this give us? It gives us a world of truth; a world whereby each individual speaks on their own behalf, and gives over to the rest of us a sense of what their particular experience is: what their newly named objects are. What we choose to name—how we construct our objects—is the same epistemological activity as when we decide our history. We choose what to remember, and thereby we choose what lives on. In looking back at post-modernism and modernism, we can see the role of truth and the importance of the epistemic function of art. We can see art that stops functioning as mere high-class portraiture or religious story-telling. We can see the switch over to art as truth-teller, to art as evidence for individual experience. And now we can see the role of qualia as experienced by the individual and understand how that particular experience is handed over to others and becomes fodder for publicly accepted reality. Artists are an important part of this naming process, of this public consensus of truth. Art matters because knowledge matters.

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