World Picture and Beyond – Representation Revisited

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Heidegger is often considered as a philosopher who stands against pictures, a belief that is based on his 1938 paper, *The Age of the World Picture*. First, as an introduction, I will attempt to show that his criticism under the heading of *The Age of the World Picture* is targeted not at pictures, but rather at the traditional dualistic approach which leads to the conviction that we have access to the world through representations. As an historical overview, I will briefly outline Bergson's endeavour to resolve this "spatial dualism", as well as Merleau-Ponty's criticism and suggestion with regard to the problem of representation. As a second step, I will focus on images and try to highlight those aspects of pictorial engagements which yield considerable immersive potential. In conclusion, I will recapitulate and attempt to answer the questions of why representation has an ambiguous position and how pictorial representations can facilitate cognitive capabilities.

Representation vs. presentation

One of Heidegger's main efforts in his criticism of Western metaphysics was to illuminate the roots and consequences of the erroneous assumption/presupposition of subject-object dualism. In his above-mentioned paper, Heidegger connects this split with representation.[1] Representation "means to bring what is present at hand [*das Vorhandene*] before oneself as something standing over against, to relate it to oneself, to the one representing it". (Heidegger 1977:131) Heidegger offers an alternative: we are immersed in the world and move amongst ready-at-hand things with the help of a referential totality provided by this world. Accordingly, "world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture. What is, in its entirety, is now taken in such a way that it first is in being and only is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth." (Heidegger 1977:129f.)

That is, though human beings are immersed in the world and relate to things as an organic part of their everyday activity, according to the dominant view, we are conceived as self-contained observers of the external world that, thanks to our intellectual power, are capable of mastering it. The puzzles resulting from subject-object dualism, and more importantly, the threat implied by this false view, might be resolved by keeping in mind our embeddedness into the world, according Heidegger. Although Heidegger offers some useful terms for creating a detailed alternative to the Cartesian view, Bergson and Merleau-Ponty yield some further help.

A couple of decades earlier, Bergson, emphasizing the motor component, suggested resolving this spatial dualism with the help of time, more precisely with the distinction of virtual and actual. The interplay of the virtual and the actual offers grounds for this substitution. Bergson held that "[t]he real action passes through, the virtual action remains." (Bergson, 1991:39) This seemingly ambiguous statement gains clarity when we add that "[r]epresentation is always there, but always virtual – being neutralized, at the very moment when it might become actual, by the obligation to continue itself in something else" (Bergson, 1991:36). That is, in the ever-changing responsive relation to the world, we are provoked to

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[1] "[T]he original naming power of the worn-out word and concept "to represent" [*voorstellen*]: to set out before oneself and to set forth in relation to oneself. Through this, whatever is comes to a stand as object and in that way alone receives the seal of Being. That the world becomes picture is one and the same event with the event of man's becoming *subiecturn* in the midst of that which is." (Heidegger 1977:132)

choose among alternatives thanks to memory. These alternatives are virtual until the moment of choice. After the response, one of the virtual possibilities becomes real.

Later, Merleau-Ponty pointed out that Bergson did not succeed in involving consciousness in a body or in the world, as if bodily movements would remain outside of the realm of consciousness. As he put it "Bergson saw that the body and the mind communicate with each other through the medium of time, that to be a mind is to stand above time's flow, and that to have a body is to have a present…. But the body remains for him what we have called the objective body; consciousness remains knowledge; time remains a successive 'now', whether it 'snowballs upon itself 'or is spread in spatialized time. Bergson can therefore only compress or expand the series of 'present moments'; he never reaches the unique movement whereby the three dimensions of time are constituted, and one cannot see why duration is squeezed into a present, or why consciousness becomes involved in a body in a world." (Merleau-Ponty 2008:91)

James, regarding emotional consciousness, suggests that it is "not a primary feeling, directly aroused by the exciting object or thought, but a secondary feeling indirectly aroused... [by] ...the organic changes, muscular and visceral, of which the so-called 'expression' of the emotion consists." (James 1969:346) Wittgenstein refers several times to this idea of James' and despite his criticism[2], he seems to accept it. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty suggests that we can hardly talk about one's thoughts unless taking into account one's utterances. As he puts it: "We must recognize first of all that thought, in the speaking subject, is not a representation, that is, it does not expressly posit objects or relations. The orator does not think before speaking, nor even while speaking: his speech is his thought." (Merleau-Ponty 2008:209) And some paragraphs later "[t]hought is no 'internal' thing, and does not exist independently of the world and of words. … 'Pure' thought reduces itself to a certain void of consciousness, to a momentary desire." (Merleau-Ponty 2008:213)

Perception and depiction

As we can see, representation as external expression/objectification and mental representation seem to coincide. Regarding images, we are faced with a very similar situation: we can speak about mental images, as well as pictures. Thanks to cognitive metaphor theory, with the help of kinaesthetic image schemas, mental images have been related to bodily activity, and eye-tracking experiments show a relation between the recollection of pictures and eye-movements. We can see some coincidence of the mental and matter-related forms, but in this talk I will focus rather on the role and challenges of images. Their efficiency is rooted in their direct relation to bodily experiences. The notion of embodiment, unlike Cartesian dualism, suggests that human rationality and conceptual capacity is determined by having a body. Perceptive capabilities, the muscular system, and different aspects of the human body and its experiences provide the ground for the development of higher cognitive functions and image schemas have a crucial role in this process since they create the basis of our understanding, as they provide general structures by which we are able to arrange our experiences (Johnson 1990: 208). As Bergson suggests, motor responses and the recollections of earlier bodily experiences yield ground for creating a responsive relation with the environment. And, as Merleau-Ponty later highlighted, perception of the external world is possible only via the perception of one's own body; there is no other way to access things in our environment.

Accordingly, visual impressions as we have them are not snapshots (i.e., picture-like representations with minute details without preferences), but rather the result of looking around in accordance with the requirements of the given situation. "Perception is not

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[2] See Wittgenstein 1963:413

something that happens to us, or in us. … The world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction … perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of bodily skills. What we perceive is determined by what we do and what we know how to do; it is determined by what we are ready to do. We *enact* our perceptual experience; we act it out."[3] According to the enactive concept of visual perception, it is a "skilful exploration" of the world, or more precisely, a discovery of certain recurring patterns of how appearances relate to things and bodily movements.[4]

General patterns provide the basis for individuation and tracking identity. Recent experiments with infants and young children suggest that in the course of cognitive development, young children first create the more general sortals such as "object", and later creating sortals such as "person". Only afterwards do basic-level sortals emerge, such as "ball", "duck", "cup", and the like. Arnheim perspicaciously notes that since perception starts from generalities, perception and conception are artificially distinguished. As he put it, "'Triangularity' is a primary percept, not a secondary concept. The distinction between individual triangles comes later, not earlier. Doggishness is perceived earlier than the particular character of any one dog." (Arnheim 1974:167) These general patterns, and subsequently more sophisticated ones, clearly emerge in children's drawings as well. Investigating children's drawings, we can recognise a tendency whereby younger children are satisfied with simple schemas of persons and things, and they gradually become capable of adding details for the sake of recognisability. The drawings nicely mirror the schemas they have: people are round-shaped entities with two arms and legs, often depicted as tadpoles without a trunk. (DeLoache 2004:68) "As the mind becomes more refined, the patterns it creates become more complex, and the two growth processes constantly reinforce each other." (Arnheim 1974:170) When we see a child's drawing, we see the manifestation of "an invisible universal". (Arnheim 1974:461) But in order to be able to draw an invisible universal, we need to know the form. That is, beside *visual concepts* which are "based on the totality of observations from any number of angles"[5] (Arnheim 1974:107), we need to know something else. As Arnheim aptly states: "'The difference' … 'is not primarily between perception and representation, but between perception of effect and perception of form, the latter being needed for representation.'" (Arnheim 1974:170)

We perceive the effect on the basis of previous experiences, and we learn to perceive the form on the same grounds. Form and effect are bound together by physical and cultural embeddedness.[6] Thanks to perceptual experiences and bodily skills we perceive effects, but in order to represent something, there is a need for some additional knowledge, the knowledge of the form. This form is rooted in the same bodily experiences, but requires the recognition of the structure which yields the ground for the effect. "[I]mage-making of any kind requires the use of representational concepts. Representational concepts furnish the equivalent, in a particular medium, of the visual concepts one wishes to depict, and they find their external manifestation in the work of the pencil, the brush, the chisel.

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[3] Alva Noë, "The enactive approach to perceptual consciousness". Accessible at
http://www.interdisciplines.org/enaction/papers/1

[4] "Perceiving how things are is a mode of exploring how things appear. How they appear, is however, an aspect of how they are. To explore appearance is thus to explore the environment, the world. To discover how things are, from how they appear, is to discover an order or pattern in their appearances. The process of perceiving, of finding out how things are, is a process of meeting the world; it is an activity of skilful exploration". (Noë 2004: 164)

[5] "Intellectual knowledge sometimes helps form a visual concept, but only to the extent that it is translatable into visual attributes." (Arnheim 1974:107)

[6] Arnheim relates certain compositional rules to literate cultures. (Arnheim 1974:33-36) The influence of culture on the manner of depiction is clearly visible in the case of a tribesman who does not recognize his mate in a photo because he lacks an institution of detailed depiction.

The formation of representational concepts, more than anything else, distinguishes the artist from the nonartist." (Arnheim 1974: 169)

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to review the ambiguous position of representation. Representation as a result of an objectifying process conceals a primordial relation to the environment. However, general patterns provide the framework for elementary cognitive functions. These general patterns are based (according to conceptual metaphor theory) on kinaesthetic image schemas, i.e., on Gestalts accompanied by bodily experiences. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, "if the words 'enclose' and 'between' have a meaning for us, it is because they derive it from our experience as embodied subjects. In space itself independently of the presence of a psycho-physical subject, there is no direction, no inside and outside. A space is 'enclosed' between the sides of a cube as we are enclosed between the walls of our room." (Merleau-Ponty 2008:236) Representations as manifestations (audible or visible) facilitate cognition because in accordance with the rules and limits of the expressive medium, they provide a framework for a more sophisticated/differentiated categorization.

From a cognitive evolutionary point of view, the role of pictorial representation, specifically cave drawings, "was to provide a scaffolding device that enabled human perception gradually to become aware of itself. … the image offers a new mode of epistemic access to the world of visual experience." (Malafouris 2007:299) On the one hand, it made visible the fact of representation, and on the other hand it revealed the basic structure of the depicted living creature.

Pictorial representations, as Arnheim suggests, presuppose the knowledge of certain structures of the visual scene; and as a result of a new bodily activity, they provide a new kind of element of the visual scene. This new element requires the capability of recognizing an image of something, i.e., the recognition of a "pictured object as 'other than itself'." (Malafouris 2007:294)

Finally, let me recall the theory of objectification by Hungarian scholar István Hajnal. His considerations provide a framework in which representation emerges as a facilitating and hindering effect simultaneously. He thinks of objectifications (either institutional or material) as a support for, and at the same time a constraint of, further processing. That is, the objectification of an idea (either a technical invention or the verbal expression of an idea) make it independent of its roots; its further development is determined by the rules and limits of the expressive form. As he put it with regard to literacy (Schriftlichkeit): "Things that had earlier happened instinctively in human beings' inner and outer lives, started to take a conscious turn with the appearance of literacy. This sphere of life becomes *objectified and abstracted*; the human being projects this sphere in front of himself, and examines it *consciously and from the outside*. There arises the possibility for methodical purposefulness, for the conscious handling of concepts, and for combinational and complicated work." (Glatz 1993: 18)

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