

## SYSTEMATICITY, INTEGRITY AND SELF-ORGANIZATION IN FINE ART Assoc. Prof., Ph.D. Roumiana Pankova - National Academy of Art

The topic introduces us to an attempt for a systematic analysis of the process of perception of fine art and its applicability in bordering fields such as art therapy and art pedagogy. The stages of wholeness and self-organization are examined through the psychosemantic profile of visual art analysis.

**Keywords:** static and dynamic forms in art, digital art, hybrid art, visual dialogue.

### *1. Necessity to Study Systematicity and Self-Organization in Fine Art*

The understanding and knowledge of fine art, as well as undertaking individual creativity works, should not be seen as intrinsic to a certain *elitist* community comprising only the *initiated*.

The power of art in general, and fine art in particular, lies in the fact that it exerts its influence on many people, no matter whether or not they have special training in the field of art studies.

The classical works of the Renaissance have inspired generations by provoking ideas of freedom, love or dreams. Hence the need to stipulate a *mechanism* for providing a structured analysis of the works of visual art, for finding a different *dimension* for the viewer *behind* the visual image, for *identifying* what the artist has implied or tried to evoke in our thoughts. The realm of visual arts includes both the focus of representation (visual analogy) and the plastic aspect (form and shaping). In this binary process, art projects centres of reference (significant values for the subject). In varying degrees these centres of reference are (individually) constructed on the basis of our experience, cognition and the process of reflection and processing in our psyche (the mechanism of reflexivity).

A similar *mechanism* for reflexive understanding of fine art is the mental technique of systems analysis. This article does not consider the constructive analysis of the fine and applied arts; focus is placed on the psychological processes involved in systems analysis, even though the conceptual vocabulary of fine art is used.

Analysing the work as a system made up of its subsystems, the viewer can identify the dependencies that exist between these elements, can try, on the basis of the completeness or incompleteness of a particular work, to *empathize with* the idea of the author, can put himself in his shoes and even attempt to *transform* this analysis into his own visual creation<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Crozier, W. R., Chapman, A. J. (eds.). *Cognitive Processes in the Perception of Art*. Elsevier, 1984.

Even when this systematic analysis is remote enough from what the artist *had wanted to express* with the image, it shall remain relevant to the individual viewer, as it fosters the interest in the study and points to the emotional and cognitive part of his intellect, to the *understanding* of fine art and the activation of the creative abilities that everyone possesses.

The systematic analysis of fine art is of an applied constitution in integrated areas such as art therapy and art pedagogy. It is expressed by reflexive responding and is part of the mediation between the consciousness of the client or trainee and the feedback to the therapist or educator on the processes of mastering and understanding the artist's creative work.

The analysis proposed in this paper is of informative nature and should not be perceived as a predetermined tool for mastering the systems analysis (various modes of thinking are possible: inductive, deductive, metacognitive, etc., for deriving the systems analysis). What is more important is to draw attention to the tasks and potentials of this analytical interpretation in art<sup>2</sup>.

## ***2. A Systematic Approach to the Work of Fine Art***

A systematic approach to the *facts* of fine art requires it be defined as belonging to a particular category, style and period. The proposed groups of *traditional, hybrid and digital art* are generalised in nature and also subject to being made precise in terms of types and content.

Accordingly, each of the types may possess its sub-types and genres:

- traditional art can be flat-plastic (photography, painting, graphics) and spatial-plastic (sculpture, relief);
- hybrid art is an artistic laboratory of conceptual programmes for research and experiments, retaining some of the possibilities of traditional fine art forms, complemented by new cross-border projects that emerge as a result of the application of contemporary digital technologies;
- numerical/digital art is the *new media* (virtual art, interactive art, computer graphics, etc.) with shared creative processes and an open code, including *static and dynamic* spatial forms.

Each type of art has its own structural characteristics that allows for a greater range or a more limited representation of the artists' ideas. At the same time, it provides the viewer with the opportunity to compare them, to concentrate on the relevant topic or to compare it with other types of arts depending on their needs and interests.

The format of the *visual dialogue*, characteristic for each of the listed types, is of dominant significance in the systems analysis of the selected type.

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<sup>2</sup> Bruter, C. (ed.). *Mathematics and Art: Mathematical Visualization in Art and Education*. Springer, 2002.

The visual dialogue with traditional art as a rule requires a more profiled delving (classically derived analysis and comparison) into the detail, identifying the system of signs, colours, and symbols that the artist has used.

In hybrid and digital art, of leading importance to perception is the signification - the synthesis of compositional elements in the generalized sense and the *effect of impact* (psychological term), that are incorporated in the work. Of course, this analysis is of guiding nature and depends to a high degree on the apperception of each viewer and the expectation of what he aims to find when observing the respective visual image<sup>3</sup>.

### ***3. Systematicity and Integrity in the Analysis of a Specific Work of Art***

Запознаването с едно цялостно произведение на изобразителното изкуство на системна основа се реализира чрез преминаването на няколко отделни етапа, добре известни на изкуствоведи и психолози, но невинаги достъпни и известни на по-широката аудитория, и сравнително рядко намират своето отражение в педагогическата практика. Затова ще спомена накратко етапите на системния анализ:

Getting to know a complete work of fine art on a systematic basis undergoes several distinct stages, well known to art historians and psychologists, but not always available and known to larger audiences, and relatively rarely reflected in teaching practices. Therefore, I will briefly mention the stages of the systems analysis:

**A)** Всяко визуално произведение се разглежда като част от цялото, спрямо сферата на изобразителното изкуство и нейните участници: фасилитатори (художници, куратори, изкуствоведи, теоретици на изкуството), рецепиенти и *ситуационната* среда. В този случай визуалният продукт се причислява към съответната категория, вид, жанр на изобразителното изкуство и *получава* присъщите системни характеристики.

A) Each visual work is regarded as a part of the whole in relation to the field of fine art and its participants: facilitators (artists, curators, art historians, art theorists), recipients and the *situational* environment.

In this case, the visual product is allocated to the respective category, type, genre of fine art and *obtains* the inherent systemic characteristics.

**B)** Integrity of the work of fine art.

This is a key property that should be paid special attention to.

It is the integrity of the image that gives the complete idea of the thought that the author has articulated into the visual work. Special attention should be paid not only to the isolation of a certain image, but to the need to find the inner and outer meaningful *world* of the respective work.

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<sup>3</sup> Maier, M. W., Rehtin, E. *The Art of Systems Architecting*. 3rd Edition, Taylor & Francis Group, 2009.

What matters to deductive analysis is the perception of the whole in the entirety of its cognitive (what is recognized and related to the conceptual vocabulary) and emotional (the empathy in the overall perception) elements.

**C) Defining the form of the work as *static* or *dynamic*.**

We need to choose the point at which the viewer will define an image as *static* (i.e., perceive the image as it is) or *dynamic* (i.e., being able to be transformed without losing its original integrity).

Depending on the approach, a work can be perceived both as static and as dynamic. An effective way to develop the creative abilities of the viewer is to seek provocativeness (posing hypotheses and exploring them) in the approach, as this will engage him in his own activity during reception of the image. These approaches have a similar intensity in art therapy and art pedagogy, where one of the goals of the pictorial actions is related to a *change* in perspective. It is the transition from static to dynamic projection in a particular work that enables such permutation.

**D) Analysis of the individual elements of the image.**

The following indicators belong to the category of basic elements in system analysis: composition, perspective, shape, light shades, tone and colour. It is necessary to submit these basic points to further psycholinguistic analysis in order to determine the semantic relationships and their place within the entire system of the image and within the work of the respective author. It is important to note here that, on the one hand, the elements referred to have an atavistic ability (e.g. colours) to predetermine the line of analysis a priori and, on the other, to synchronize and adapt within the context of time and place and to adopt *a new sign code* for the work. In the given example of colours, the psychological processes of feeling, understanding, rational and irrational thinking imply a different semantic dominance in the personal interpretation. It is necessary to trace the interpretation of the main thought that the viewer *understands* in the respective work.

Sometimes elements such as individual *lines* or the establishment of symbolic connections between the image and the background can be of particular focus for system analysis, especially when it comes to dynamic images. This involves the formation and development of spatial thinking.

The plastic reflex of the light shades (volume and position in space) as connecting elements between the individual structures of the image is of particular importance within the systems analysis. Contemporary techniques of fine art allow for an extremely abundant use of light in images. In this case, the dominant recourse in the analysis is the emotional impact of this dimension on the overall perception of the image.

**E) Structures and their interactions.**

The structures model the *relationships* between the individual elements of the image. Often that interactions between the structures lead to the overall effect of an image. Such connecting elements like light shadows, dynamics of the objects, interaction between figures and groups of figures and the background create an additional psychological interpretative potential of the respective image.

Systems analysis also requires a thorough analysis of the functions of the elements and the structures within the overall system of the image.

It is important for the viewer to answer the following questions: which of the elements and/or structures are of leading significance to the semantic content; which of the elements complement the basic semantic topic; which of the elements or structures bears the main emotional *charge* of the respective work? Even viewers' *attempts* to answer (naturally, there is no unambiguous effect of a work of art on anyone except in an *a priori arrangement*) will activate the cognitive processes, make the viewer concentrate on the energy of the respective work, and this in itself means the fulfilment of one of the functions of art - to stimulate *empathy* for the content of the image<sup>4</sup>.

#### ***4. Analysis of the organization and self-organization of the system***

The systematic analysis of fine art provokes the viewer not only to perceive the work as a unified system, but also to pose the question how it has been organized.

Virtually every work of fine art has a definite *centre* around which the remaining elements of the system are organized.

The systematic approach requires the viewer to try to find this *centre*, to imagine those motives, algorithms and impulses that were the basis of this organisation of the work in the process of perception.

Such attempts enable the visual object of art to *pass* through the viewer's consciousness in a manner that provides *an entry to the process* of its preparation and fulfilment.

This aspect of the activity concerning the systematic analysis of works of fine art is often omitted in order not to *damage* the impression from the respective visual media.

At the same time, it is extremely significant as it involves the basic cognitive mechanisms, which not only help fully understand art, but also stimulate the creative process in the mind of the viewer.

The systematic analysis of works of fine art still awaits its considerably more detailed elaboration.

Not only the representatives of professional art circles, but also specialists from others, including from *borderline* fields, such as art therapists and art teachers, should get more and more actively involved in this visual-analytical process.

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<sup>4</sup> Eldridge, Richard. *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

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