

Unconscious Awakening: Exploring the Relationship Between Identity and Art Analysis

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In the most basic form, humans interact with the world through five senses. Sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound enable man to build a relationship with the world around him. It is through these same five senses that a fetus comes to experience existence within the world. If a being cannot experience any one of these senses then how is it able to make sense of the world around? Through these modes of interaction, man is capable of experiencing the world that he is a part of. He is able to see the space in which he occupies. He can smell the air that he breathes and taste the food that he eats. He can hear the breaths that he takes and feel the cool air that fills his lungs. Every sense constitutes as an integral element that makes up an art. Visual art is experienced through sight, while the culinary arts can satisfy senses of taste and smell. Through touch a guitarist can elicit beautifully sounding melodies to be heard by all.

As a human being, I have noticed that I best understand an experience when there is a significant emotional connection. This practice is created through the utilization of senses in which there is a response to stimuli, which is comprehended mentally, or rather consciously. In some capacity, every conscious experience I have is also experienced emotionally, greatly influencing my understanding. I would describe this as a head and heart connection, or perhaps a mental and emotional connection and I believe that through mental and emotional comprehension, man experiences spiritual growth. From this lens, these modes of existential interaction or rather five ‘senses’ are embodied in every art form and it is through the experiencing of art that the human spirit is cultivated.

I chose to explore this thinking in the form of a case study because I concluded that if human interaction with the world is most directly experienced through the five senses, then art, which embodies these five senses, is a vehicle that allows for humans to experience life once replaced from the unstructured world (life as we know it) - to the structured world, (a work of

art). I recognize art as one of the only direct experiences with life which can be structured, in the sense that it can be rehearsed, produced by man, controlled, uncontrolled etc. Art is a manifestation of an others lived experience in some form because it expounds upon human qualities and characteristics and presents them in a symbolic form. When a person looks at a work, he knows that it is created by another, living, breathing human. This human has had experiences just as he. Nonetheless, the viewer has to draw on his own experiences or unconscious to interpret the work which in turn promotes self-awareness as analysis on a work can be created only subjectively - reached through personal reflection or tapping into the unconscious. I decided to explore this vein of thinking in the form of a case study with the intentions of identifying a connection between ones world-view and his or her views about art and if art is the best tool for identifying unconscious themes about a person's lived experience and perception.

In an effort to find correlations between art analysis and identity I have underwent an explorative process in which nine participants responded to open-ended questions so I could gauge their approach to every day life and the analysis that goes into their thinking. From here I identified trends in the subjects responses and narrowed the participants to four, which then underwent an art intensive component of the study. Lastly, I debriefed with my subjects by asking a few questions about their experiences and interactions with art at the Palmer Museum. In this case study, I will discuss the authors and works that have informed my thinking, I will provide background regarding the data that I collected and the analysis that went into reflecting on the data, and I will elaborate on my findings and how they have influenced my thinking. Through experiencing and analyzing art, a person's unconscious is awoken, providing information critical to the process of forming and understanding ones identity.

In relation to this case study, the author who has influenced my thinking the most is Carl Jung. I am drawn to Jung's thinking insofar as he explores themes central to the concept of self, and studies ideas regarding the conscious and unconscious, identifying the significance of each to the formation of ones identity and promotion of self-awareness. This thinking is central to my case study as much of what I am trying to unearth is how a person's unconscious is awoken in the process of analyzing works of art, and its ability to shed light on individual themes of thinking which in turn play a fundamental role in identity formation. Jung's logic regarding the conscious and unconscious suggests that each is integral to the creative process while the unconscious is more of a symbolic form which when tapped into, can often stream rich and insightful information. Jung considers genius the ability for a person to use the unconscious to reach a rich vein of thought and then translate it effectively, whether in the form of scientific discovery or the arts (Darity, 2008). However, Jung notes that a persons unconscious and conscious thought is entirely subjective, because opinions are formed from personal experiences and other aspects such as family and friends, which have been formative in a person's life.

My influence in utilizing Carl Jung's thinking was brought about through Marjorie Cohee Manifold and her work "What Educators Can Learn from the Fan-based Artmaking of Adolescents and Young Adults." This work informed my thinking with respect to the idea that people participate in fan art because it is an opportunity for them to express and explore concepts about the self that are central to their identity as a whole. The engaging in fan art is likely more intrinsically motivating for its subjects than analyzing works of art as they "gain a sense of identity, experience the advantages or disadvantages of behaving in particular ways, and are persuaded that through enacting messages of the stories they might make positive changes in their lives" (Manifold, 2009, p. 259). Naturally, there are differences between displaying

elements of a persons identity through the creation of a character that embodies traits one see's or hopes to see in the self and how one might find truths about the self through the analysis of artwork, however they are very much of the same. Just as a creator of fan art might manifest unconscious thoughts about the self into the form of a character, so might a person analyzing a work of art in effort to find truth and meaning about a piece, tap into the unconscious and find truth and meaning about the self. This idea can be described as self-awareness and is better put in terms by Sally O'Reilly (2005) as she states ,“A self-reflexive work [...] must not only know that it is art, it must also know that it is self-reflexive and whether its self-knowledge is adequate to interrogate itself, and so on, in an infinite regression of self-awareness” (p. 8). In this vein, a self-aware person must know itself enough insofar as to have the ability to recognize growth is experienced through reflection and self-interrogation, constantly questioning the self in order to better understand the self, on and on, in an infinite regression of self-awareness. This is the vein of thinking I am referring to when discussing art and its ability for a person to tap into the unconscious to find truths. If a person spends enough time with a work incessantly analyzing it, they might find truths about the work and they also might find truths about the self.

Lastly, William A. Darity Jr. has been an important author throughout my study. Darity explores the need for creativity on an individual level pertaining to identity and self-awareness. He describes creativity as:

An extremely valuable natural resource. It plays a role in cultural evolution, innovation, and virtually all societal change. It also plays a significant role on an individual level, contributing to psychological health, learning, and adaptability, as well as to artistic and scientific endeavors. Creativity is not easy to define, in part because it plays such diverse roles. (Darity, 2008, p. 164)

Creativity is especially necessary in the search for truth and self-awareness as it is not necessarily problem solving, but problem finding, a theme critical in thorough analysis of art.

Creativity has the ability to take on many forms and is not just limited to the arts. Creative thinkers are more intrinsically motivated and open to new experiences, characteristics integral in a self-reflexivity and ones willingness to dig for answers, thus promoting self-awareness.

In this case study, research was conducted in order to identify a correlation between world-views and artistic analysis or vice versa. The purpose of this study was to locate similarities between how a person views and interprets the world around them with how they view and interpret a work of art, in order to identify trends or overlap in thought that might indicate levels of self-awareness and understanding of identity. This approach is influenced by Carl Jung and his ideas pertaining to the conscious and unconscious, in relationship to the unconscious being stimulated by visual arts and offering a glimpse into a person's world. Jung's views are described (Brookes, 1996) :

Jung is a kind of object-relations theorist, focused on internally derived objects. This amplifies the concept of projections, usually used in the sense of attribution to the outer world of the perception of the inner experience, to include the attribution to consciousness itself of archetypally derived inner world. (p.350)

This passage sheds light on the idea of how a person finds truths through introspection, turning inward to understand an experience and then manifesting it in the outer world, giving the internal thought physical or external characteristics. Visual art acts as the vehicle in manifesting the unconscious into the outer world to offer an understanding of what might be influencing a subject and their interpretations.

At the beginning of this case study, a questionnaire was sent out to nine subjects in an effort to acquire as much information about a person's views on self, life, and the world around. Some of the questions presented were "Why did you choose to attend Penn State? What is the meaning of life? What excites you the most? And what has been the best part about your day so far? These questions were asked with the intention of not being specific, but rather leaning on towards broad and existential, but allowing for the subjects to open up as much as they want.

Once responses to the questionnaire were collected, four subjects were chosen for the museum component of the study. The subjects were chosen based on variety in responses. In this component, four subjects were taken on individual trips to the Palmer Museum of Art where they were introduced to two pieces of 2 dimensional art and two pieces of 3 dimensional art. The works chosen had no particular significance besides ranging in diversity in respect to media and subject matter. The first object was a piece of Peruvian Pottery from A.D. 400, the second was a metal sculpture by Richard Stankiewicz from the 20th century, the third a representational painting by Richard Diebenkorn from the 20th century, and the last, an abstract painting by Esteban Vicente from the 20th century. Each subject was introduced to the piece and then asked the following: What do you see? How does it make you feel? What do you think the artists intentions were in creating this piece? Can you draw on any personal experiences in your interpretation of this work? After the museum component, subjects were asked about their experience, what they took away, what an artist is, and what their favorite work at the museum was.

The first subject, known as "Stephen," an Accounting major, had responses to the questionnaire that were full and methodical. He touched upon every element of each question asked, staying on topic most of the time. He has a positive and welcoming attitude about life,

which is apparent in his responses about his life's work and desire to travel, read, explore and experience life. A readily apparent theme in Stephen's responses are his almost obsessive views on organization and structure, especially noted in his response regarding what excites him most. He said the future is the most exciting but also very worrying, saying he is, "excited for the future, I just hope I know when it gets here." This response sheds light on perhaps his discomfort with unknown, something he tries to control through incessant organizing.

Interestingly, Stephen's responses to the questionnaire followed a similar thread with his responses to visual art. The first piece Stephen was introduced to was a piece of Peruvian pottery. He had an exceptionally difficult time analyzing this work, often lacing his comments with "I don't know." Stephen seemed almost uncomfortable or frustrated with this work.

Next he viewed Richard Stankiewicz's sculpture. His comments regarding the piece as being rustic and industrial were notable points and will be touched on later. Stephen paid a considerable amount of attention to the dates of the work, referring to the Industrial Revolution, and what he inferred the artist might have been experiencing at this time. After teetering through surface elements, Stephen began to open up about the content, which offered a greater glimpse into his unconscious. He described the work as chaotic, but then went to say "It seems like everything has a place. It doesn't seem like anything is sticking out, like 'why did he put that there?' Everything is in order but in a chaotic order. Everything is contained and it seems like there is a purpose." He posited that the work made him feel at peace. It seems to Stephen that containment and organization are suggestive of purpose.

Next, in viewing Richard Diebenkorn's painting, Stephen seemed to find his footing in the unconscious. Adjectives flowed from his mouth describing the piece as melancholic,

sorrowful, reflective, and sad. He began to enter a dialogue with this work as he started asking lots of questions and wondering about the intentions of the artist and the purpose of the work.

Lastly, Stephen viewed Esteban Vicente's piece, which provided critical insight into themes of his dissatisfaction with chaos and lack or order. He said there was so much going on but it did not make him feel much of anything. He provided very little analysis and seemed utterly disinterested and unmoved by the muddied, abstract painting.

Finally, I concluded I would introduce Stephen to one last painting, which I knew would satisfy his need for organization and purpose. Stephen was shown Edwin H. Blashfield's "Lute Player." He described this work as his favorite from the experience, stating "For me, I think the organization of the piece is what drew me to it. I need organization in my life, I strive for organization, and the painting had that. It was simple, yet left enough of a story behind to maintain its mystery."

The second subject, "Kevin," a Finance major, had very noticeable themes throughout the entire process of the case study. Similar to Stephen, Kevin has somewhat of a methodical approach to responding to the questionnaire. He is very thorough and avoids paddling, touching on all necessary points. In observing Kevin's responses, there is almost a peeling back of layers where each sentence facilitates the peeling back of the next sentence and so forth. This is a good example of self-awareness or self-reflexivity, building on each thought into the next. This can perhaps be best analogized as a basketball player who is not looking where to make the next pass, but is so in- tune with the self and its surroundings that he is thinking three passes ahead. Kevin had an analytical approach to the questionnaire and art works that were very apparent. Based off of the inferences and connections Kevin makes, one can tell that there is a significant amount of internal dialogue he experiences. He seems to acknowledge the surface material and

then translate it personally, better described by Brookes (1996) in the framework of Jung, “the psyche strives toward movement from the unconsciousness to the consciousness” (p.348). Kevin seems to look, analyze, gather thoughts, and then expand almost unconsciously until his thoughts manifest into the conscious.

Immediately, in showing Kevin the Peruvian piece, he started asking questions. He was curious as to the function, the purpose it played, why the figure had physical impairments. There was a question within each question, building and building. Not only did Kevin acknowledge the dates and culture in which the work inhabited, he tried to identify the purpose that a piece as such would play today and how the intention or meaning has evolved to the point where we might have difficulties in understanding the work as it is so far removed from its origin, today.

Moving to the metal sculpture, Kevin began expounding on the piece. Once more, Kevin analyzed, noted, and expounded. Kevin discussed the work from top to bottom, attempting to identify what its function once was and what it is now. He identified a character within the work, which he saw as the central element that everything was built around. Kevin described the scene as something of a struggle, where the large pipes serve as “the foundation of society, transitioning into the complexities (smaller beams, pipes, levers, and other metal pieces) and where the person is” (character Kevin identified in the work). He described the scene as the character trying to climb away from the wreckage of all the metal pieces that lie upon him. This awareness exhibited by Kevin is best described by Sally O'Reilly (2005):

Profound self-reflexivity is often encountered in the realm of language and logic, where paradox has a deeply satisfying aesthetic that might find its form in the neat pun or an insight into a corner of human absurdity – Catch-22. (p. 9)

Just as Kevin is experiencing art, his unconscious allows for him to expand on personal stories and self-reflect. This self-reflection manifests too as something aesthetic, in the form of savory description and analysis.

Looking at the two-dimensional works, Kevin seemed to experience some struggle. In the work of Richard Diebenkorn, sits a man and woman in close proximity. Again, as he had with all of the other works, Kevin analyzes and expands, but something about the people in the center of the painting seems to throw him off. He keeps asking “what are they doing?” Kevin perpetuates his confusion to the role the characters play in the painting; interesting when considering the work before him did not have an actually clear-cut character, however he visualized and manifested it. Perhaps the actual existence of people disallows Kevin to expand on his creative dialogue as he seems to consciously experience the characters, whereas he unconsciously manifested and described a character in Stankiewicz’s piece before. Ultimately Kevin said, “this one doesn’t really connect with me.” And we moved to the last work.

Vicente’s abstract painting, “Princeton” was a good ending to Kevin’s experience. Though 2 dimensional, the piece is an abstract painting, which would allow for Kevin to perhaps create his own story as he had with the metal sculpture. He very much enjoyed the last work, asking a lot of questions about the placement of the paint and the intention of the piece. He said this piece did not evoke any emotion, though it was aesthetically pleasing and quite interesting to look at. Kevin said that the abstract painting was interesting because it doesn’t take the shape of a known or understood symbol, therefore the artists direct intention can never entirely be understood.

The last subject, “Shannon,” a double major in Veterinary Sciences and Spanish, followed a different trend than the rest, though the consistency of her responses from the

questionnaire overlapped quite a bit with the museum component. Shannon's responses were short and simple with seemingly little in-depth analysis. Each response from the questionnaire component was a sentence or two and did not always go off of what was specifically asked, sometimes not even entirely fulfilling the question. With little information, the most accurate description of Shannon might be something such as, she loves animals (wants to be a veterinarian), she has a positive scope about life, and often references family and friends.

In introducing Shannon to the first work, she noted that it looked like a monkey, that there was maybe some type of a handle, and perhaps it was a monkey-man-warrior. There was not much analysis beyond this as she seemed to touch on the majority of visual context without reaching any depth.

The next piece, a metal sculpture by Stankiewicz was much of the same, however, here was where themes about her family started to appear. She noted how industrial and rustic the piece was and said it made her feel some type of connection being from Pittsburgh, historically a steel empire. She said the work made her think of the men in her family who had likely worked in the steel mills, but did this was about all the analysis that was given, aside from touching on visible information with the work.

The third piece was especially unique as Shannon seemed to enter more of a dialogue with this piece, observing and making inferences. She said she felt as though there was a major life-happening going on between the man and the woman in this image and really experienced an awakening of her unconscious. She visualized this as being the type of conversation that her great grandparents had before coming to the United States, as her great grandmother was leaving and her great grandfather would be staying behind. She reached this conclusion commenting on the sadness of the woman's face and the paper that was being held in hand. Lastly, in viewing

Vicente's painting, Shannon did not have much to say aside from commenting on the muddied, dull palette, which made her feel "bored."

Through studying the various subject's questionnaire responses and museum visits, there were strong examples of overlapping themes regarding ones world-view and their perception of art. The findings with Stephen were especially notable, alluding to how much he desires organization and is almost uncomfortable when experiencing things that are out of his control. Stephen seemed uncomfortable when viewing the piece of Peruvian pottery, as there was little information for him to work with, thus he struggled articulating his thoughts about the work. It seemed the more detail in the work, the more he became interested, however it was not necessarily aesthetically pleasing for him unless it had some sort of structure or organization, which he posited meant the work was more purposeful. When Stephen experiences works that meet his criteria for "purpose" it lights him up and enhances his awareness. Perhaps this is when he experiences a head and heart connection and is motivated to tap into his unconscious as a result of strong feelings of connection to the work. Though he was not noticeably moved by many of the works, when he came into contact with Stankiewicz piece, which was somewhat chaotic, though put together in a way that was purposeful to Stephen, he began to find dialogue thus tapping into his unconscious. As themes about the art he enjoyed became more apparent, he was introduced to a work that was not originally a part of the study. In viewing Edwin H. Blashfield's work, Stephen was awoken and excitedly began to analyze the work. Unfortunately, there was little time for him to look at the piece, but when spoken to after, he described it as his favorite, touching on the organization but the level of mysteriousness which kept him intrigued.

Kevin's experience with the artwork also had overlapping threads with his responses to the questionnaire. Kevin seems to be naturally curious, thirsting for understanding, or perhaps

learning in general. This is very apparent in his approach to life, and his approach to artistic analysis. This thinking can be seen in Kevin's response to the meaning of life, which at one point he says, "to live everyday like the opportunities are endless, because in reality they are." He seems to approach art with this thinking, continually finding more and more opportunity for expansion on the works. There was a lot to be seen about Kevin's awareness, especially noting that he does not have much of a background with art. He seems to approach everything in the same manner, searching for truth and understanding. Kevin's analysis regarding the 3 dimensional works was notable, when it came to his incessant questioning and then manifestation of unconscious ideas into the conscious. He seemed to struggle somewhat with 2 dimensional works, perhaps suggesting his difficulty in finding a connection with something that does not physically occupy space in the way 3 dimensional works do. Overall, it is apparent he enjoys new experiences, is very much an analytic in all facets in life, and contains a creative capacity to find problems and make solutions.

Shannon was the toughest to find information about as she did not provide much detail to work with. Her interaction with the pieces was similar to her interaction with the questions as they were short and seemingly uninterested. This is perhaps suggestive of her current self-awareness, as she seems to not reflect when experiencing something, thus struggles to find truth in what she is experiencing, apparent in her analysis. Nonetheless, there were apparent themes of surface interest, but not an awakening of unconsciousness or passion. Very notable was her tendency to draw on familial matters to articulate ideas about what she was experiencing, this was especially noticeable in her viewing of Diebenkorn's "Man and Woman, Seated," which she manifested an unconscious story about her great grandparents coming to America. Shannon's

constant referencing of her family very much plays into her identity and is best described by Mason and Vella (2013):

Social theory posits that formation of self occurs through identifications with ‘significant others’ who tend to be one’s parents and other individuals during one’s biographical experiences. Family is an especially important socializing agent because it teaches them skills, values and attitudes about themselves and other people. (p. 238)

It is apparent that family is a strong theme that plays into how Shannon views herself. In her questionnaire, she described the best part of her day as “having a conversation on the phone with my dad.” Perhaps it is through relationships with family and friends that Shannon experiences unconscious understanding as a result of mental and emotional excitement created by connection with others.

There were strong themes about identity and self-awareness that were seen through this case study. Just as Manifolds article describes the understanding of ones self through the creation of a character, so do people elicit themes about the self when engaging in a relationship with art. Themes about family, happiness, sadness, comfort and discomfort were readily seen in what the subjects come to notice in their world and how it affects their identity. Worthy of note is how environment impacts identity. This is perhaps seen through connection the subjects felt with the industrial aspects of Stankiewicz’s piece, perhaps alluding to the their backgrounds being from Pittsburgh, and the idea that industry and steel is synonymous with the city. Additionally, many other individual ideas about life became apparent through the subjects art analysis, suggestive of its application as a controlled element of life, or what it means to be alive.

Through this study, light is shed on ideas pertaining to how themes about identity can be identified through art analysis. It was interesting to find how themes about life can be understood

through the analysis of art, perhaps justifying the idea that art is a controlled form of life, in that it embodies all of the senses along with emotional and cognitive reflection, thus when a person interacts with art, they experience conscious and unconscious connection that results in reflection and the promotion of self-awareness. The utilization of art as a vehicle to manifest unconscious ideas pertaining to the self is effective, likely because it forces the viewer to internalize the visual in order to find truth. Just as one can craft a conscious idea of who they want to be, so can they come to know themselves through the awakening of the unconscious by interacting with art – perhaps then crafting a conscious idea of ones truest self.







***MISSING FROM IMAGES – ESTEBAN VICENTE “PRINCETON”

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