

RECOGNITION AND RESPONSE
IN CONTEMPORARY ART

RICHARD LEACHMAN

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R i c h a r d L e a c h m a n

ARTWORLDS

'Recognition and Response in Contemporary Art' is an account of the hostility often directed towards the *Artworlds* management training tool, and an examination of the apparent causes of that hostility, and their implications for art appreciation

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PREFACE

The paper *Recognition and Response in Contemporary Art* was written in January 2000 for a follow-up issue to Volume 6 (1999) of the Journal of Consciousness Studies, which was titled *Art and the Brain*. The paper was rejected, but I feel that the ideas discussed are nevertheless of value and worth recording. It is reproduced in its original and unedited form.

The paper discusses some of the results of three years' trialling of *Artworlds™*, a management tool that involves the use of contemporary visual art, and that is designed to enable users to see the world within different cultural frameworks. Despite the success of *Artworlds™* in engineering profound shifts in users' mindsets, the depth of the hostility to the tool's implicit proposition that artworks have specific and universally accessible intentional contents confounded all expectations. The paper describes the theory underlying this proposition of an objectively recognisable content in art, drawing principally on recent developments in neuroscience and phenomenology. This is contrasted with the vehement, indeed enraged, denial by many art viewers of the possible existence or relevance of such an intentional content in art.

During the trialling of *Artworlds™* it became increasingly clear that the basis on which an artwork is originally created and designed to be seen is often almost diametrically opposed to how a large majority of viewers of art are determined to see it. The reason for this very deep-seated conflict seems to lie in many users' refusal to distinguish recognition from response. Indeed the very concept of recognition seems to be totally absent in the way that many view contemporary art, most of whom have an apparently absolute commitment to the idea of evocation and subjective response. And within that context, any suggestion that there may actually be a recognisable objective content in art is consequently interpreted as a violent and personal attack on the viewer's own subjective feelings and responses.

Whereas for the artist art is generally made so as to offer viewers the chance of directly recognising how the artist differently sees the world, for most viewers art is in practice regarded exclusively as a mirror of their own subjectivity. The experience of *Artworlds™* seems to highlight a crucial and fundamental failure of

communication between artists and their public, which leads not only to a disrespect and disregard for artists' work, but also to an almost guaranteed failure to recognise and engage with what art uniquely has to offer. This seems to me to be an important insight into the way art is conventionally very differently approached by practitioners and viewers, and as such is worth airing.

As for the paper's rejection by JCS, there are certainly faults in it, and it is very far from perfect. Not least, it has a certain oddity about it, and it doesn't resemble a 'normal' academic paper very closely. It covers a huge expanse of ground very generally, necessarily so, and it is drafted as a broad outline of the perceived problem, much of which is by its very nature anecdotal. It could also be better structured, and better written. Rejection on those grounds would have been perfectly legitimate and understandable, and I had in fact intimated as such to the editor of JCS. The anonymous peer-reviewer's editorial report, however, was totally and contemptuously damning in a way that was both shocking but also distressingly familiar. In the paper there is reference to my expectation that many readers of JCS would be enraged by the ideas proposed, and the reviewer certainly lived up to this. With the exception of a couple of very minor editorial points, what shone through was a total lack of any reasoned theoretical or logical argument against the paper. Certainly there was no argument that I could recognise as such, but rather an emotional, irrational and even infantile outrage that was hell-bent on rubbishing me at all costs, accompanied by criticisms that, although to my mind made of straw, were also all too liberally doused in bile. (And yes, I am well aware that peer-reviews often elicit this kind of author's response. My disappointment, however, was both with the sad predictability of the hostility, and with the complete absence of any serious criticism with which one could intelligently engage.)

The editorial report culminated in what is to me the extraordinary statement 'there is no obvious reason why...the categories of perception (recognition), intention, and response should be strongly separated at all'. My reading is that what this really means is that cognition is in fact *wholly* a matter of subjective interpretation, including those categories of intention and recognition. To my mind this is dyed in the wool relativism taken to its naturally extreme, and also extremely sloppy, limits. But the real offence is that at the same time the reviewer is implicitly suggesting that this is a perfectly normal and conventional, indeed 'obvious', presumption, blindly and wilfully refusing to acknowledge even the existence of the huge and legitimate raft of well-established philosophical and practical objections to the absolutism of post-structural theory.

This all seems such a shame. Having hoped for at least some kind of adult dialogue, the simple suggestion that art has an intentional content that is recognisable has again served to provoke the kind of blinkered road rage to which *Artworlds*TM has become all too accustomed. The proposition might of course turn out to be wrong, but at present there seems to be little chance of the possibility of its rightness even being allowed for, let alone seriously discussed. Publishing this paper both in this format and on the internet represents a mild and rather forlorn hope that some such discussion within the academic arena might yet develop. At the very least, however, I suppose it does stand as a record of the profound gulf that evidently all too often exists between the artist and his or her public, and as such it might help to prompt the beginnings of some kind of future breakthrough in the way that contemporary art is both perceived and held in the wider society. Anyway, whatever it's worth, here it is, warts and all.

Richard Leachman

Bath, September 2000

Recognition and Response in Contemporary Art

Even at our most primal, our recognition that a tiger is hurtling towards us must precede, albeit by only a nano-second or two, our response to that attack. In more everyday circumstances, when we are in conversation with another we listen acutely so that we can recognise (as accurately as is possible) what is actually being said, and we then respond to that intentional content. Recognition and response are two distinctly different, although obviously closely related, processes. Although the implications of the meanings of recognition and response are of course philosophically deeply profound and far-reaching, there is in practice usually no great difficulty in understanding the broad principle of that difference. It is a particular curiosity of art, however, and especially of contemporary visual art, that this distinction between recognition and response seems all too often to be eroded to the point at which the obligation to try to recognise an intentional content before responding to it, however partial, problematic or subjective that recognition might be, is blithely, even wilfully, discounted. The whole process of recognition has been thrown out, and an immediate and 'virgin' response to art seems to have become the rule, apparently existing in a causal vacuum locked within an introspective subjectivism and solipsism that is not only absolute but also ferociously defended. Indeed the very suggestion that there might be an intentional content in art the recognition of which might reasonably precede one's response, is frequently met with a hostility that is wholly out of proportion to any philosophical disagreement in interpretation.

This phenomenon of a response to art without prior recognition, extending to an extreme resistance even to the very idea of recognition, has been very forcibly

brought home to me in the context of my involvement in the development and recent trialling of *Artworlds*TM. *Artworlds*TM is a simulation tool that uses contemporary visual art to enable managers to experience their organisational decision-making within different cultural frameworks, 'worlds' or realities. Over the last year or so convincing experiential evidence has been mounting concerning the root cause of this resistance to the idea of a recognisable and intentional content, which leads to interesting conclusions concerning the profound differences between how art is conceived and created by artists, and how it is actually viewed by a large part of our population, no doubt including some readers of this paper. (Although none of the papers in *Art and the Brain* actively denied a recognisable content in artworks, several betrayed distinct confusion between recognition and response, and between content and evocation, occasionally even using the two concepts interchangeably.) What seems to be a polar opposition in how the artist intends the artwork to operate, and how the majority actually perceives that artwork, has very definite and fundamental implications for any serious study of art and the brain, and needs to be at the very least accommodated by any such study.

Put very simply, the proposition implicit within *Artworlds*TM is that an artwork has a specific and precise content, articulated intentionally by the artist (albeit the full intention might not have been wholly successfully articulated,) and universally accessible to anyone with a developed visual sensitivity and literacy. Although my colleagues and I had always anticipated strong opposition to the idea of the universal accessibility of a content, our experience is that what is absolutely unacceptable to the majority is the simple statement that art has a specific intentional content. Although relativist resistance to that was of course expected, the intensity of the hostility and the genuine outrage accompanying it has been quite shocking, defying all reasonable expectation of debate and dialogue. Consistently the reaction is as if *Artworlds*TM has with malevolent intent challenged and threatened peoples' very souls. This sounds melodramatic and excessive, but on the basis of our experience I fully anticipate that already not a few readers have hurled this volume of *JCS* aside in rage and disgust.

To reliably elicit such an extreme reaction from so many people, all of them highly intelligent, sensitive, educated, generally working at the cutting edges of

psychotherapy, organisational development and change management, and most of whom are probably familiar with looking at art, is interesting, and clearly indicates extremely potent agendas that need to be accounted for. To properly explain these agendas, it is necessary to outline the philosophical and neurological theory underlying *Artworlds*TM' suggestion of an intentionally articulated content in art that is universally accessible to us all.

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To go back to some kind of beginnings, until the 1950's classical objectivism by and large held sway philosophically in most disciplines. Objectivism posits a dualistic world that is mind-independent. The real world exists out there and our human mind endeavours to mirror that one world, identifying and adapting to the objective natural properties and categories of that world, to external fixed points of reference that are constant and absolute. Although the objectivists are still thriving in cognitive science, particularly in AI, the powerful arguments of post-structuralism have trounced them from what might be described as the social humanities.

The post-structuralist view is almost the precise opposite of classical objectivism, positing an object-independent world, in which the mind is wholly self-referential and entirely subjective. Each individual's mind *is* that individual's world, viewing the world only from within the mind's own framework of reference. There are no fixed points, either 'out there' or here within our own minds, or if there are, then they are wholly self-defining within our own closed cognitive and experiential systems. And if a world does exist out there not only can we never know it, even the fact of its existence is irrelevant to us. The essential proposition is that all knowledge and meaning is absolutely relative and subjective. Nothing can ever be known objectively, and no two individuals can ever communicate with any reliability.

The extraordinary influence of post-structuralism over the last thirty five years, particularly within the arts, literature and social science, can to a considerable extent be attributed to its devastatingly successful critiques of classical objectivism. Certainly art appreciation has been profoundly influenced by post-structural theory,

within which it follows inevitably that art is absolutely whatever you want it to be. By definition the meaning of an artwork is exclusive to each individual, and is wholly inaccessible to any other. And the corollary is that art as an activity or artefact is no different to any other activity or artefact, other than that some people happen to label it 'art'.

Clearly a very large part of human cognition is indeed as the post-structuralists argue, and it is almost impossible to explain the intense cognitive subjectivity of so much of our interpretation within the classical objectivist view. And yet it is also experientially clear that in any meaning of the terms we do indeed understand our interaction with our environment extraordinarily reliably. We do survive, often in a hostile environment and against huge odds, and our experience is that we do that both by objectively mastering much of our world, and by communication with one another with a remarkable degree of accuracy. And yet both of these mutually opposing and contradictory theoretical interpretations of how we see the world are absolutes, ruling out any possibility of reconciliation within either the objectivist or the relativist camp. There is, however, one significant body of philosophical theory which does successfully bridge and reconcile the objective and subjective, and that is phenomenology. Long considered by many to be a poor relation of mainstream philosophy, phenomenology has most recently acted as a theoretical and spiritual home for autopoiesis, an even poorer and yet more distant family black sheep that has nevertheless powerfully and inspirationally revived the fortunes of phenomenology. It is from autopoietic theory, sadly still often neglected and ignored (although notably not in *JCS*), that *Artworlds*TM draws its own theoretical justificationTM for the claim of a universally accessible content in art.

The phenomenological claim is that there is no clear dividing line between our cognition and the external physical world, which we know only through our active and experiential participation and involvement. That argument has been expanded and refined within autopoietic theory, developed over the last thirty years by the biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. The autopoietic proposition is that all organisms are intrinsically self-contained, self-generating and self-organising, yet constantly in open physical interaction with an objective environment. An organism

defines and is defined by its environment, in a constant reflexive feedback loop that acknowledges and embraces both the subjectivity of the organism and the objectivity of the world out there.

Within this argument the organism *is* the mind - the mind is literally embodied throughout all of the cells and organs of the human bodily condition. Our perception belongs entirely to the human bodily condition, and what we perceive is a meaning that derives from and is defined wholly in terms of the interaction of the human organism with an objective outside world. We have fixed points in our cognition that are neither wholly out there in the world, nor wholly here within the subjective world, but exist 'in between' as sufficiently viable indicators that allow a constant and reliable interaction between the human body and the world out there. These fixed points are, in a sense, in the medium of our human perceptual interaction with the world. And within this medium, the interaction of the organism and the real physical world 'brings forth', or 'enacts' a meaning that bears sufficient relationship to our lived experience of the world that we can act upon reliably.

This issue of experiential embodied meaning is both crucial and particular to autopoietic theory. Classical objectivists define meaning largely in terms of symbolic, syntactic and representational transcendental absolutes, whereas for post-structuralists meaning is whatever you choose it to be. Both definitions have a partial validity, but both clearly fail to account for the whole picture. Embodied meaning, however, engages seriously with the practical and experiential evidence that we do in fact access complex meaning both subjectively *and* reliably and viably. What the nature of that embodied meaning actually is therefore assumes considerable significance.

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Animals are clearly hard-wired for meaning. They reliably 'know' the meaning of many environmental properties in many cases immediately at birth, and it is difficult to imagine their survival without that access to objective interactional meaning. One of the principal mechanisms underlying that innate perception of meaning was first identified by David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel over forty years ago, when they

isolated stimuli-specific neurons within the cortex of a cat. Since then a huge catalogue of such neurons has been identified, each neuron being triggered by a different and unique primitive-level stimulus. Although by necessity no experiments have been conducted on humans, it is accepted that such neurons are similarly triggered within the human brain. Work in other disciplines such as developmental psychology, anthropology and linguistics also indicates that we are hard-wired for large areas of perception and cognition, and that by virtue of our human bodily condition we humans do at a simple level universally perceive a common culture-independent world.

It is now reasonably justifiable to claim that we as humans universally recognise perceptual stimuli for all sorts of primitive-level properties such as light, dark, colour, warmth, texture, hardness, softness, sharpness, flatness, heaviness, separation, distance, proximity, movement etc; gestalts such as causality, beginning, end, wholeness, birth, death, livingness etc; affordances such as shelter, exposure, protection, nourishment, accessibility etc; maybe archetypal images such as sun, sea, earth, mother, family, animals etc; and certain causal relationships such as subject/object/verb, attraction/repulsion, and simple order.

Such stimuli, however, rarely if ever exist in isolation (outside the laboratory at least), as discrete and transcendent properties complete and independent within themselves. Individual neurons in fact seem to be triggered by simple-level properties seen *in relation*. An individual property such as 'smoothness' is not recognised as that discretely, but in the context of its immediate and local environment. So a specific stimulus identified as 'very smooth' in one context, might be identified as 'moderately smooth' or even 'slightly smooth' in another context. That neuron for 'smooth' will therefore fire only in response to a stimulus that indicates a *relational* 'smoothness' - the stimulus indicates 'smooth' in that particular context. The point is that not only is the stimulus not a transcendent referent indicating an absolute of smoothness, but such an absolute would be of little practical value to us. Meaning can only exist in relation to other meaning, and that is why it is the relational properties in our environmental context that we as humans need to be able to reliably and universally identify. We need to know what the infinitely various constitutional parts

of the environment actually mean not on their own, but in the way that they relate to one another in forming the complex whole.

This, however, still does not explain the experiential meaning of primitive-level stimuli, the nature of our experience of a stimulus, what information it communicates to us, and on what terms. Although conventionally the meanings of stimuli are often treated as if they are transparent, that is hardly satisfactory. They must mean something beyond the 'simply' mathematical, geometrical, optical, molecular or topographical, however simple or basic. So what exactly are we 'perceiving' and 'experiencing' when we look at a primitive-level stimulus? It has been suggested by others that such perceptual stimuli comprise building-block qualia, as the basic elements of experiential meaning. I believe that to be correct, but it still fails to adequately define that meaning, and what I would like to propose is the suggestion that primitive perceptual stimuli are in fact experienced as *affordances of bodily sensation*.

Evolutionarily we need to be able to interpret our environment accurately, and in particular to anticipate the likely impact on us of our environment before we actually physically make contact with it. We need above all to be able to identify in advance those aspects of our environment that might physically damage us - we need to know reliably the likely sensational effect of a potential interaction. That is surely true for all but the most primitive animals, and is no less true for us humans. So in recognising (relational) 'hardness' in our environment, for example, the meaning of that hardness will revolve around how it would feel if it were in direct contact with the human body. And it would clearly feel differently in different contexts - as a surface for lying on, as the ground two metres below our dangling feet, and as a lump of wood in the hands of an attacker. All carry significantly different meanings, yet all recognisably characterising 'hardness' in relation to physical contact with the human body.

Simple workshop exercises can be quite illuminating. By focusing dispassionate attention on such primitive-level stimuli as the cutting sharpness of a knife blade, the penetrating pointedness of the knife end, the flatness of a slab of concrete, a plank of wood, piece of carpeting or sheet of paper, the containment of boxes ranging from

sides of a few inches up to man-size, or the heavy mass of differently sized stones and rocks, very clear perceptual meanings can be experienced as subtle bodily sensation. By looking solely at the single prescribed primitive stimulus (notwithstanding what I have said earlier about relational and contextual meaning), the aim is to be aware of where and how within one's body one registers its primordial and archetypal meaning. The instruction might well be to physically 'feel and experience' the raw meaning. This requires one to suspend all memory, subjective response, symbolism, abstract thinking and intellectuality, and to 'feel', or maybe more accurately 'register' the meaning physically and viscerally. The cutting edge of the knife, for example, is usually experienced as a kind of slicing across the torso, the knife-point is usually experienced as a stabbing in the stomach, each with its very distinct range of properties, feelings and emotional traces that comprise its sensed 'meaning'. The precise location varies, but the experienced archetypal meaning itself tends to be remarkably consistent and articulable.

Stimuli-specific neurons are believed to be wired into the evolutionarily ancient limbic system, whereas abstract thought is clearly associated with the more modern neocortex. The level, quality and nature of primitive-level perceptual meaning in terms of afforded bodily sensation is very specific, and might well be described as 'limbic meaning'. This kind of meaning is viscerally experienced as an innate physical knowing, as 'direct' or 'objective', not absolutely or transcendently, but in the sense that it is almost factual, transmitted as it were unfiltered from the outside world (as indeed it is) and universally accessible to the human condition. It carries with it a confidence of environmental knowledge that is instinctually accepted and trusted, and that can be recognised as an essential cognitive or behavioural prerequisite for any intelligent organism. And this kind of physically and directly experienced raw limbic meaning is profoundly different to the somewhat disembodied and intangible nature of meaning that is associated with abstract intellectualising.

It is a relatively short step from the innately perceived qualia of afforded bodily sensation to the suggestion that those meanings comprise the building blocks of words and concepts. It might not be too fanciful to imagine that the very first words referred to directly and immediately perceived primitive-level stimuli, either single stimuli,

such as ‘hard’ or ‘soft’, or groupings of stimuli, such as ‘warm safe nourishing shelter’ combining into ‘home’. But the stage at which one or more viscerally experienced meanings of raw stimuli were recalled (‘abstracted’) distant from any triggering event, and then described, for example as ‘hard’ or ‘home’, so as to communicate the nature and meaning of those absent stimuli to another, might well have marked the beginnings of language proper. The linguistic philosopher George Lakoff has written persuasively on the embodied meaning of language. He describes in detail the role of basic-level concepts and image-schemas within the ontological structures of the emotion ‘anger’, the preposition ‘over’, and grammatical constructions. Following on from his work it is not too difficult to break down any word, emotion or concept into basic building blocks that are identifiable from the vast catalogue of available primitive-level stimuli, and all of which hold uniquely specific meanings of interactive bodily sensation.

That is some kind of crude theory of the origins of language and meaning, but although it may well be the case that the meanings of words derive originally from primitive-level perceptual meanings, that does not make the meanings of those words precise and universally accessible. Words embrace abstractions or metaphorical projections of primitive-level meaning, and as such they by definition carry within themselves large elements of subjectivity. We know the meaning of a word mostly not through direct innate knowing but indirectly through cultural experience, as post-structural theory rightly demonstrates. By their nature the meanings of words and language are fluid and relative, without precise constancy. I am making the suggestion, however, that in contrast with the subjectivity of language, art *is* ‘universally accessible’ and ‘objective’ in terms that allow any visually sensitive and literate human to recognise meaning directly, reliably and consistently. This is absolutely intrinsic to the entirety of *Artworlds™* theory and practice, in presenting art as having an intentional content that is accessible to us all. And the implication is that this is what fundamentally distinguishes art from all other forms of communication

The suggestion that I am putting forward for consideration is that artists create artworks by representing primitive-level stimuli as visual indicators, replicated usually two- or three-dimensionally, and by combining those indicators (and their associated meanings) within a coherent composition so as to articulate a complex content. (I originally thought this was quite an original insight, until I read that when Hubel and Wiesel first published their work on the cat's cortex in 1959, J.Z. Young sent them a reproduction of one of Van Gogh's self-portraits, commenting 'Van Gogh seems to have broken the code'.) Certainly, artists' training has always traditionally focused on developing the skill of 'seeing' and accurately replicating 'what is there' (and the art viewer likewise needs to develop and refine the same faculty of seeing). And artists always talk of whether a painting or sculpture 'works', as a technical and disinterested criterion of successfully articulated content.

Just as primitive meanings combine abstractly in language, these artist-replicated indicators combine directly, objectively and explicitly in art, with the result that the end-product complex meaning in the artwork can be experienced directly in the same terms and at the same level as primitive-level perception. That is, complex content can be recognised objectively and viscerally, limbically, and it is this that sets art apart from any other human activity, and why art is so uniquely powerful. Not only do we recognise the content, we physically *know* it to be objective. We innately recognise it, and we know that others can recognise almost exactly that same content, whether now or in several hundred years' time, simply by virtue of our shared human bodily condition. Which is not to say that an objective content is absolute, with a sharp black and white line dividing it from subjective meaning. There is in practice inevitably a degree of latitude, but the intentional content of an artwork is nevertheless usually sufficiently clear and constant for it to stand more or less alone, allowing for only a modicum of greyness fudging the boundaries between objective and subjective. And it is also of course not to deny that many artists cheerfully load into their artworks any number of highly subjective indicators such as historical, cultural or personal referents, symbols or ideas, all of which can only be interpreted subjectively, as meaning particular to each individual. I am certainly suggesting, however, that the content that identifies the artefact *as art* (as opposed to merely an

artefact), and that justifies art's uniquely peculiar significance to us, is that content which we innately know to be objective.

Our response to this objectively accessible content in an artwork, what it evokes in us, is of course wholly subjective, and it would be absurd to suggest anything else. In *Artworlds*TM participants are taken to the point of recognising the 'world' articulated by the artist, and from then on it is for them to respond subjectively to that kind of reality. Guided questions lead them in particular directions, but merely so that they can explore their own organisational problems from within the contextual framework of the artist's specific world. As such *Artworlds*TM has proven to be an extremely powerful tool, acting as a kind of cognitive simulator for engaging with other world-views and cultural frameworks. The problems that *Artworlds*TM has experienced, however, have not by and large been with those who have participated. The hostile reaction comes usually far earlier, at the point when it is first recognised that *Artworlds*TM proposes to describe *the* content articulated by the artist in the artwork.

Quite a few of the descriptions used in *Artworlds*TM have in fact been validated by the artists, but this seems to carry no weight at all. What has gradually become clear is that it tends to be taken as axiomatic that the artist's content is not just inaccessible but irrelevant. The fact that the artist might have spent ten years creating a work's content is disregarded, and a request to show courtesy to the artist and to actually 'hear' what he or she says is likewise ignored. I once asked if it would make any difference if the artist were beside me to confirm the content, and the answer was categorically that it would not. It appears that the work of art is viewed exclusively as a mirror for the individual's own subjectivity, and as sovereign to him or her absolutely. It is entirely a blank canvas, so to speak, which each individual can explore and respond to in any way he or she chooses. And the last thirty five years of post-structural theory have hammered home the justification for this approach. That of course is their choice and prerogative, and without wishing to sound patronising, good luck to them. But it still fails to account for their interpretation of the mere suggestion that art has intentional content as a vicious full frontal attack denying and invalidating their inner selves, allegedly robbing them of their identity, subjectivity and creativity. And the bizarre force of that outrage, its vehemence and cold contempt, will bear no

dialogue, and there seems no possibility of reasoning, pacifying, or reassuring. For a long time we were left utterly perplexed at the sheer intensity of the venom directed towards *Artworlds*TM.

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It is commonplace that an *Artworlds*TM description of an artwork defines a content that is identified in very similar terms by whoever else has written professionally about the work. And if the theory of a constant content is right, that is precisely what one would expect. The art writer who defines that content, however, seems to attract no opprobrium, certainly not on the scale that *Artworlds*TM does. One very significant difference is that *Artworlds*TM takes that content extremely seriously, focusing on it intently and rigorously in a way that is very single-minded, and very explicit. And we have come to believe that this is in fact *Artworlds*TM' real offence in others' eyes, to suggest that art is *explicable*, that art is a technical visual construct whose workings can be laid bare and explained in a simple and straightforward way. And this is ultimately what is so intolerable to so many. It seems, and this is of course only on the basis of our anecdotal experience with *Artworlds*TM, untested by any proper study, that art for many people has become totally identified, indeed synonymous, with their inner world. In a curious way they seem to go way further than any standard post-structural relativism. It looks as if they are absolutely determined to have some part of their world that is comfortably and ineffably numinous, spiritual and mysterious, far beyond such limiting and mundane ideas as subjective and objective. So when they identify that part of themselves so completely, at times seemingly exclusively, with art, then of course if someone comes along and explains the content of an artwork in technical, even clinical, terms, and implicitly suggests that that content is the prime purpose and justification of the work, then their dream of their soul meeting with the inexplicably magical and divine is naturally mortally offended at a very deep and fundamental level.

We always anticipated and were welcoming of opposition to and disagreement with *Artworlds*TM, and were only too well aware of the philosophical minefield into which we were leaping. The extreme nature of the response encountered, however, has been

instructive. On the one hand there are the artists, expressing how they see reality, and wanting that articulated content to be recognised and then responded to. And on the other there is a sizeable proportion of the art-viewing public which seems to be almost violently determined to establish its right to disregard the artist, to read into an artwork whatever it wants, and to use the artwork to help project them into their own subjective imaginations and solipsistic sensed-divinity, regardless of the artist's intention. This gulf of expectation is desperately sad. I admire artists hugely for their stoicism and good humour in the face of what are often the most extraordinarily inappropriate comments about their work. Often, however, I have the feeling that they are just grateful that somebody is at least looking at their work, and that it is eliciting some kind of response, however unrelated to the real content. And to me that humiliation just aggravates the sadness, and serves only to emphasise the wasted potential of communication that art all too often represents.

It certainly seems that in practice the artwork is widely regarded simply as a mirror for others' individual and isolated selfness. The ironic tragedy is that art is in fact the very epitome and exemplar of a universally shared and experiential common language that enables us to step right outside of our subjective self-referential experience. Art is an extraordinary gift to humanity, offering a medium through which *others'* complex ideas and insights can be communicated amongst all of us, directly and reliably. A medium whereby one can actually experience the creatively intuitive world-view of another person, enter into another's awareness of the spiritual and numinous, or even of the everyday and mundane. Whereby we can experience new and unfamiliar, and with any luck more productive, ways of seeing our habitual world.

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Following our experience with *Artworlds*TM I feel it is appropriate to counsel caution regarding any attempt to study art and the brain. There are in the field two diametrically contrasting ways of approaching art that, at the very least, need to be recognised and accommodated. It is perfectly clear, to me at least, that art and the artist's brain and art and the viewer's brain can be at polar opposites, often with little if anything in common at all. Both of these very different approaches to art offer

highly fruitful opportunities for research, but only if one is not confused with the other, and if it is understood that they are operating at different extremes of the cognitive spectrum.

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