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Reflections on the Mediated Sign in Visual Culture- Visual Analysis, Methodology and Science, an Arena of Aesthetic Learning to reach Identity and Integrity.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is *to clarify how visual analysis of a handmade picture function in between at least two views*, the creator and the respondent. The starting point is to look upon the picture as a symbol system, no matter who made it and if the product is art or not art.

Pictures originate from art and media but also from our hands and minds in learning. The function of lines and colours, is the basis for externalised interpretation. My point is that the more externalised views and minds, the better the tutor gets to know the student, and the better the student gets to know her- or himself and the better the student and tutor meet in symmetry.

The critical view to the Habermas' concept of symmetry in pedagogical practice, is that there is always one that is supposed to know more (tutor) than the other (student).

Learning is relational and so defined in terms of a variation. This means that an aspect of the social within us is externalised and interpreted in a unique communicative form (of the object), different from that of others. All together the different artefacts about a specific phenomena can inside the student or between students open up for an awareness of other ways of experiencing the specific and lead to deep learning.

My point is that visual analysis and understanding, it's methodology and science, is an arena of not only aesthetic educational learning but gives birth to more of symmetrical relations, to creator personal identity and integrity.

Keywords: visual analysis, externalisation, visual ground, communication, individuation.

INTRODUCTION

Educational theory and Semiotics in general do not count on “the handmade picture” as a statement. That is a problem. That is why I model an outline of a basis of how visual statements can be looked upon in relation to an object of attention and related to a process of a more widened concept of “the text”, in a society of globalisation and individualisation.

The quality of an aesthetic practice lies in its competence to offer its member a setting where they can strengthen their ability to identity and to develop as humans by help of aesthetic work.

The teacher’s relation to their practice, the mentality that they develop conveys to the members. By help of deliberative competence the relationship focuses on coming to an understanding. Deliberative competence means knowledge about how to trace language code function based on aesthetic formal facts and normative as well as unique.

A relationship where the tutors can handle the aesthetic products of the members to communicate and make them believe in that the human “traces” in pictures, sculptures and handcrafts make him and her talent to create meaning in life, not just here and now.

The participation of the aesthetic practice will stimulate the members to develop aesthetic competence even in he future. Artistry has to do with professionalism, to master a material fully and the concept of art derives from knowing.

An aesthetic practice teach in several material that the members may perhaps not master, but will have an opportunity to try different material to chose the most suitable. By help of their artefacts and the social and aesthetic setting they will be in a situation to feel inner strength.

The members get professional of their self by developing their non - verbal language they get visible and by continuously discussing ideas, material and contexts they even may develop verbally and they come out of their silence.

Different material used in different techniques gain the wholeness of the members production and education is made to build on the ability of the student to meet other people in contact and discuss their products and relate to the gained world experience to make the unique person visible to body and soul. Communication will happen and will be seen in an aesthetic function where the choice of lines, colours, form and composition contributes to meaning. In so, the tutor takes the perspective of the student and with empathy tries to understand how the student think of his or hers pictorial language action, to be able to make the best out of tutoring.

Aesthetic Learning

Every human being is learning from what interests her or him. Enough amount of interest minimize resistance to learn. Intuition and interest guide attention to the object.

During the medieval you looked upon visual knowledge as handcraft. The first general theory of art was presented by a Dutch philosopher, Gottlib Baumgarten, at the end of the 18:th century. This theory of art he names *Aesthetica*. Just in time Kant presented his *Philosophy of The Art of Feeling*. The human orders experiences wisely with help of intuition. Reality is what the human experiences and expresses aesthetically and what the human reflects upon out of that. Intuition is about time and space. Kants deliberative philosophy of knowledge as the human experience of the world is close to the concept of “Lifeworld” in the theory of Habermas.

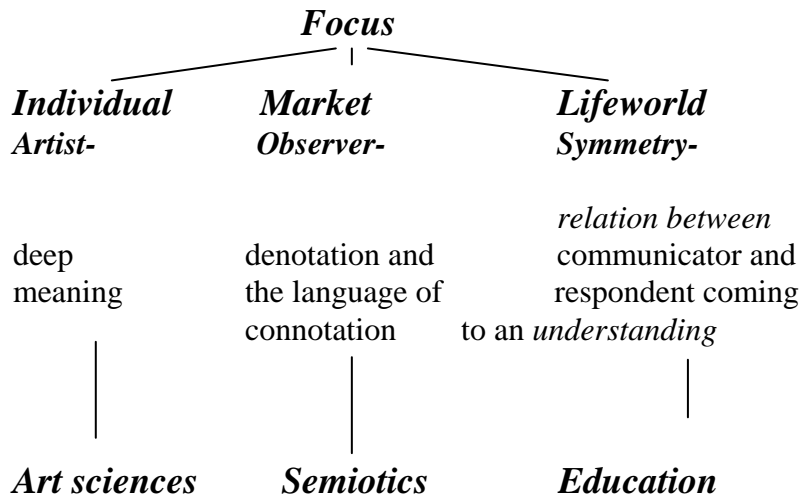
The science of Semiotics has a long tradition in Kant and the thought of knowledge as a result of the human experience and feeling of the world. Visual semiotics is a part of Semiotics. Aesthetical products are signs. They have a visible manifest expression and a latent deeper content, which by reflection could be understood at different levels of concentration and validation. The product is in this sense a dimensional text. Semiotic mediation means that meaning conveys by help of an artefact, a picture or another text or piece of art. The human associates the experienced on the ground of knowledge she or he has from the visual and pictorial impressions.

During the 20th century visual and the importance of the visual as symbol system has changed. Visual culture and a pictorial turn has to do with the post modern project and the individual to create its future. The importance of the visual has improved in this project, even at the level of the individual. The human socialisation includes work of identity and individuation.

Today is focus in USA and England on pragmatism and not on formalism. A discourse of Philosophy is needed in the Pedagogy of Aesthetics but seems to be hard to implement. It often ends up in formalism. The concept of aesthetics can be traced back to the Greek word *aesthesis*, which means sensation. Aesthetics combined with function means to decode the elements that have a function, related to the life world but also to the symbol system of the pictorial individual. Aesthetic work might mean to tutor the individual into the domain of visual explication, *coding and decoding*; to guard to interpret colour, lines, and *aesthetic function* in relation to individuation. In the light of this, I can see the educational discipline benefit from a scientific methodological discourse of language pragmatics. A discourse analysis in which art and aesthetics in the name of *communication* is an important aspect.

A communicative co-operation with the handmade picture start in a situation where the communicator and the respondent meet in order to reach an understanding. A communicative relationship takes into consideration the features of demands to find that understanding - the activity of discourse, the analysis of the handmade picture of the pupil, the dialogue about it as they try to come to an understanding. A communicative relationship implies the co-operating parts, not to deal with reaching goals of their own (Habermas 1990).

Dealing with the pictorial, different sciences focus on the relationship between the individual, the pictorial and the world differently. I make a demarcation of an educational discourse in relation to the Art sciences and the semiotics emphasising communication and the coming to an understanding, as much as possible alluding to identity and individuation of the pupil while internalising to culture (Ahlner Malmström 1998, Malmström 2002): Fig1



The sciences of art and semiotics deal with the picture artefact and a method of interpreting - of understanding its meaning. The art science focus on the understanding of the personality of the artist and the semiotics on the other hand focus on the understanding of the observer and the pragmatic function of the picture.

To make things clear

Gestures and pictures are signs and can be interpreted just like words. These are as central in the science of semiotics as words are. To communicate you have to have words for your thoughts. The role of semiotics is from the days of Kant and his philosophy of experience, and has during the twentieth century become an important science and is today heavy, even in aesthetics, the social sciences and education. Charles Sanders Peircean semiotics deals with reality itself and qualities as to how the human being relate and represent oneself to reality. To perceive something *as something* is what makes the human representation process semiotic. The *triad concept of sign-, object- and interpretant* means that something comes from outside the person and conveys to the mind:

“That for which it stands is called its *object*; that which it conveys, its *meaning*; and the idea to which it gives rise, its *interpretant*.” (CP.1.338 s 171)

In other words, by Peirce “a sign is something which stands for something to somebody in some respect or capacity”. Through signs the world is recognized and signs allow us to speak of, refer to and think about the world (van Heusden 2004).

The Human being organises experiences of reality in firstness, secondness and thirdness (CP 1.337 s 170). *Firstness* signifies an intuitive form of orientation to

something that interests you. It is the quality of the embryonic sensation, feelings and perceptions. In this activity you turn your mental attention to an ambiguous existing object. The existence is unclear. *Secondness* signifies a mental relation of “resistance” that mankind live through on earth. You learn how to handle different types. It can be a difficult “door” to open to a relation, to an even more difficult object to understand. *Thirdness* signifies thinking. Wherever there is ongoing thinking the form of existence is thirdness. It signifies the interpreted relation between the individual subject and the object of attention. Thirdness has to do with separation from firstness, specification and clarification by discrimination. This has to do with what Peirce talks about as *abductive thinking*, by which he means that the human is *oriented by intuition* and is described as one way of drawing a conclusion differently from deduction and induction. It is a sort of guessing and the different steps from what the individual *has a feeling for* towards *a relation to* and thirdly *insight in* are not logical. The thought passes *inside* our language and action. Intuition plays an important role in the learning process and has a functional orientation for the future (Ahlner Malmström 1998, Malmström 2001).

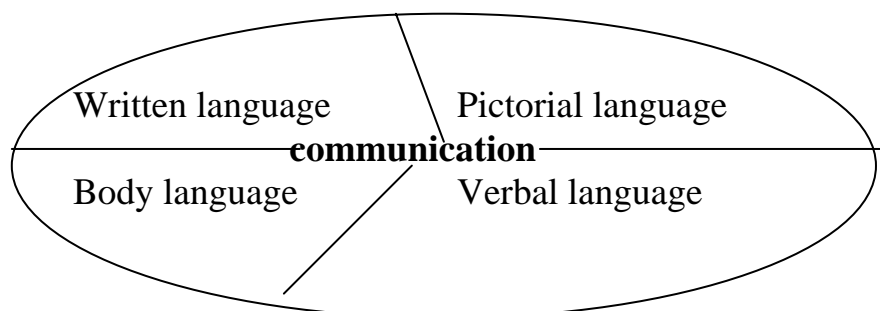
A wide and a narrow view upon language

It is time to take language in its narrow view off its pedestal and focus more on the importance of the wide view of language in the study of learning and produced meaning, by mediation, and a unique individual attaining integrity and identity.

I consider three views upon language in our society that can be distinguished - *segregated*, *extended* and *integrative* and these generate different discourses which makes the handmade picture invisible, visible but unimportant and visible and used (Ahlner Malmström 1998, Malmström 2001, 2002a, 2002b). I suggest a focus on visual literacy in language education.

The problem is how to describe the realm of non-linguistic thinking so we can more accurately discuss it. A wide view means that the word might stand for all forms of expressions and ways of communication. A narrow view means that language is the verbal, even though other ways of communication and forms of expression might be similar with features, more or less of the verbal one (Kjörup 2004).

Fig 2



Language by a wide view, is from my point, different dimensions of communication (Ahlner Malmström 1991, 1998, Malmström 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004). You can use all dimensions to communicate, but the focus of this paper is on the pictorial. To communicate you have to have words and in some way translate a picture.

How do we practice different dimensions of language? Written language is practised in verbal exercises that guide the attention on the language of form and the poetical, rather than on content. Pictorial language is practised in pictorial exercises that guide the attention partly on the content and goal of different pictures, partly on different ways of expressions and actions of language. Body language is practised in dancing and drama. Role - playing is spontaneous dramatisations. Planned dramatisations can be exercises of the mind, or of valuation, co - ordination and co - operation. When different role dramatisations convey a content – a message- then it is theatre. Talking language is practised when you keep a dialogue about the picture that has to be translated.

The verbal language has an impact on the written, pictorial and the body language. But literacy functions even the other way. This means that pictorial language has an impact on verbal language, in parity with increased ability of expression; supplies the verbal language with new words and expressions, with continual pressure on what could be reasonable to paint or sketch.

Visual culture

Pictures originate from art and media but also from our hands and minds in learning. Visual culture implies to deal with the pictorial dimension of language in a strategic way. Media does this, but how about the human in common? It can be easier to interpret verbal language than pictorial language, as the interpreting part is much harder, takes more time and demands more of hermeneutic skill (Bernstein 1991 s 252). Interpreting gives a challenge for the interpreter to understand the reason behind the positions of the communicating parts in order to be able to defend the validity of the communication (a. a. s 247). That means that the communicator and the respondent, mostly a fellow and/or a tutor/teacher have to understand the theme composition and the context in which the handmade picture is produced. If the human experience something obscure and hard to understand, she or he tend to try the interpretation that is the most reasonable.

Every picture and its context decide the conditions of the explication process, the picture analysis. Picture analysis can be looked upon as a scientific method that follows a hermeneutic line and in which the process itself determines the quality of the explication.

In some way the domains of art, media and learning goes hand in hand in school today. Media uses art and art uses media and everyday learning has to deal with both. In Sweden you talk in terms of a method of polarisation as a radical and fundamental aesthetics, when you take account of media, and not just educate art but in Visual Culture.

The function of lines, colours, is the basis in relation to externalised meaning. Ways of deliberative talking to handle aesthetic “utterances” might reach democratic goals and based on facts of the product and focus of the normative and the unique.

My point is that the more externalised views in minds, the better the tutor gets to know the student. And the better the student gets to know her- or himself and the

better the student and tutor meet in *symmetry*. Symmetrical relations are at best constructive, in wise tutoring (Ahlner Malmström 1991, 1998, Malmström 2001, 2002 a, 2002b, 2003, 2004).

Symmetry in pedagogical practice

There has been a debate on whether pedagogical relations are to be seen as symmetrical or asymmetrical. The critical view to the Habermas ' concept of symmetry in pedagogical practice, was due to the opinion that there is always one that is supposed to know more (tutor) than the other (student).

Learning is relational and in a cultural perspective defined in terms of variation in an aspect of the social ego. Meaning is externalised in a unique communicative form, differently from others. All together, the different handmade artefacts that attend specific phenomena can inside the student or between students open up for an awareness of other ways of experiencing the specific object and lead to deep learning (Marton Booth 1997). My point of view is that educational relationships can be looked upon as symmetrical.

Visual analysis and understanding, its methodology and science, is an arena of not only aesthetic educational learning but might give birth to more of symmetrical relations, and create personal identity and integrity.

The semiotic Field

Semiotics is the science of signification. It deals about how things become carrier of meaning. Thus semiotics involves determination criteria which may help to separate different sign types of signification. Semiotics is interested in finding general rules and regularities. There are different theoretical paradigms within the semiotic field. Van Heusden (2004) presents:

- Logic Semiotics (Peirce)
- Linguistic Semiotics (Saussure)
- Behavioural Semiotics (Morris)
- Evolutionary Semiotics (Uexküll, Cassirer)
- Phenomenological Semiotics (Husserl)

Signs may be viewed as *cognition*. This is about logic and epistemology. Signs make knowledge possible and is the background to thinking. Signs in cognition psychology focus on schemes. Or signs can, in a behavioristic sense, be looked upon as *stimuli* that are learned through deduction or induction. Signs as cultural *conventions* have been studied within Linguistic semiotics and language is the prototype sign system.

In adaptive behaviour and a biological and anthropological perspective signs plays an important role as *representations* (signs are about something). And in a phenomenological paradigm signs are the building blocks of consciousness. Which one offers a satisfactory perspective for research?

Out of the named paradigms I turn to the paradigms of Pierce and Husserl, but in a discourse which I name a Educational phenomenological semiotic¹ paradigm. Signs may be viewed as *learning*.

The Husserl concept of “Lifeworld” (1989), or “ the world taken for granted” I define by help of Habermas (1990) discourse and concept of the three human being worlds of orientation; the objective, the social and the one of inner life. I further point to Peirce’s view of human understanding of the regularity of the World, which he says necessarily not have to be conscious. The world and the meaning are not wonderfully matched (Menand 2002).

Habermas and the post modern project

Habermas combines two paradigms to reconstruct a critical theory of science. The basis is language in his theory of communicative acting and *communicative rationality*. The concept of rationality stands for the changing of attitudes in the social system, to the benefit of the individual “Lifeworld”. His theory is modelling how the human develops in relation to the social system. With an aesthetic eye, to consider the individual in relation to the verbal and media. That is my point. The goal is that the human will be as independent as possible in relation to the social system (Habermas) and to the visual culture (my point).

Habermas is working on the post modern project to create basis for communication to symmetry. To get people motivated to reach mutual understanding and including the background to the problem in focus, to communicate with sincerity and truthfulness. This means that human activity follows moral assessment and authenticity in communicating with the family or near and dear friends. This is the basis in a theory that builds on *communicative sense* and mutual understanding. This theory of hermeneutics and phenomenology, he integrates and combines with the positivistic theory, which builds on what Habermas calls *instrumental sense*. An instrumental sense, which is about to reach ones goal as effective as possible, is a way of communicating, when the human act in situations of the “System”.

The idea of signs as knowledge is as old as Western philosophy. You can come to an authentic understanding about an object only if you learn about its history. I hint to the history of the pedagogy of picture and handcraft with roots in the philosophy of Kant and Pestalozzi and copying as a strategy of learning about the world of facts rather than the world of cognition and meaning. The acts of human beings are not based on one world but our Lifeworld is constituted by three different worlds, even if these three worlds constantly are brought together in everyday life (Habermas 1990, Månsson 1995). Communicating to symmetry is Habermas idea, artefact his medium and communicative rationality in language use, his strategy.

His theory of language and communicative action deals with reflection of inter subjectivity and of language use in practice. The learning process is in focus and he points out the importance of the moral. Social institutions and social integration is to be combined and make conscious that learning happens differently in the “Lifeworld” and in the “System”. He wants to guide and change attitudes to the benefit of

¹ Introduced in my thesis , Ahlner Malmström 1998

individual integration to liberty. Focus on a communicative function will develop cultural knowledge.

Communication is defined as utterances that are understandable, truthfully, authentic and moral, and the discourse is a clarifying argumentation and a strive for consensus. As I can see, by exploring the picture as an arena of Aesthetic Pedagogy and aesthetic learning and function the visual culture is renewed.

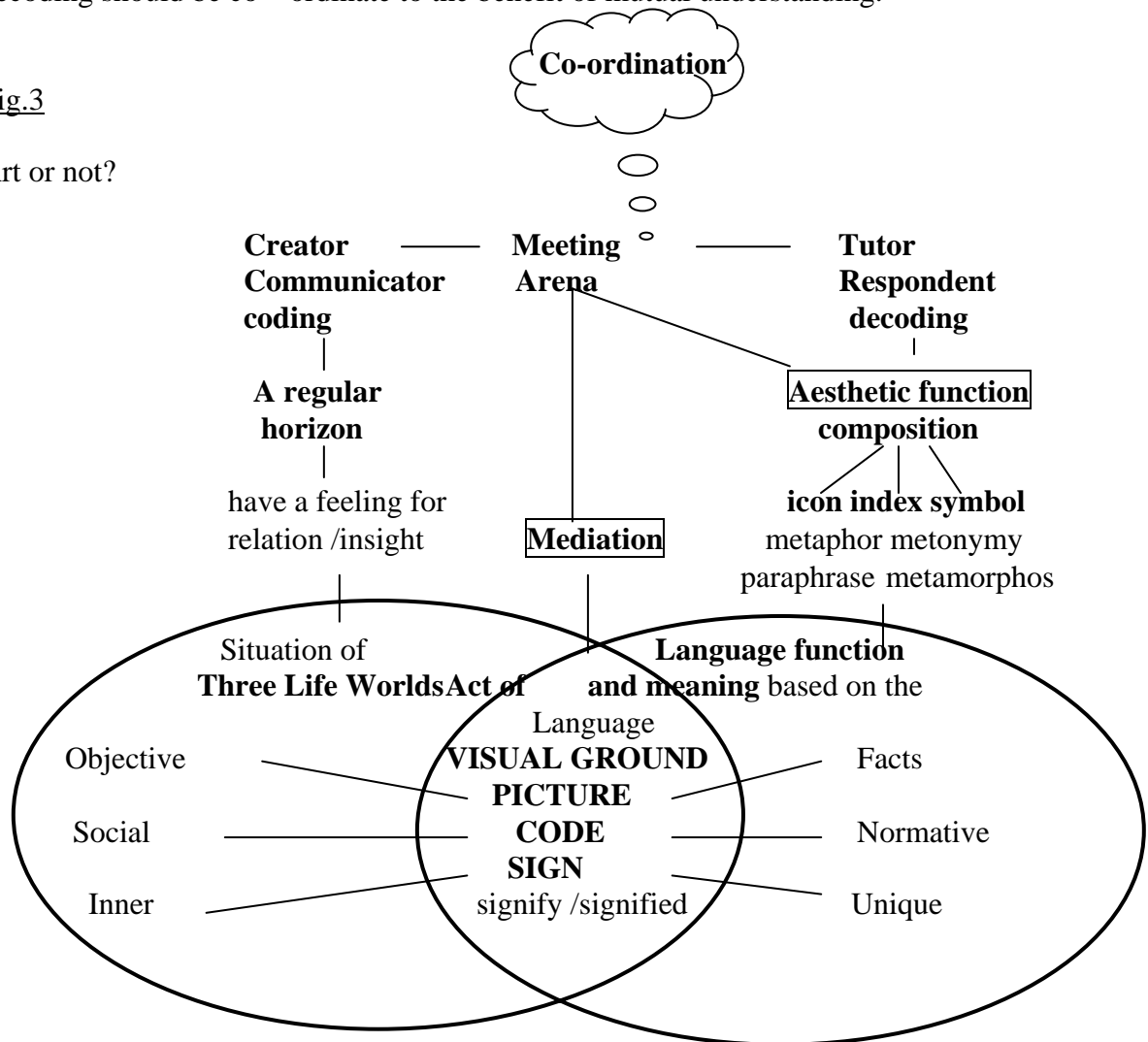
Towards a Model of co-ordination the mediated sign

Semiotic *mediation* means that a message is mediated by language and by help of a tool, an artefact, as a picture or a verbal text. Semiotic comes from greek "semaion" = sign, and all semiotic theories are " basically theories about the spontaneous categorisations taking place in the Lifeworld" (Sonesson 1989 p14) and the picture is a mediating sign signifying the signification (Sonesson 1997). That is what makes a *code*.

Visual ground in Peircean semiotics is the idea of the picture elements. Coding and decoding should be co – ordinate to the benefit of mutual understanding.

Fig.3

Art or not?



What is the mediated Lifeworld, based on facts, with reference to the normative and the unique? (fig 3) What code is dominant in the picture and allows it to function in a certain context of use? What is the aesthetic function? The dialogue ends in symmetry

and an individual transforms into culture. Based on *artefact*, material and the picture expression, and decoding relation to others, *otherness*, makes the *presence* of artistry and an unique individual might reach identity and integrity.

The medium is part of the message. An individual can feel authenticity in relation to other people by help of his or her artefact, its aesthetic quality. The Lifeworld of the creator can in a dialogue be translated in some way and give birth to a application of meaning and language function.

Thinking and intuition deals with the signify on one hand and with the expression on the other. Thinking deals with the signified Lifeworld, and the more knowledge about in what way metaphorical expression signify, is to deal with language use and meaning. What in the different parts of the picture, the lines, colours and contrasts makes it understandable in different ways, in a specific situation?

Jacobsson (1974 p 120) uses the concept *dominant* to signify the element that determinate the salient feature of an individual text and brings the composition to a tool that makes the communicators transformation to culture.

That means that the signification of the signified connects to the Lifeworld.

From this you may recognise that a picture articulates the *iconic, indexical and symbolic contexts of validation*, which means that, when reflecting on these contexts, you should change attention between *what* is seen, what it looks like, *how*, and which intention, signification and *meaning* that can be interpreted.

Iconic level is when the picture is interpreted by being validated according to the likeness with its model. *Indexical level* is when the picture points out a thing, but this thing is not validated by likeness but in some way related to the signification. A dog has big teeth which indicate and represent dangerousness. There are a wider interpretation of the index - a connection to social relation (Greimas 1987). *Symbolic level* is when a picture points out a sign that is conventionally validated by a arbitrary connection. A heart for example, that points out love (Aronsson 1997).

Sjölin (1993) talks about one special *level of interpretation* as the verbal one, when a text or the title of the picture is written in the picture.

A picture is a signifying personal text and an aesthetic validation of the composition as a whole implies that the tutor initiates a dialogue and emphasises the good things - points out the elements, either a manifest order and balance between the elements of the phenomenon or something spontaneously fascinating in colour or form (Sörbom 1999).

It is my point to emphasise the importance of that the symbolic level of interpretation even validates an interpretation of *intentionality*. And that this level also should end in an *aesthetic validation*. Metaphorical language has to do with the thinking and the process inside, of making the world understandable. Language use makes it possible to reduce the loose contact between conscious and unconscious acting and the intention with language use, as a tool, is not to find the truth but learning about what

is salient by paying attention to what you are interested but unskilled in (Peirce 1990). This is to be interested in narratives, that has to do with the expression of opinion in abductive thinking (Danielsson 1998). Narratives have a function of action in progress.

The explication process and Visual Analysis as a scientific Method- The Extended Sign

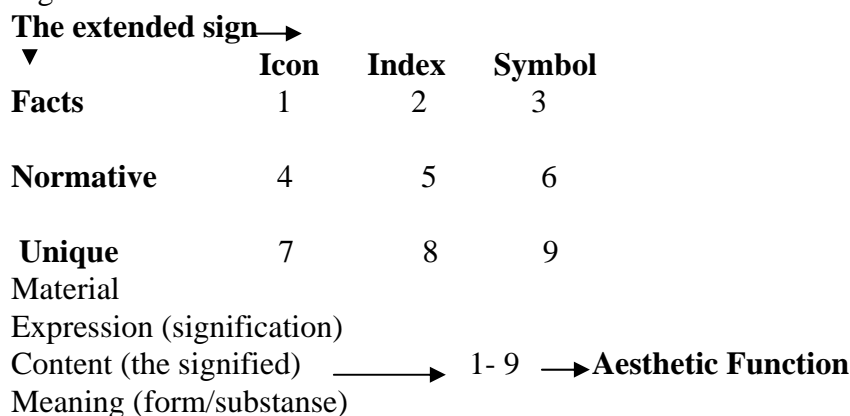
An important concept is the *triad concept of sign-, object- and interpretant* which means that something comes from outside the person and conveys to the mind, as Peirce says. His point is that the creator is embodying this triad concept. And that is why I have come to a solution to illuminate this, by extending the triad concept to a *matrix*, where the concept of interpretant connects the individual to the three worlds of Habermas. This I stress will solve the problem that Peirce had with the concept of symbol and which he touches in Collected Paper, volume 2²:

“The word Symbol has so many meanings that it would be an injury to the language to add a new one. I do not think that the signification I attach to it, that of a conventional sign, or one depending upon habit (aquired or inborn), is so much a new meaning as a return to original meaning” (C P 2.297 s 167)

My point is to illuminate that the sign is conventional **and** individual. In my point of view the symbol is individual when you speak of the human process to a cultural adjustment. The object of attention is embodying the creator and comes to meaning, by help of abductive thinking oriented by intuition.

The *extended sign* (Fig 4) I will stress to be the ground of the theoretical concept of aesthetic function. This concept I wish to highlight. Learning is relational and can be oriented by shifts in attention between nine parts of the extended sign (Fig 4). Different parts are in focus during the process of explication, depending on the situation or the purpose of a study.

Fig 4:



The explication process is based on focus of *the extended sign* (fig 4): One type of a code has to do with *texture* and the surface of the picture, others are *figurative*. Explication of conveyed meaning is based on different focus of the relation between form and substance. That means to confirm and to motivate, what features that define the meaning and the aesthetic function.

² I discuss this in my thesis, Ahlner Malmström (1998)

Icon = likeness, Index = closeness and “marker”, Symbol= conventional sign, Metaphor = to use a tree as a metaphor of the science of Pedagogy, Metonymy = to create association to “likeness” and “closeness”, Paraphras = to playfully “imitate” another picture, Metamorphos = When you use change or transformation as metaphor.

There are some implications that stand for the relationship between the inside of the sign or picture and its outside (Sonesson 1989). This can illustrate the role of the picture in the collaborations between individuals:

That expression and content stick together by a mutual implication, a motive. The relation is motivated. This means that pictures deal with something in the world of interest, i.e. the self, norms of the future school or the experiencing of material.

The signified object lies outside a picture, i.e. the picture of the school is not the school. It is thinking about the school.

The relation between signify/ signified is arbitrary and is able to thematise.

The whole of the picture (sign =signify/signified) is arbitrary in relation to the reality (the object), which means that the elements in a piece of work are chosen out of many possible.

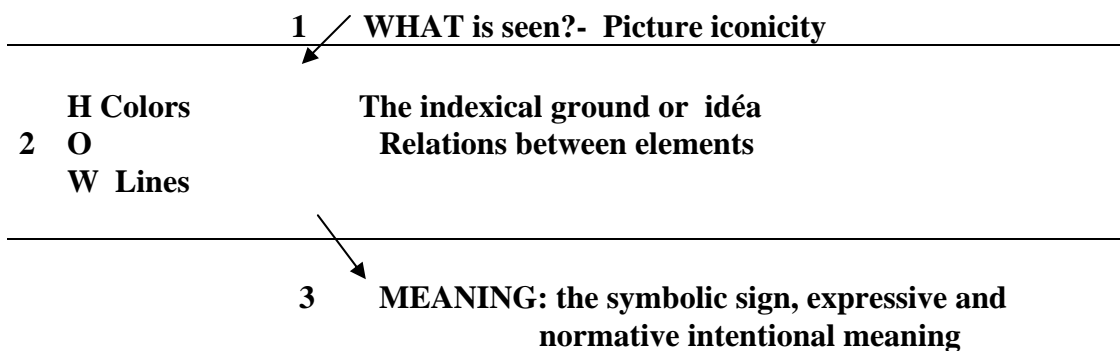
There are features in the pictorial plane that are necessary to make the signified (form/substance).

There are principals of validation between some elements of the expression or the signification and the conveyor of the signified.

In my way of view the meaning that is interpreted is valid out of specified principles based on facts and material, related to otherness and the normative and the uniqueness and individuation. An intuitive attention to the object is embodying the creator and comes to meaning, by help of abductive thinking.

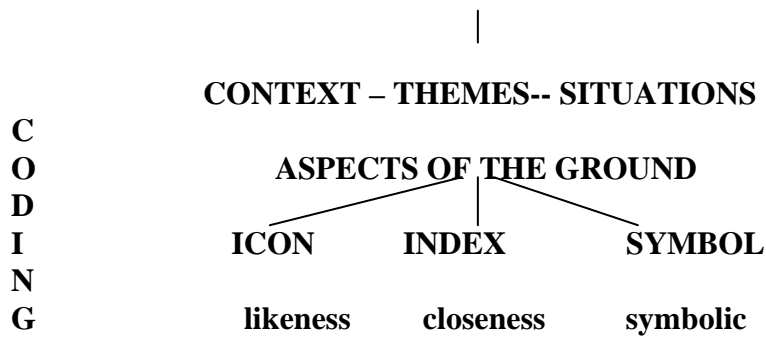
In my thesis I came to a conclusion, in the light of my results, that a model of a Functional Pictorial Analysis, could be an attempt to illuminate the explication process and visual analysis was my scientific method (Fig 5).

Fig 5 **A Model of Functional Pictorial Analysis**



The world is in a way organised. Still there is variation in the human attention to an object of interest (fig 6).

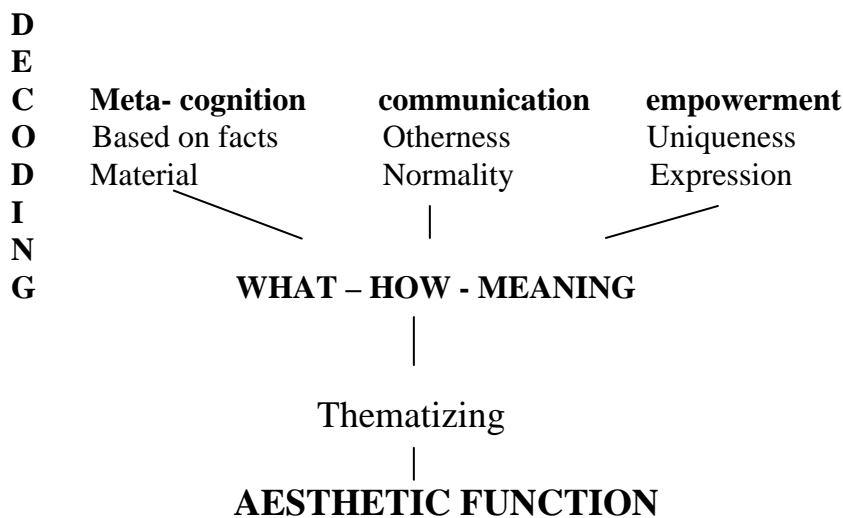
Fig 6 **ATTENTION TO AN OBJECT OF INTEREST**



The visual ground in Peircean semiotics is the sign and idea, to be reflected upon, and the first thematizing is based on content and the preliminary message(Fig 6)

To reflect upon the aesthetic function is to consider pictorial expression of the visual ground and its philosophy in practice, in experimentation and individuation, partly on feelings of composition, colours and lines and partly on the individual and its relation to other people and media.

Fig 7.



Due to the purpose of a situation you deliberately copy with meta – cognition, communication and empowerment.

Due to the purpose of a study you focus differently on material use, the social and conventional or on uniqueness and the individual individuation.

I will end up this part of my article by stressing that there are two theories that are important for my discourse of aesthetic learning and individuation and were the concept of aesthetic function is significant. Carl Gustav Jung based his ideas about the *individuation* of man on his opinion of a line between a conscious *Me* and an unconscious *Self* (Stevens 1992).

Man, in creating her or his identity, strives to understand her or his self, the not yet conscious. Forming the identity should be understood as a process of differentiation of the personality (Jung 1993). This implies adaptation to collective norms which is necessary to live in a culture (a. a. s. 156 f f). But the motive behind the progress of the personality of an individual is the motive to understand her or his self beyond the conscious Me. The self includes both the conscious and the unconscious part of the mentality (Jung 1994). Mankind search for harmony and adaptation - an aspiration for synthesis between the conscious and unconscious, where the conscious and unconscious inside a person learn to know each other (Stähle 1996). An aspiration for wholeness and meaning press the process of individuation.

Lev Vygotsky has been criticised for his scientific work and the word to be a too small unit. He says nothing about the elementary mental functions that are transformed (Wertsch 1985). Still his opinion is that language is basically social and he looks upon the handmade picture of the child to be origin of written language.

Vygotsky emphasises in his thesis *The Psychology of Art*:

”Art is the social within us, and even if its action is performed by a single individual, it does not mean that its essence is individual”(Vygotsky 1924/1971 s.249).

Social interactions have turned to a higher internalised psychological knowledge and to an externalised form, mediated by a picture. In the process of transition from ”other- regulation” to ”self-regulation” there are marks of inter subjectivity in the represented picture, as aspects of thought. Discourses inside the handmade picture show cultural signification to the out side.

A study with focus on the normative and the conventional

Future school in the pictures of the six year old children was an object of attention in my thesis from 1998.

The starting point for my thesis was at the time the fact that the child is exposed to many pictures in the context of social life in our culture. Pictures are more and more dominating our every day life through television, video and advertisement. This is not easy to handle for the child. If the child ”fails” in making a picture there is no *remedial instruction* and *support* compared to if the child fails in doing verbal language. Like linguistic awareness facilitates starting to read I am sure that pictorial awareness makes it easier to learn more about different picture functions. In 1988 I listened to Elliot Eisner saying that ”The thought of art as a tool and conveyor of knowledge is an idea not yet in time.”

This thought very much underline the purpose of my thesis. The same year I went to Reggio Emilia in Italy and I met a very wise man, Loris Malaguzzi, and his colleagues, and their inspiring aesthetic pedagogy very much strengthened my own ideas about practical aesthetic work, by making children aware of the connection between their pictorial language in pictures and the world around. My idea is that by strengthening the child’s possibility to interpret information in a critical way, the teacher first has to assist the child to accomodate to its own way of pictorial expressing. This can be done in many ways and acts and the children in this study had to answer a question by making a picture. The picture is part of a language game and my interest was to analyse and interpret its communicative qualities and how the child relates and represents to reality. I approached my area of research from a very broad

field embracing the individual child and its orientation to pictorial signs in society. The perspective in that issue is based on how we conceptualise non verbal pictorial signs and thought all seen in a social context. This in order to widening a knowledge of and an interest in pictorial analysis in pedagogic practice.

Man has created a society that has a *segregated* view upon language function as a system. In line with this dimension of society children learn to defend themselves from commercial pictures and use verbal language by help of formal rules. Mass communication has influence and power. Still there is an *extended* view upon children's drawings as language. But how do we form an *integrative* view upon language function incorporating pictures? Aesthetic work does not have the same status in our curriculum compared to verbal language and therefore not in the lifeworld of the child either.

When you ask children something they start to think about something. The question asked to the child was: Next autumn you are going to start school. What do you think of when you hear this? Tell me by drawing a picture!

By making future school function as a frame of reference I was inclined to get the intentions made by the children of that matter.

I asked the teachers to write down the comments made by the children while making the picture. I also interviewed 25 children according to their view upon making pictures and about their ability to think in a meta perspective upon a picture like *how* it is done, could give associations to *what* it means. I used one picture made by a child and an other advertising a special kind of goods.

In order to visualise children's communication made by a picture and verbal comments I used different models of analysis.

About *what* in school did the children make a drawing, and *how* did they make it?

They drew it out of *four themes*:

Associations to material things (1)

Associations to out side play or going to and home from school (2)

Associations to work inside school (3)

Associations to persons and situations (4)

- Children seem to have taken good care not to misunderstand the question. They were very much aiming to come to an understanding by asking the teacher if they were wondering about the instruction or the object.
- Children often seem to talk while making the picture, but many draw silently.
- Children that use a collective monolog talk mostly about the process of picture making or the materials.
- Children are oriented towards metacognition. They describe different methods children can use for learning pictorial language; as train (a), copy from nature (b), imitate another person (c) and think in order to find out something new (d). To understand a picture (interpret) they use different strategies; as look and read (1), look and think (2), look and ask (3).
- Children could use polarisation in pictures to interpret meaning and in making pictures to make the meaning distinct.
- Children draw different themes.

- Children use different manners that vary between concrete graphic description to a suggestion of a central perspective. Not many children use the manner that is a suggestion of a central perspective (15 out of 45).
- Children construct a composition that vary between symmetry and asymmetry. 28 pictures out of 45 were symmetrical. An asymmetrical or a symmetrical composition could be combined to both manners.
- Children differentiate according to school as a frame of reference with varying extent founded on facts, normatively or expressively and use icons, indexes and symbols. The more “school like” picture the more differentiated by means of elements and their relations. Even a simple construction is signifying school but the main point could be interpreted in an expressive meaning. On the other hand a more realistic construction does not need to signify school but something else that is more dramatic to the child than to start school. Mostly do the pictures in some way signify school normatively.
- An example of more or less differentiation with reference to school could be illustrated by comparing two pictures. In one picture is the iconic element signifying a desk alone and in another there are several desks put in a row. The latter denoted schoollike picture could be interpreted as more differentiated and indexical because it says something according to settled conditions.
- If a picture is indistinct according to the social normative world it could still be important to the individuation of the child.
- children picture a relation between a child and a teacher by help of position between the element of the teacher and the element of the child. You could talk about child centred, teacher centred or democratic centred relations. The same colours on the clothes of the teacher and the child could strengthen a democratic interpretation but weaken a teacher centred interpretation.



Elements signifying pupils and teacher could connote a teacher-focused pedagogy, picture or a more democratic pedagogy and meeting between tutor and pupil.

- Children describe their use of colours and lines in terms of normative meaning in a pre theoretical way. Yellow is a happy colour. Blue-grey signify that it is getting dark, a red face signify that a person is angry or ill and so on. A dot is an eye or an ear. Horizontal lines could in this context signify the pages in a closed book, and vertical lines could signify that someone turn over the pages of a book. It could signify hair that stands up (because the person is happy or angry). Children know at this age in general, that an element far away should be pictured out small in size.

- Children often use play signs as indexes for written language. They use eight different functional methods. One child could use several, conventional writings which means that the child writes one proposition with subject and predicate, its name, nonsense etc. In using the same method twice or more the child indicates a learning method interpreted as mediation.
- Children often use play signs as indexes for mathematical language. They use three methods. Conventional system of figures, single figures or figures that have in some way a guiding function, as number on different classrooms.
- Children use the element of a clock. It often does not look like a modern one and I interpret the clock as an index for that we attend to time in our culture and that for the child starting school implies more of watching time.

A study with focus on uniqueness

Another focus has been on understanding artefacts made by students of an art school named Unikum. The students, at the time eight in number, are retarded as to verbal language. The members of this school are supposed to develop an ability of non-verbal language to gain individuation. The educational setting and praxis in this school looks upon aesthetic utterances just as good as verbal ones. Learning non-verbal aesthetics, non-verbal language, is to learn to communicate symbolically. It is an intention that symmetry is put into practice by help of participation and shared experience in this setting (Malmström, 2005 publishing).

Based on facts a student named Igor seems to me, to have a very personal way of expressing himself. His pieces of life-drawings and sketches are filled forms rather than outline drawings. In the beginning he did not want to use colours at all and he, in a way, “painted” with the pencil (picture 1).



1- Life-drawing and sketch to a sea- mark

He gradually started to use colour with caution. He marks one element in blue. Blue is to be his colour and will accompany his work during his education. When trained in chromatics he even uses other colours, warmth in yellow and a more “active” red. When he made his first self- portrait, he painted a mask over his face. He named the mask to be the one you use in swimming (picture 2).



2- Self- portrait with mask

He often paints that “band” over the faces, like in the picture of the captain (picture 3). It is like a mask (picture 4).

That way of hiding and an overlapping method he even uses in his piece of embroidery (picture 5). He sewed this cross from out of his painted outline. The cross was not too difficult to sew. But suddenly he sews a shutter, which you can open to see Jesus on the cross. He sewed an accordion to the left and a skateboard to the right. These are two of his favourite elements.



3-A captain



4 -Outline of a mask and above his name with letters covering.



5- Jesus on the cross, embroidery 6- cowboy

A cowboy made of a body in wrapped paper and sewn textiles (picture 6). His sculpture has an expression very much alike his sketches (picture 1); with for example the arms withdrawn. At first the arms of the sculpture were standing straight out, but Igor put them together and wrapped with blue material and he sewed with blue cotton-shreds.

The sketch outline of the theme “Our town in six metres” is painted over and over and there are a lot of hidden elements that you can not see but which still is signifying (picture 7). The picture represents Jesus by horse, his mothers father, he himself in a students cap. Grand father eats clear soup. You also see the house of a good friend, a bed, a sideboard and a stove. He describes and points at the different elements that you can, from Igor’s description get an inkling of, underneath the layers of colours in white and blue veils.



7- Sketch – painting and outline on the theme "Our town in 6 metres".



8- Igor made the oldest house in town and by a tree, all sawn in timber and painted blue.

The oldest house in the town of Simrishamn, was in the beginning of the twentieth century a manufacturer of sweets. Hidden underneath the blue colour is the pink of (the body of the house) from facts in reality (picture 8).

The dove from his painting with reference to the one made by the artist Hilding Lindqvist, is hidden under the red colour (pictures 9 and H L).



9-

A painting inspired of the colour and form, from a painting made by Hilding Lindqvist, "The song of the heart".

Examples of signifying elements in these shown pictures and in other are the students cap, the accordion, the skateboard, the cross, the telephone and the uniform.

At the end of his three years at the school of Unikum I met Igor and his assistant for conversation and communication. Igor talks a lot and his charisma, body and mind, communicate more of integrity and identity than I have ever seen earlier.

He is to me, in spite of the facts, very difficult to understand verbally. He very often mixes languages from Swedish to Russian, his mother tongue, and which I do not understand. But by help of his Russian assistant we can understand that the elements are signifying. They are several but unremarkably they are often the same and repeated in new pictures as for example the students cap. He points at his pictures and tells me like a poem.

From a cultural and normative understanding his pictures are intense. The metaphorical signification seems to communicate something very exiting that makes me as a respondent wishful to understand. Blue is for example made to mark and in some way signify the signified. The blue mask makes me to associations like that Igor signifies that he understand the World in his way. He points out this. It's his way to show the integrity of himself. This is, in a way, cultural learning and transformation.

The students cap signifies the social assessment of education. Different kinds of headdresses have a greater symbolic value than other garments (Biederman 1997/1989) like a symbol of position or of group membership.

The cross is a religious symbol.

The aesthetic function of metonymy and closeness in his picture, I associate to be unique in expression and thus a desirable and socially ability worth aiming at, to any artist. The vase, the dove, the lemons and the flowers are there because I know the artist and he told me. He has a tremendous sense of colour when he paints warm colours as complement to blue (picture 6).

On the level of the unique I interpret this person having a strong identity and that he understands the world in his way which he wants to communicate.

He wants to communicate his view of the world by help of signifying elements, (metaphor and metonymy). He uses symbols like the mask to mark his personal way of experiencing and the cross to show his interest in the religious and he likes music from the accordion and so on. Symbols are related to Igor but they are also conventional.

The metonymy and his ability to see and associate to "likeness and closeness" in a unique way is a further possibility to show his view of life. The vase the lemons and the flowers he has with fantasy and creativity given his own form and colour. The dove you can not see, but is painted underneath the colour of red.

Igor's sense of colour he depends by help of chromatics on the schedule. Arranged conversations on the theory of colour, perspective and form, combined with free application makes him to acquire new knowledge of the world. He acquires new insights from how the world is regular, which in turn makes him having new feelings for how the world is regular.

It is interesting, that he, from my conversation with him, ends up with that he had been trained in *patience* and that he would like to learn about how to be *purposeful*.

Surely there is, in this context of Unikum, a special picture that is important in communicating his world to other people: The first mask he made blue on a black and white photo from his own face (Picture 2). By help of the pedagogues, the glass of the mask has been polished and that makes him seeing new colours, lines and forms. He made his own portrait for example, once, in skin colour and with differentiated blue eyes, nose and mouth with warm colours. The pedagogues are seriously concerned of to stimulate the students ability to handle fantasy and to support them to creativity but at the same time support their ability "to see" and get them opportunities to study figure- drawing, making sketches in colour and lines of the adopted apple tree and copy special pieces of arts like for example the one of Hilding Lindqvist, "The song of the heart".

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