

# ‘Curiouser and Curiouser’, said Ellen (or was it Viktor?). Art in-between Modernism and Prehistory

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*Among all the definitions of art, one, in particular, has played a preeminent part in semiotics: the idea of making strange, as the Russian Formalists put it, or the double transgression of the norms of standard language, and of the aesthetical norms set by earlier artistic movements, in the considerably subtler version of the Prague School of semiotics. In a number of papers published many years ago, I have argued that this model is not a model of art in general, but of modernism, and there can be no postmodernism, since the mechanism of modernism is a formal apparatus, which, once it has gotten going, can never stop. Apart from the formal arguments, the fact of several persons having been both modernist artists and scholars involved with the Russian and/or Czech schools and other scholars having been close friends of the modernist artists supports this claim. In recent years, I have become aware of the fact that Ellen Dissanayake, taking her cues from these same Russian Formalists, has argued for making strange, or making special, as she prefers to call it, being at the very origin of art, and perhaps of something even broader than what we today know as art. After summarizing these two points of view, I shall try to show that they are not incompatible, once we admit the ambiguity of the central notion of the Russian Formalists and the Prague structuralists alike. Indeed, I shall suggest that as a very abstract notion, strangeness/specialness is part and parcel of the process of perceptual attention and that, as such, it has often confused reasoning about semiosis in general.*

KEYWORDS                      artwork, Russian Formalism, Prague structuralism, modernism,  
prehistoric art

## Introduction

From Aristotle to Kant and beyond, the artwork has been conceived as an object specifically created in order to offer an experience of beauty, and this idea hardly changed during the long period of Occidental history going from Aristotle to Kant, although the very notion of beauty may have been construed in different ways. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this conception came in for harsh criticism, both in Anglo-Saxon philosophy, where many thinkers (e.g. Beardsley 1958) argued that beauty could not be defined, except from the point of view of the individual subject, and in art itself, which, with the beginning of Modernism, clearly set other goals than beauty for itself. Meanwhile, continental philosophy may have continued to be more open to the possibility of defining art, though art was hardly a central subject at least in the phenomenological tradition, except, of course, in the work of Roman Ingarden (1969), for whom art still was supposed to realize aesthetic values, the defining properties of which were there for everybody to experience, once he or she had learnt to observe them.

## 1. Art under the Regime of Modernism

Modernism as a cultural phenomenon, and the possibility of its having been succeeded by something else, often called Postmodernity, is rarely discussed in semiotics. The whole issue is usually given over to so-called Postmodernist (or, originally, Poststructuralist) theory, which, in spite of its name, has a very tenuous theoretical content. In several earlier papers, I have suggested that this phenomenon is better understood from the point of view of semiotics, and that we are already in possession of at least part of the necessary theoretical equipment required (see Sonesson 1993; 1999a; 2011). Semiotics, I have argued, as it has evolved from Russian Formalism, through Prague structuralism, and to the Tartu School, is not only theoretically capable of handling Modernism: it has in fact been, as the French say, its *companion de route*. It will not part company with Postmodernism, for the simple reason that the latter, in spite of its self-understanding, is only a new phase of Modernism. While Russian Formalism and Prague structuralism were made in theoretical heaven to account for Modernism, including Postmodernism, a quite different question, on which we will embark in the second part of this essay, is whether this tradition still has something to say about art, before the time of Aristotle and Kant, that it, at the outset of the human adventure.

### 1.1 Formalism as a Historical Model

Bringing together the historical experience of art during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the philosophical criticism of the notion of art, the institutional theory of art, first suggested by Arthur Danto (1981) and George Dickie (1974) determined that everything is art once it has been designated as such by the proper actors, which is to say by artists, critics, conservators, and so on. While Dickie, in particular, presented this rather like a manifesto for a new way of doing art, Howard Becker (1982) later suggested this could be a sociological description of how the Art world works in present day society. Still, even as a sociological vision, this conception only makes the actors internal to the Art world into participants, leaving out the audience and, in fact, the rest of society. Paradoxically, the conception of the so-called Russian Formalists, later developed by the Prague School, is more inclusive in its sociological aspect, and more geared to the biologically founded capacity for perception of human beings. The paradox, of course, consists in these scholars calling themselves Formalists, in the sense of abstraction from sociological and psychological parameters, and retaining this reputation in the succeeding history of criticism.

The formula for what characterizes art, as given by the Russian Formalists, is that of making strange, or, as they also said, of desautomatization or defamiliarization (Shklovsky 1988[1917]). This mechanism itself works in two ways: first, since the Formalists mainly thought of literature, they argued that artistic works aimed to disappoint the expectations produced by everyday language; second, they argued that each new tradition within art has the goal of disappointing the expectations created by some earlier artistic tradition (See Erlich 1969; Steiner 1984). According to the common way of writing the history of semiotics, history as such lies outside the purview of Russian Formalism, and it is supposed that it was only at its latest stage, at the point of transition to Czech structuralism, that a theory of history was supplied, by the collaborate effort of Roman Jakobson and Jurij Tynjanov (1971 [1928]). Yet, a theory of history – of the *history of perception*, to be more specific – is clearly *implied*, already by one of the central theses of Formalism (as formulated by Viktor Shklovsky and, perhaps earlier, by Leo Jakubinskij), according to which the habits of perception, which are acquired in our ongoing everyday experience of standard language and other standardized media (as, in the case of pictorial art, 'non-artistic' pictures), and are thus 'automatized', are disrupted by artistic creation, and thereby 'made strange', or 'actualized', for us; and which, when they have hardened into standardized artistic forms, are again transgressed by the invention of new ways for the making of

art. Indeed, in spite of his formalism, Shklovsky (1988 [1917]) talks about 'the laws of perception' and the 'habituation' to which it gives rise from the very beginning. Nor is *society* really absent: it is in relation to an audience, a public, that art appears as something 'strange', and it a public which is familiar with earlier artistic traditions that discover the new way of making art as incarnating 'the shock of the new'.

In this respect, as in many others, Formalism may well have formulated, not a theory of art outside history, but of *the art of its time*: emerging Modernism, created by friends of the Formalists, such as Malevich, Kandinsky, Tatlin, Chlebnikov, Brik, Majakovskij, Meyerhold, etc.; and even by the Formalists themselves in another incarnation, as in the case of Sergej Eisenstein and the early Roman Jakobson (cf. Steiner 1984). The Prague structuralists, who took over, specified, revised, and extended the theories of Russian Formalism, certainly entertained similar connivances with the contemporary Czech avant-garde, Karel Teige and 'Poetism' (see Deluy, ed. 1972). Thus, the Formalist model, as well as its later Prague School version, is implicitly, if not overtly, historical, not only because it supposes a sequence of changing perceptual habits, but more fundamentally, it is historically dated, because of its reproducing the conception of art presupposed, and even explicitly formulated, by the exponents of Modernism. If the dialectics of art described by Formalism is really identical to the Mechanism of Modernism, there must have been a time when it was not yet a correct description of art; and we may thus be justified in asking whether, as the prophets of Postmodernity submit, it could also cease to be such a description.

It stands to reason, then, that Modernism, and thus the applicability of the Formalist model, has a beginning, not, perhaps, as far as the divorce from the standard medium is concerned, but as to the ever-repeated dialectics of 'struggle and reformation' (in the terms of the Prague theses) applied to established artistic forms. It is not only that 'the character, direction and scale of this re-formation vary greatly', as Jakobson and Tynjanov (1971 [1928]): say, but, although re-formations must have taken place before the advent of Modernism, they were not the order of the day: the breaking of the norms did not constitute the *meta-norm* of all artistic work. In the case of painting, for instance, there may have been a guiding idea, a common endeavour, since the Italian Renaissance, aspiring to render ever more perfectly the appearances of the visual world; 'progress in art', in Suzy Gablik's (1976) terms, was thus conceivable. But it is wrong to think that there could be a similar progress in abstraction: rather, following the dialectics formulated by the Formalists, each new generation of Modernists found themselves, in Michael Fried's terms (as quoted by Singerman 1989: 158), under the obligation to work through the problems 'thrown up by the art of the recent past', thereby creating new problems for the future generation to work on.

Once the machine of Modernism has got going, however, there is no escape from it, and there can be no Postmodernism, if not as a (misnamed) phase of Modernism. This is not only because a lot of properties usually ascribed to Postmodernism are already present in Modernism. There are at least two, more fundamental, reasons for rejecting the claims of Postmodernism, one of which is simply semantic, the other properly semiotic. The semantic, that is, purely linguistic reason, has to do with the fact that the word 'modern' is an instance of the category of *shifters* (as defined by Jakobson 1963 quoting Jespersen): a word, the meaning of which refers to the act (for instance the time and place) of its own enunciation. Thus, the time span included in the domain of reference of the word 'modern' must comprehend the moment at which the word is pronounced. Modernity is always on the point of running ahead of us, unavoidably lagging behind by an inch. Some modernisms, of course, become objectified in history: that of the new philosophy of the Middle Ages, or that of Perrault's *moderns* struggling against *les anciens*, no longer seem particularly modern to us. But they continue to encapsulate the time of enunciation when they were truly modern.

The second, purely semiotic reason, because of which there can be no end to Modernism, is that its mechanism, as described by the Formalists, can never cease functioning, once it has started to

work: trying the break out of the 'tradition of the new', the art work *confirms to the very mechanism of that tradition*, which consists precisely in transgressing the norms set up by the art-forms preceding it. Even if Postmodernity consisted in returning to the ways in which art was created before Modernism was invented (which is only true, and only to some extent, of Postmodernist architecture), this could only be understood, after Modernism, as a break with the earlier, temporary, Modernist norm, and thus as a new phase of Modernism – that is, it could only be so interpreted, as long as Modernism was remembered, and not lost too far back in the past. If, however, as Jean-François Lyotard (1979) often suggested (also see Appignanesi, ed., 1989), Postmodernism originates before, or at the same time as, Modernism (which does make sense in terms of the properties often ascribed to it), it is simply a misnomer (see further section 1.3).

### 1.2 Modernism – an Unending Story

Let us now recapitulate, in order to add some details, while applying and adapting the models referred to. What I have termed the Mechanism of Modernism may be conceived as a particular application of what Edmund Husserl (1966: 331) has termed *Time consciousness*, in which, at each moment of time, some earlier moment is retained, while another is expected to occur, or as Husserl terms it, is protained. This model has been used, and revised, by Jan Mukařovský (1974) and Jiří Veltruský (1977), in their studies of literature and drama; and by myself, when endeavouring to render the working of perceptual hypothesis-filling when supplying the details lacking in everyday experience (Sonesson 1978). I have lately used it even more generally, as a substitute for the much too limited notion of isotopy, to render the idea of an interpretational scheme, present in the work of Schütz, Piaget, Bartlett, and contemporary cognitive psychology (cf. Sonesson 1988; 1996, in press and Fig.1.).

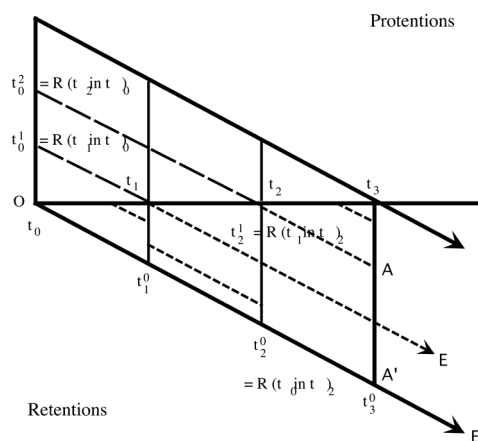


Fig. 1. A schematic description of time consciousness, inspired by Husserl 1966, but adapted in Sonesson 2015a along the lines suggested by Husserl's text.

According to the critique of the notion of *isotopy*, which I have set out in detail elsewhere (Sonesson 1988; 1996; in press), this concept, introduced by Greimas presupposes the return, at time  $t_2$ , of an event expected at time  $t_1$ , which, at some level of abstraction, is identical to the event occurring at time  $t_1$ . There is a break of norms, according to this conception, if instead, another event, categorically different from the event at  $t_1$ , occurs at time  $t_2$ . To my mind, rhetoric, as the art of transgressions, should be much broader: it should also include the occurrence, at time  $t_2$ , of an event which is identical to the one occurring at time  $t_1$ , when a different event is expected. The rhetoric of Modernism is really of the latter kind: it makes us expect, at time 1, that the work of art created at time 2 will be different from that existing at time  $t_1$ . Of course, even the expectancy of something different occurs inside a framework of familiarity and things-taken-for-granted: we expect, among other things, that

the new work of art, however different, will be of the kind to which Modernism has accustomed us. Thus, the real surprise would be the occurrence, at time  $t_2$ , of an altarpiece of the style painted during the Middle Ages, or even of a painting like those which won awards at the French *salons* during the last century, when, at time  $t_1$ , a Modernist work of art is expected to appear.

What the Formalist model says, then, is, in sum, that every new event at time  $t_1$  will tend to become the norm in vigour at  $t_2$ , which is applied and obeyed, only to be transgressed at  $t_3$ , when a new event occurs, which is then made the norm at  $t_4$ , and subsequently contested by yet another norm at  $t_5$ , and so on indefinitely. Clearly, this mechanism has a beginning, but no conceivable end. What happens in the end, however, is that newness itself becomes something well-known and familiar: in terms of isotopy theory, *non-iterability is iterated*, the non-expected is expected. That which, on a lower level of generality, is for ever new, is, higher up on the ladder of abstraction, always the same. Thus, at last, that particularly modern sentiment, diagnosed by Marshall Berman (1982), and before him, of course, by Marx, that ‘all that is solid melts into air’, tends to disappear. Newness becomes a frozen gesture. The habits of perception are never really upset. Postmodernism, on this count, is Dadaism in scare quotes: Dadaism as theatre. We will see the importance of this possibility later.

The Prague School model of artistic communication, as it was first suggested by Mukařovský, may be seen as a direct application of Husserl’s model of time consciousness to the communication of art, though it was more directly inspired by some ideas of another follower of Husserl, Roman Ingarden (1965). The most important idea to retain from this model is that communication (in the sense of conveying information) is not necessarily about transportation or encoding, but it does involve the presentation of an artefact by somebody to somebody else, giving rise to the task of making sense of this artefact (See Sonesson 1999b; 2014). An artefact is produced by somebody, and it has to be transformed by another person into a work of art going through a process of concretisation. The term concretisation is used to describe this process to emphasize the active, but still regulated, contribution of the receiver/audience to the work, which, moreover, takes place in a social context. Since, to Mukařovský (1974), this is a social act, the process of creating the artefact, as well as that of perceiving it, is determined by a set of norms, which may be aesthetic (and in works of art they would be predominantly so), but they can also be social, psychological, and so on.

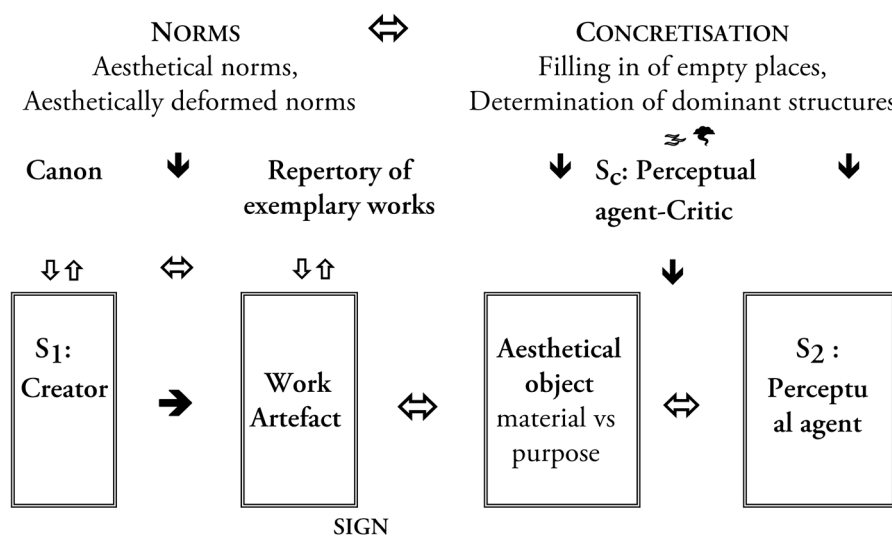


Fig. 2. Schematic rendering of the Prague School model (as reconstructed in Sonesson 1999b). Filled arrows indicate direct influence; outline arrows stand for more complex interactions)

The work of art is that which transgresses these rules. Mukařovský points out, however, that these norms may be of any kind, going from simple regularities to written laws. All interpretation also takes place in accordance with a pool of knowledge, more or less shared between the sender and the re-

ceiver, which has two main incarnations: the set of exemplary works of arts and the canon, in the sense of the rules for how art works are to be made. As Mukařovský also observes, though it would be given special importance by his student Felix Vodčika (1976), the critic also has an important part to play. But this takes us back to a conception closer to that of the institutional theory of art (See section 1.1.).

This is of course a very general model, which may be generalized to communication will beyond art (see Sonesson 2014). Even when we add the temporal dimension, this model may be sufficiently general to account for art in general, or at least for Occidental art since antiquity, as long as the guiding value is some specific content, such as the Renaissance striving to render the appearances of the perceptual world ever more perfectly, which, no doubt together with other values, has been a regulatory idea of most Occidental art, up to, and in a way including, Impressionism. When the rhetoric of Modernism gets going, however, it is newness itself which becomes the guiding norm (See Sonesson 1999a). In time this modernist norm came to require the abandonment of pictorial representation mimicking the appearances of the visual world, and thus, by implication, the central role of the human figure, thus denying another norm in vigour (in the Occidental world, but not, for instance, in the Islamic one) ever since the end of prehistoric cave paintings and petroglyphs. As Frank Stella has testified (cf. Tomkins 1988:141ff), at the time of his art studies, it was simply unimaginable to make a painting which was not abstract. Indeed, when de Kooning started painting female figures, however caricatured, Georges Mathieu demanded his expulsion from the Artist's Club in New York for having betrayed the abstract cause, that is, broken the norm of American Modernism (cf. Tomkins 1988:137ff). That fact that he apparently was not excluded illustrates Mukařovský's point that not all norms acquire the force of law.

As Mukařovský (quoted by Galan 1986:36) notes, every work of art contains an affirmation of some (aspects of) earlier works of art, together with a negation of others. This observation is also verified by later Modernist movements: Frank Stella's abstraction is even more studied than that of Rauschenberg and Johns; as for the more confirmed Minimalists who followed him, such as Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Carl Andre, and Sol LeVitt, their work may even be considered to retain the simple geometrical forms found in early European abstraction (notably that of Malevich, Arp, etc.), yet without the claim to convey a higher symbolism which was essential to the latter. At least at the level of intentions, there is a curious contrast between, for instance, the esoteric conceptions of Malevich and Kandinsky, and Stella's saying that his work is 'based on the fact that only what can be seen there is there' (quoted in Tomkins 1988:31). Interestingly, this is the same opposition which is found between two groups of poets using (apparently) meaningless phrases which were contemporary with the Russian Formalists, the *zaim'* poets, for instance Chlebnikov, sharing Malevich's ambition, while others, such as Krušenyč, relied on the sound effect as such (cf. Steiner 1984:144ff).

### **1.3 Centrifugal and Centripetal Modernism**

Lyotard's paradoxical observation, and the claims of Postmodernism, become understandable, however, in the North American context, where the image of Modernism was very much influenced by the conception of Clement Greenberg writing mainly on the Abstract Expressionist painters such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and William de Kooning. According to Greenberg, the Modernist work of art was essentially a critical discourse applying to earlier works of art, and its methods required it 'to avoid dependence upon any order of experience not given in the most essentially construed nature of its medium' (quoted in Rorimer 1989:129). Indeed, more recently, Greenberg himself has set up an opposition between Modernity and Postmodernity, quoting, in the latter case, in part the same persons and movements as are the heroes of Lyotard, many of which are contemporaneous with, or anterior to, his Modernists: Duchamp and other Dadaists, certain aspects of Surrealism, and Pop art (see Tomkins 1988:7f).

The result is a curious amputation of the Modernist movement, two of the most important early constituents of which were Dadaism and Surrealism, both of which left their imprint also on such an emblematic European Modernist as Picasso, *the* Modernist of popular opinion. Yet, it may perhaps be said that there were two, in some respects divergent, ingredients of early Modernism: on one hand, an *inward, or centripetal, movement, a tendency to reduce art to its smallest denominator*, to highlight, under 'aesthetic focus', in Prague School terms, the minimal properties of the art work as a thing; and on the other hand, an *outward, or centrifugal, movement, tending to include ever further properties, objects, and spheres* in the world subjected to the aesthetic function (Sonesson 1999a; Marner 2000). What came to evolve, under the name of Modernism, in the United States, was mainly the first endeavour (with the exception of Pop art). When the second tendency began to predominate in the United States (and, thanks to the cultural hegemony of USA, in the rest of the Occidental world), it was baptised Postmodernism.

Duchamp, the Dadaists, the Surrealists, and more recent Postmodernists, also have to work through the problems 'thrown up by the art of the recent pasts', in the formulation of Michael Fried, but these problems are now created, not by an ever finer isolation of the intrinsic properties of the artwork, but by the outward expansion of the art sphere, and the ever more comprehensive absorption of other objects, events and spheres into it.

## 2. In the Meantime, Back in Pre-history

If the model of art preconized by Russian Formalism and the Prague School, which is the best model of art so far proposed in semiotics, actually turns out to be a model of Modernism, then we seem to be at a loss for suggesting any characterisation of art which is more adequate and more enlightening than those of earlier aesthetics. Indeed, we might have to accept the disheartening view of analytical philosophy, according to which art is anything we choose to call art, or the equally disappointing conception due to the institutional theory of art, according to which art is what the stakeholders of the art world call art. If, however, at some earlier moment of (pre)history, all human beings were stakeholders in the art world, which at the time was co-extensive with the Lifeworld, the latter alternative may turn out to be more productive. Interestingly, in a number of papers, Ellen Dissanayake (2009; 2013a, b; 2014) has suggested that the origin of art consists in making something special, or – as she somewhat pleonastically calls it nowadays – to artify. This is suspiciously reminiscent of the formula coined by the Russian Formalists.<sup>1</sup> But Dissanayake backs this up with a lot of background insights deriving from present-day knowledge of human prehistory.

### 2.1 What is so Special about Art?

To make strange, to make special, and to artify are all actions, while art is an object or, perhaps better, a domain of objects. As Dissanayake (2013a) observes, contrary to such acts, art in the substantive sense is something which has only existed in particular, notably Occidental, cultures. Normally, I would not make too much of this distinction. A phenomenon may easily be considered an action or event for some purpose, and an object for another, as prefigured by the distinction between 'noesis' and 'noema' in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, and as suggested by such linguists as Karl Bühler and Eugenio Coseriu (See Sonesson 2014). In the second place, the Prague School suggests that (artistic) communication consists in an act which produces an artefact, itself giving rise to the experience called concretisation. None of these latter instances have to be material objects, but they certainly have a relatively static character. Still, making strange or special has a property which is important in this context: it is an occurrence situated in time. As conceived both by the Russian Formal-

ists and Dissanayake, that special strangeness or strange specialness is not there from the beginning: it emerges out of the everyday world, also known as the Lifeworld. As Dissanayake goes on to say:

Artifying is the behaviour of intentionally making parts of the natural and manmade environment (shelters, tools, utensils, weapons, clothing, bodies, surroundings, and other paraphernalia) extraordinary or special by marking, shaping, and embellishing them beyond their ordinary functional appearance. (Dissanayake 2013a: 232)

Allowing for an earlier period in which our ancestors (during the Middle Pleistocene, i.e. ca.780 – 127 kya) *recognized* some objects, such as unusually shaped, marked, or coloured stones, as being 'special', Dissanayake claims that, at least from 250 kya, members of our species displayed a mental capacity (and motivation) deliberately to *make* ordinary things extra-ordinary:

The extra-ordinariness of artification is achieved by means of at least five *operations* used by artificers: formalization (a term that includes shaping, composing, patterning, organizing, schematizing, and simplifying), repetition, exaggeration, elaboration, and – in some instances – manipulation of the perceiver's expectation (Dissanayake 2009). Readers who are familiar with ethological concepts will recognize these first four features as characteristics of 'ritualized behaviours' as described in writings by ethologists /.../ (Dissanayake 2013a: 233)

This is reminiscent of James Gibson's point (1980) that, while all animals perceive surfaces, only humans are able to see surfaces as having reference. In other words, pictures have 'referential meaning'; they contain invariants for surfaces but also for the objects referred to. However, as Gibson goes on to say, a surface may be decorated, regularized, textured, painted, or embellished in other ways without acquiring a referential meaning; and deposits of dirt or blots of pigment may be left on the surface without the surface being made to stand for something. According to Gibson, the two latter cases, intuitively describable in terms of the opposition between order and disorder (familiar to all familiar with structuralist semiotics), are not distinguished by children. But they clearly would serve to make things 'special', the first one being most clearly the case of 'formalization', in the sense of the purposeful preparation of surfaces.

Although Dissanayake (2013a: 237) does not refer to Gibson's observations on applying markings to surfaces, she mentions mark-making, along with play, self-adornment, and ritual/ceremony as being four universal human behaviours that were 'steps' on the evolutionary path to artification, both phylogenetically and ontogenetically (See Dissanayake 2009: 150ff; 2013b: 86ff 2014). She also suggests that they all somehow develop out of the kind of recognition ritual that goes on between the child and its parent, considered as an evolutionary adaptation to the frailty of the human baby, which results from it being born too early in its development to be able to survive on its own.

At its most basic, artifying is the deliberate use of the proto-aesthetic operations that evolved—as described above—as mechanisms used unconsciously by ancestral human mothers in the highly adaptive context of reinforcing emotional bonds with ever more helpless infants (Dissanayake 2009: 156).<sup>2</sup>

According to Dissanayake (2013b: 88), the features found in the interaction between the infant and the parent are the same as those that appear in art: thus, *simplification*, which is manifested in baby talk, and the accompanying body movements, in 'stanzas or framed episodes with a clear beginning or introduction and initial felt closure, sometimes with a refrain or coda'; *repetition*, as in the use of one- or two-syllable words or phrases, and the equivalent gestures, that are frequently repeated and encourages a repetitive regulating meter; *exaggeration* found in expanded vocal contours



and dynamic contrasts such as heavy stresses or accents, again manifested also in bodily movements; *elaboration*, shown in dynamic variations of a ‘theme’ such as alliteration and assonance; and *manipulation of expectation* as in ‘peek-a-boo’ which is a play with the tension and release of anticipation and its fulfilment.

But Dissanayake (2013a: 237) goes on to observe that these behaviours only become operations of artification, once they are associated with a distinction between ‘an ordinary or mundane order, realm, mood, or state of being and one that is unusual, extra-ordinary, or “super-natural”’. This seems to mean that none of these operations give rise to any ‘specialness’ in the children, nor in the parents. But, if so, this begs the question what makes these operations into means of artifying.

What is at issue here is not whether artification, once it has developed, is adaptive: Dissanayake’s (2009: 158; 2013a: 242) suggestion that it can serve to alleviate the deleterious effects of stress within groups, as well as to create feelings of trust and belongingness among the members of a group seems more plausible than Robin Dunbar’s (2005[2004]) more well-known proposal that these effects are obtained by the possession of a language, for reasons mentioned already by Dunbar (See Sonesson & Sandin 2016). But this leaves us wondering what it is that makes behaviours derived from the interchange between parent and child originate the capacity of making special. Indeed, Dissanayake (2013b: 85) herself points out that ‘there is more to art than making special and that making special is not confined to art’, but that still does not tell us what is so special about the making special of art.

What is at stake at present is not whether or not art, starting from the first prehistoric markings, is ‘symbolic’, in the sense in which this term is used by archaeologists, that is, made up of signs, consisting of an expression and a content that can be differentiated from each other and which are related in a doubly asymmetric way (see Sonesson 1992; 2012). Without offering any such clear definition of the sign, Dissanayake (2009: 165ff; 2013a: 243ff) rightly points out that this is a separate question, some results of artifying being signs, and others not, as well as vice-versa. Indeed, art, also in the archaeologists’ sense, may well be semiotic in some sense, but then semiosis must mean something more and less than being a sign. If the behaviour of the Decembrist, as suggested by Jurij Lotman (1984a, b, c) – or, to take an example that is more easily understood by most of us, of the Dadaists and Situationists – is in some way semiotic, then this must mean something else than such stretches of behaviour having the double structure of a sign.

## **2.2 Some Special Things in the Lifeworld**

Making special, as we noted above (in section 2.1.) shares with making strange a temporal dimension: the former applies to the pre-existing everyday world, just as the latter applies to standard language. Indeed, the four first, more formal, operations of artification mentioned by Dissanayake (2013a: 233) could be seen as variations of the fifth one, the ‘manipulation of the perceiver’s expectation’. On the other hand, making special appears to lack the second temporality of making strange: it is not a transgression of the expectancies generated by some particular artistic movement, at least not at the beginning.

Standard language may nevertheless be more of a self-explanatory term than that of the everyday world.<sup>3</sup> We will suppose here that the latter is identical to the Husserlean Lifeworld, paraphrased by Alfred Schütz (1962-66) as ‘the world taken for granted’. At present, we are not going to enter any detailed discussion about the nature of the Lifeworld, how it is related to Gibson’s ‘ecological physics’, Peirce’s ‘commens’, and the ‘naïve physics’ cum ‘folk psychology’ of the cognitive sciences (See Sonesson 1989; 2010). Nevertheless, if we take the notion of the Lifeworld to be an explicitation of the ‘ordinary or mundane order’ (Dissanayake 2013a: 237), the obvious problem is that, in the Lifeworld itself, a lot of things are special, in one or another sense of the term. To begin with, there is a difference between living in a Lifeworld, and living in a simple *Umwelt* like that of the tick. According

to Jakob von Uexküll (1956), the world of the tick simply consists of three percepts and three actions which are triggered by these percepts: the smell of butyric acid because of which the tick lets itself fall down, the warmth of the mammal's body which sets it in search for the least hairy part, upon reaching which it bores itself into the skin and drinks the mammal's blood. The repertory of experiences and actions of human beings, and also of many other animals which, also in other respects, are more similar to human beings than to ticks, is of course immensely richer. More importantly, however, we have the experience of a world which is interconnected, not of a few isolate features: rather, some traits are perceived as more salient than others, while still letting the others subsist more or less marginally in the background (See Sonesson 2010: 195ff).

According to Aron Gurwitsch (1957; 1985), every perceptual situation is structured into a theme, a thematic field, and a margin. The theme is that which is most directly within the focus of attention. Both the thematic field and the margin are in contiguity with the theme, but the thematic field is, in addition, connected to the theme at a semantic level. When attending to the theme, we are easily led to change the focus to something within the same thematic field. Changing what was earlier at the margin into a theme, on the other hand, is felt to require some kind of outside incitement. In the margin is normally found some items of consciousness that always accompany us, such as our own stream of consciousness, our own body, and the extension of the Lifeworld beyond what is presently perceivable. But the margin will also contain all items that are not currently our theme, nor connected to this theme (See Sonesson 2011).

This is an excellent beginning for a theory of attention, but it is not a full-blown theory. All changes of theme and the persistent holding to one theme are not of the same kind. It is well known that faces early on attract the attention of infants, and so does human speech. This is why very little may be needed for the face or speech to be made into a theme. It demands more time and effort for lines on a paper or on another surface to become subject to attention. However, lines on a surface which suggest a human (or human-like) face can be recognized as such given much fewer clues than other constellations of lines. A similar *hierarchy of dominance of the Lifeworld* accounts for the fact that it is much easier to conceive two-dimensional objects to be signs of three-dimensional ones than the opposite, and that, in certain cultures, it may be easier to recognize some lines on cloth rather than on paper to represent objects in the world of our experience (See Sonesson 1989; 2010; 2011).

The shift of the centre of attention determines what objects are special in a given situation in the Lifeworld, and the hierarchy of dominance contributes to fix those kinds of objects which are given most salience in the Lifeworld at large. The latter may be seen as a particular kind of typification, of which the Lifeworld is made up. Every particular thing encountered in the Lifeworld is referred to a general type. According to Schütz, other people, apart from family members and close friends, are almost exclusively defined by the type to which they are ascribed, and we expect them to behave accordingly. Closely related to the typifications are the regularities, which obtain in the Lifeworld, or, as Husserl's says, 'the typical ways in which things tend to behave' This is the kind of principles tentatively set up which are at the foundation of Peircean abductions. Many of the 'laws of ecological physics,' formulated by Gibson (1982: 217), and which are defied by magic, are also such 'regularities [that] are implicitly known': that substantial objects tend to persist, that major surfaces are nearly permanent with respect to layout, but that animate objects change as they grow or move; that some objects, like the bud and the pupa transform, but that no object is converted into an object that we would call entirely different, such as a frog into a prince; that no substantial object can come into existence except from another substance; that a substantial detached object must come to rest on a horizontal surface of support; that a solid object cannot penetrate another solid surface without breaking it, etc.

Things can also be special, and still be within the Lifeworld, if they are a kind of *ultra-things* ('ultra-chose'). This is a term coined by Henri Wallon (1963: 647ff), to describe things which, to small children, are somehow beyond grasp, such as birth and death, the sky, the sun, the wind, and so on. It was generalized beyond child psychology by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1979[1945]), who no doubt realised that many things are difficult to grasp also for adults. I think we could go further and suggest that ultra-things are precisely the kind of things which are at the limit of the Lifeworld, and thus of what can be understood. Wallon's first example is here particularly poignant: when he asks the children about the time before they were born and the time after their death, they become very confused. But so do we all.

Perhaps specialness in the sense of ultra-things is addressed in the following quotation:

For our Pleistocene ancestors who invented the arts, the important things that were artified had to do with material subsistence – hunting and food, prosperity, preservation of the natural, social, or divine order, appearance of the self, fertility, health, safety, group continuance and harmony, averting misfortune, and successfully traversing transitional stages of life from birth to death (Dissanayake 2013b:91).

Still, these are given here as things which might be 'artified' from the very beginning, not as things which are already 'artified' as such. Indeed, we should not neglect the temporal distance implicit in any kind of making strange or making special.

If the original sense of something being special is that it is at the centre of attention, then it might perhaps become even more special if that attention is directed to it by some other person. A case in point is of course the interaction between parent and child, epitomized in the game of 'peek-a-boo', but also any other kind of interaction in which one person draws the attention of another person to a third person or thing. Jordan Zlatev (2008: 226) distinguishes *shared attention*, when two individuals become aware that they are both attending to the same objects, and *joint attention*, when, in addition, each of the persons becomes aware of the other persons being aware of what they attend to. One may perhaps add to this *conjoined attention*, when one of the participants in the game is clearly directing the attention of the other.

A peculiar case of conjoined attention is when somebody is somehow taking a stretch of behaviour out of context and 'quoting' it. In an earlier paper of mine (Sonesson 1998), I suggested, when discussing Lotman's idea that the behaviour of the Decembrists was a case of 'semiotization' that this then could not mean that they somehow turned themselves into signs, but rather that they were using another type of meaning-making act, probably of the kind we designate as 'quotation' when it is applied to language. Quotation means that a token is in a way promoted into a type, more precisely into a time-bound type. In this sense even actions may be quoted. All ritual and ceremony could be seen as behaviour quoting other behaviour. This could apply to the actions of the Decembrists, discussed by Lotman (although he obviously does not describe them in that way).<sup>4</sup>

The Decembrists were a group of Russian officers and their sympathisers who, incited by their experiences during the Napoleonic Wars, fomented an unsuccessful conspiracy on December 6, or, according to the old calendar, on December 14, 1825, to overthrow Czar Nicholas I. It seems that they displayed their contempt for the Tsarist tyranny by rejecting court lifestyle, wearing their cavalry swords at balls (indicating their unwillingness to dance), and committing themselves to academic study. My main sources for the saliency of the Decembrists' behaviour, however, is a series of articles by Jurij Lotman (1984a, b, c). Contrasting it with the Decembrists' semiotization of ordinary life, Lotman (1984a) claims that routine behaviour is not semiotic: 'Semiotic behaviour is always the result of a choice'. He also says that 'the very act had to be seen as significant, to deserve the memory of

posterity and the attention of historians, and to be of the utmost value'. So far, I, and perhaps also Dissanayake, should be able to agree. But then Lotman goes on to claim that the Decembrist's behaviour in ordinary life thereby 'has become a subject of attention, in which value is attached not to the acts themselves but to their symbolic meaning'. However, it is not at all clear that the acts have become carriers of a meaning substantially different from what they are in themselves. Rather, it seems that they have been singled out for attention.

One is here reminded of some aspects of the inventions of Modernism, which consisted in placing a routine action or an everyday object in a context where it would be attended to, such as in an art gallery, or on a scene, etc. (an aspect of Centrifugal Modernism; see Section 1.3). This holds true of many parts of a happening or performance and of most ready-mades (see Sonesson 2000). Of course, Lotman's examples actually illustrate a case which is the opposite of the one just mentioned: the acts of the Decembrists took place in the middle of ordinary life, but they had a spectacular quality to them that (at least potentially) attracted an audience. Still, without the presence of a scene or an exhibition hall, the behaviour of the Decembrists is clearly experienced (if we are to believe Lotman) as being acts of conjoining attention. Thomsen (1992: 136), who believes Postmodernity abolishes the distinction between fine and popular arts, refers to the personalities and behaviour of such pop artists as Madonna and Prince as acts of theatre

### **3. The Theatre of Everyday Life**

An important feature of the Prague School model of art mentioned above is that it requires *the spectator to collaborate* in the creation of the work. Such a collaboration must of course always take place (not only in the case of art, as I suggested above, but in communication generally), in order for the work to be transformed into an aesthetic (or more generally perceptual) object, in the process of which empty positions in the structure are filled in from the knowledge of the receiver, and the dominant of the structure is determined. Nevertheless, there is one particular aspect in which the collaboration of the perceiver is surely needed: in the determination of the *aesthetic function*. Indeed, by putting the emphasis on certain properties of an artefact, to the exclusion of others, or rather, by highlighting some properties while downplaying the others, the artist may transform any object into a work of art, and any perceiver may actually choose to look upon any artefact, and even a product of nature, as an art object, simply by taking an aesthetic stand on it. As if to illustrate this point, Marcel Duchamp accomplished his famous act of placing a urinal in the exhibition context.

#### **3.1 The Spectacular Function**

Art, according to Dissanayake (2009; 157) originates in 'ceremonial behaviour' or, in other terms, in rite or ritual: 'Because of the inseparability of religious practice and artification, it is plausible to suggest that the arts arose in human evolution as components of ceremonial behaviour rather than as independently-evolved activities.' Since ritual is certainly a kind of behaviour, it might be useful to compare it with a division of art which also consists in behaviour, the theatre.

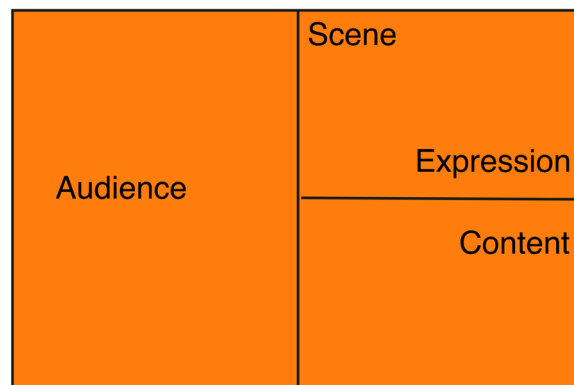


Figure 3. A reconstruction of Hildebrand's (1976) model of what Sonesson (2000) calls the referential and the spectacular functions

In an early paper on 'theatre modernism', Olle Hildebrand (1976), taking his cue from the Prague School, set out to distinguish sport, ritual, and theatre by means of a cross-classification involving the dichotomies between *stage* versus *auditorium*, and *expression* versus *content*, sport manifesting the first dichotomy, ritual the second, and theatre both of them. In his dissertation, which is predominantly concerned with Eivrenov's play 'Harlekin the Saviour', Hildebrand (1978) then goes on to show that the peculiar 'theatrical' style invented by this author combines ritual and theatre, in the senses specified above. Here, of course, the first opposition derives from Mukařovský's above-mentioned theory, while the second is traceable to the Saussure/Hjelmslev tradition. In Prague School terms, this second function may be qualified as *referential* or informational. The other function, which may be termed the *spectacular function*, really consists in the fact that the actors involved in the realisation of a particular process of signification are divided into two groups, one of which is physically realising the process, while the other group is given the task of perceiving the process or its result. Normally, the two groups will also be assigned different localities inside the theatre, so that the transgression of these borders also may become significant, non-theatre becoming theatre and vice-versa, just as non-art becomes art.

Relying on this same double opposition, Lars Kleberg (1977; 1984) embarks on an analysis of Ivanov's conception of the cultic theatre. Expressed in these terms, however, Ivanov's conception certainly appears problematical, for, as soon as it is stated, it tends to vanish as such:

Ivanov's program propagated the restoration of the cultic principles, which theatre – as is usually agreed – has abandoned, thus becoming a secularized art form. The fact that the elimination of the border between stage and audience, in principle, implied the elimination of theatre as such did not occupy Ivanov. In theatre as an art form he was interested in a *shift of emphasis* from the 'spectacle' towards the cult. /--/ The abolishing of the dualism between actors and audience became a metaphor for the synthetic elimination of a series of other contradictions like Poet vs. Crowd, individualism vs collectivism, etc.' (Kleberg 1984: 60f).

Unfortunately, Hildebrand's and Kleberg's conjoint labour leaves us with two paradoxes, which are far from being trivial. If ritual involves the dichotomy between expression and content, and theatre compounds this dichotomy with a further one opposing stage and auditorium, what can it mean that Eivrenov's conception of theatre combines ritual and theatre? And, if, under the same circumstances, Ivanov's idea of the theatre implied the abolishment of the opposition between stage and audience, in what way did he think he was proposing something different from a mere return to ritual? If we rephrase this in Mukařovský's subtler terms, it might be said that Eivrenov and Ivanov wanted, in different ways, to transfer the dominant of the activity they were proposing, from that of

the spectacular function, implying a distinction between stage and audience, to the referential function as such: but then, if Hildebrand and Kleberg are right, the result would simply be ritual.

Even if we accept, however, that ritual differs from theatre in lacking the spectacular function, while sharing with it the referential one, this is hardly enough as a definition: for many phenomena (among them visual art) have the referential function, and many of them (again visual art, among others) have, if not the spectacular function, something similar to it, that is, a division between the perceivers and the perceived (there would be no point in a work of art which is not presented to be perceived). It might therefore be said, that both theatre and ritual are *stretches of behaviour which stand for other stretches of behaviour*, and that they are susceptible of being *repeated* in their entirety, in one case because they follow a script, and in another because they are standardised. Also sport may be qualified as a stretch of behaviour which, though lacking the referential function, is standardised as to its quality, though not, of course, in its quantity. Here, then, we have a difference to visual art, as it is traditionally understood: it is an object, not a stretch of behaviour, though it may, in some cases, stand for a stretch of behaviour. However, already Dadaism invented works of art which were stretches of behaviour, and similar things were later realised, under the name of happenings, events, and so on. All in all, however, the happening may have more in common with ritual than with theatre: it is a Modernist ritual, and as it becomes Modernist, with its requirement of newness, it is a one-time ritual.

In any case, it cannot be right to claim that the rite has no spectacular function; in fact, there is frequently a division, just as in the theatre, between those who perform the rite and those who only participate, like for example, the priest in the Christian mass as opposed to the congregation: that is to say, there is a difference between *those who only observe, and those who, in addition to observing, are also observed*. However, there is probably nobody in the rite who is *not* a subject but only an object of observation, for also the officiator partakes in the experience of the rite; he performs it for himself, in the same sense in which he does so for the others (unlike the actor). Even if we consider rites of the type which seems to have been imagined by Hildebrand and Kleberg, where the difference between the officiator and the participants tends to dissolve in a collective trance (a more Dionysian than Apollonian kind of rite), there still remains a spectacular function of the participant without which the rite would lack any meaning (see Sonesson 2000).

A correlate of this division is that different spatial expanses are normally assigned to the spectator and the observed, which offers the possibility of a transgression of limits between spaces independently of the respective subjects: and such transgressions are really what is often found in the work of Ivanov and Eivrenov, as well in more recent vanguard theatre, as for example the Living Theatre, Théâtre du soleil, etc. But there are also rites in which the space of the officiator is clearly separated from the space of the common participants; this also is true of the familiar Christian rites, particularly in their Catholic variant. But in these latter cases, the transgression of limits does not give rise to new forms of art, but to an act of sacrilege.

It might be said that the spectacular function, as conceived here, is a particularly pregnant version of the act of attention. The sign function also required attention, but to something which is not directly present (see section 2.1. and Sonesson 1992; 2012). However, the aesthetic function, as conceived by the Prague School, is also a variety of the act of attention.

### **3.2 Aesthetic Focus on its Own**

The idea of art being characterized by an emphasis on the very material of the resources by means of which meaning is conveyed in ordinary communication is clearly part and parcel of the message of the Russian Formalists. It was explicitly designed as such by Jan Mukařovský (1974; 1976; 1978; 1986) who, in the communication model, placed the aesthetic function focusing on the message as such, alongside the three functions defined by Karl Bühler (1982[1934]): the referential function, focusing on the content; the expressive function, focusing on the sender, and the conative func-

tion, focusing on the receiver.<sup>5</sup> Most of us are of course familiar with these functions from the model proposed by Roman Jakobson (1963), in which the aesthetic function is called poetic, and two more functions are added, namely the phatic function, focusing on the channel, and the metalinguistic function, focusing on the code.

No matter the term used, there is an ambiguity in the characterization of the aesthetic (or poetic) function, which is never fully resolved in the Prague School model: is there some property of the urinal, never before apperceived, which in itself is worthy of sensuous, or even sensual, contemplation; or, alternatively, which, once highlighted, comes to refer to some further property which is of intrinsic interest – or is the task of the aesthetic function simply to pick some indifferent property and single it out for observation, that is, is the ‘aesthetic’ property of the object simply ascribed to it (see Sonesson 2004)? And, if the latter, is the point of this act simply to extend the sphere of art? The latter interpretation seems to fit at least some aspects of the Modernist adventure, but there is no reason to think that it applied to the the experience of art at the beginning.<sup>6</sup>

The answer to this conundrum is probably that there were earlier some properly aesthetic, that is, sensuous, properties which made artefacts eligible as works of arts in the human Lifeworld (though sometimes these properties were difficult to discover and were often perceived only when no longer deformed by some prevailing norm), but that Modernism inverted this relationship, and *ascribed the property of being a work of art* (no longer properly called aesthetic properties) to artefacts included in the artistic sphere. Since a work of art, on this interpretation, only possesses the property of being a work of art, once it has been moved inside the sphere recognized as being that of art, it cannot be said to signify any property it possesses, but only a property ascribed to it on the grounds of its temporary relationship to other things, which however tends to attach to it in history: no matter how it is moved, Duchamp’s urinal continues to be a work of art.

Suppose Dissanayake (2009: 150ff; 2013b: 86ff; 2014) is right to think that aesthetic qualities originate in the interaction between the parent and the infant. It does not follow that these qualities are aesthetic because children like them. The opposite may be the case. Perhaps the properties are primary.

Drawing upon their innate sensitivity to proto-aesthetic operations in vocal, visual, and gestural modalities, present from infancy, early humans “invented” ritual ceremonies, packages of salient multi-modal artifications that we as scholars (rather than participants) can separate into their various elements: chant, song, literary language, mime, theatre, dance, and visual enhancement – the arts. (Dissanayake 2013b:90)

This may account for the importance of ultra-things to the arts (see section 2.2.). That is, it may account for what is known as the sublime. But what about beauty?

### **3.3 Beauty and the Beast**

The question I want to broach here is not the classical philosophical issue whether beauty is objective or subjective (see Sartwell 2014); but whether we appreciate certain properties which we describe by the term beauty, because we were accustomed to them in the peek-a-boo games of our infancy, or whether we, just like the infants, appreciate these properties for what they are, given that they are experienced within the framework of our common human Lifeworld – a variant, after all, of the *Umwelt* of one of the primate species (see Uexküll 1956). No doubt there are some properties of shapes as experienced by human beings, and to which small children seem to be particularly susceptible, termed ‘physiognomic properties’ by, for instance, Werner & Kaplan (1963), which, for all we know, may be universal (Sonesson 2013: 2015b). These properties, at least when they are repeated, seem to correspond fairly well to what Dissanayake (2013a: 233) characterizes as ‘the five operations used by artifiers: formalization (a term that includes shaping, composing, patterning, organizing,

schematizing, and simplifying), repetition, exaggeration, elaboration, and – in some instances – manipulation of the perceiver's expectation'. So, in some sense, these properties are no doubt universal, but do they necessarily produce an experience of beauty? That remains to be proven. There probably is (or was) something like the human universal experience of beauty, but it must be (or have been) provoked by something more particular than physiognomic properties, and/or Dissanayake's five operations, which may easily be made to serve other goals as well (see Sonesson 2004).<sup>7</sup>

And then art never was exclusively about beauty. As Aristotle famously remarked, Greek dramas tended to show terrible acts, and still the representation of them gave pleasure to the audience. No doubt, this has something to do with the language by means of which these acts were represented (see Sonesson 2004), but the importance of the meaning of the acts accomplished in the Lifeworld should not be neglected. And these observations may be generalized beyond Greek drama to art in general. This is no doubt the part of the ultra-things, or of the sublime, in art, sometimes being mixed with beauty, and sometimes being on its own, just as beauty may appear alone.

From peak-a-boo to pre-modernist art, there is no doubt some sense in which 'the manipulation of the perceiver's expectation' plays a part, though not singlehandedly, as was often the case in Modernism. From Zeuxis and Giotto to the advent of Modernism, the reigning norm in Occidental pictorial art was the *the striving to render the appearances of the perceptual world ever more perfectly*, and the value attributed to progress in this endeavour, no doubt together with other values, was the regulatory idea of Occidental art, up to, and in a way including, Impressionism. This means that the way to manipulate the perceiver's expectations was to bring pictorial appearances ever closer to the appearances of the real perceptual world. Even before abstraction became its norm (itself broken by de Kooning, Pop art, etc.), Modernism, in its heroic beginnings, put the artist under obligation to give up this particular mode of pictorial rendering, or at least deprived it of its part in making art special. Thus, the two 'giants' of European Modernism, Matisse and Picasso, never, or only passingly, gave up depiction entirely, but the value regulating the kind of art they produced, and for which their works became exemplary, did not require any perfect rendering of visual appearance, but, on the contrary, laid stress on the reinterpretation and resegmentation of perceptual reality. No doubt, Surrealism, Hyperrealism, and Pop Art never gave up depiction as a norm; but there ceased to be a value for them in striving for further perception. Indeed, with the exception of Surrealism, they all depict other depictions, or simulate their effect.

It can certainly be said that Zeuxis in his time, and Giotto in his, and then Botticelli, Titian, Chardin, Courbet, and many others, were out to surprise us, but not to surprise us absolutely: to surprise us with their ever greater ability to create pictorial appearances approaching those of the perceptual world itself. The precise rules of the game were different of course, in other arts, but at least in literature, too, the norm that had to be followed was broadly that of Mimesis, in the Aristotelian-Auerbachian sense of the term.<sup>8</sup> In a way, literature has remained truer to that norm than the plastic arts.

#### **4. Some Very Preliminary Conclusions**

On its own, making strange does not seem to account for more than a particular (if, by now, very long-lasting) phase in the development of Art, Modernism (including so-called Postmodernism). Even if it is reinterpreted as making special, the notion of art faces at least two hurdles: there seem to be a lot of senses in which things may be 'special', and still be part of the everyday Lifeworld. And if we define the specialness of art as some special way of making special, going beyond the ordinary Lifeworld, we still have to explain it what way this happens. Taking another clue from Dissanayake, we might want to say that this specialness is grounded in our earliest infant experience, in the interplay between parent and child, but even if we accept such a peek-a-boo model of art, it is still not obvious whether it is the latter which makes art experience rewarding, or whether art experience and



peek-a-boo both are rewarding because of the intrinsic properties which they bring to our attention. Indeed, if we start from an evolutionary perspective, as Dissanayake certainly does, there seems to be no reason to deny that, already as a peculiar kind of animal, the human being is sensible to certain properties which have long been known as beauty. In addition, as an animal with a consciousness, we are living particular situations, in which ultra-things become pregnant, notably, as Wallon pointed out, the experience of the impossible non-experience of the existence of the world before our birth and, in particular, after our death, and this is certainly also an important ingredient in what we know as art. The manipulation of expectancy, after all, is hardly more than the icing on the cake.

## NOTES

1. As far as I have been able to ascertain by reading her publications, Dissanayake herself does not explicitly derive her model from the Russian Formalists, but when she gave an invited lecture at our institute on November 12, 2015, she recognized having been inspired by this tradition. As I later found out, however, in Dissanayake (2009:155) there are somewhat convoluted references to Shklovsky, Jakobson and Mukařovský.
2. When criticizing the evolutionary psychologists George Miller (2000, p. 275) and Matthew Rosano (2003), who argue that there is a 'cultural diphormism' (analogous to 'sexual diphormism') in the cultural sphere, because most artists, authors, and composers have been males, I observed (Sonesson 2016) that the fundamental inventions of art (such as art itself, its different genres, etc.), let alone culture (life in society, collaboration, the city, the public sphere, etc.), cannot be attributed to single individuals, whether men or women. Dissanayake's argument would seem to make art an invention, not of single individuals certainly, but of women to the exclusion of men. To avoid discussing this point, I have here rephrased her argument in terms of parents generally.
3. As Davies (2012, 131) remarks, Dissanayake's 'concept of "making special" seems to be too broad, seemingly including anything which humans experience as interesting, for example "a video of our child's university graduation or of a horse we've heavily backed winning a major race". The point is well taken, but my own critique, formulated before I read Davies' book, aims to be more specific about what is problematic.
4. Although quotation may sometimes involve imitation (that is, mimesis in the sense of Merlin Donald 1991), it can also have different kinds of metalinguistic (and more broadly meta-semiotic) uses, which do not require the reproduction of an earlier token of behaviour, just the reference to a behaviour type.
5. Actually, Bühler used somewhat different terms, but these are the names the functions were subsequently given by Jakobson.
6. The same question could be formulated with reference to what Goodman (1976 [1968]) calls exemplification, i.e. when an object becomes a sign for a property which it also possesses. For further discussion, see Sonesson (1999a: 2004).
7. I do not mean to refer here to gross naturalistic interpretations on the line of mainstream evolutionary psychology, according to which, notably, the breast-hip ratio of a woman's body, which have traditionally been considered a feature of beauty (at least when appearing in paintings), is 'really' a mark of health and ability to have many healthy children. For a critique of this kind of reasoning, see Sonesson, in press 2016.
8. Not be confused with the meaning given to this term by Donald (1991) and Zlatev (2008). Although these two notions of mimesis have a common core in the idea of imitation, it is essential to the latter, but not to the former, to involve an activity realised with the aid of one's own body.

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