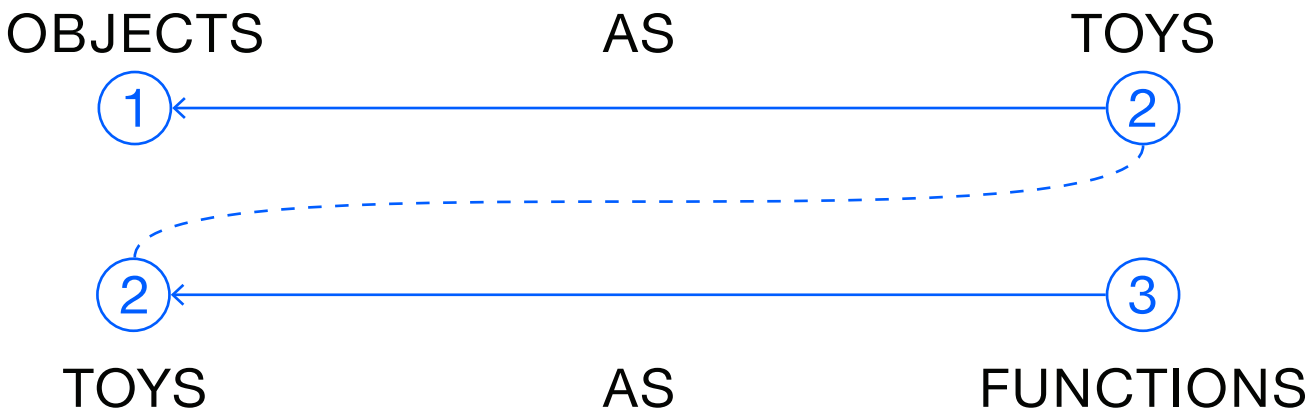
Portuguese Catholic University
School of Arts
— Contemporary Artistic Fabrication Week
Diogo Tudela / July 16th 2021



WORKSHOP ON COMPUTATION, MODELS AND AESTHETICS

A FRAGMENTED READER

#1

#2

OBJECTS AS TOYS / TOYS AS FUNCTIONS
A FRAGMENTED READER

[A] To assume the discernable conditions between what is art and how we experience it epitomizes the desideratum to assert the separability between the ontological and epistemological underpinning of objects. To speak of a toy aesthetics implies a kind of a cognitivist model of art and artworks that engages philosophical vantage points probing the ontological and epistemological concomitants to the phenomena of art in ways that are entangled together.

Adam Berg (2018)
On Toy Aesthetics: Wittgenstein's Pinball Machine
www.toyphilosophy.com

Artworks are not simply in the 'world' as objects or events but also constitute 'worlds' on their own both as real and immanent constructs and as counterfactuals. The logic of art as aesthetic objects or events is far more recent than we tend to assume if indeed the very symptom of its ontological-epistemological entanglement is to be construed not as arbitrary and tangential to its various experiential manifolds, but rather as a sort of evidence that attests to a series of mutations that occurred within and after the enlightenment.

There can be three kinds of aesthetic models of art making that follow this shift and which I wish to briefly sketch with the help of Adorno and Goodman and later move to Wittgenstein in the form of a proposed pinball machine inspired and configured by his Logical Investigations.

The three aesthetic models are:

01 The Ineffable Model: based on the Romantic takes of Ursprache and inexpressible significances in normative languages or codes.

02 The Instrumentalist Model: based on various types of art making which are conceived and assumed as an instrument for either achieving or expressing 'ideas' and 'changes'.

03 The toy model: following Goodman's world making, such an aesthetic model has a primacy over specific aesthetic objects (e.g. paintings, books, music or films, etc.) in that it functions neither as a representational or anti-representational manifold, nor as a simulation or de-simulation of the 'real' (segments of reality), but rather, as constructing or generating 'Worlds' as emergent topoi or provinces which (like computational models) intervene with the environment on multiple levels.

[B] #1 Upon reflecting on the meaning of simulation, it struck me that it is possible to distinguish between two, if perhaps complementary, significations. There is a first signification that refers back to an older understanding of simulation and is a more etymologically faithful meaning of simulation in terms of deception, in terms of pretence, illusion, and false appearance, and which refers us back to the classical idea of the simulacrum as formulated by Plato.

Antoine Bousquet (2015)
Wargames
in Simulation, Exercise, Operations
p.13

#2 There is also a more contemporary meaning of simulation. This is a conception that is tied into the history of computing, although it does pre-date it, and which suggests the dynamic representation of processes, operations, and situation through the formal description of the internal characteristics and constituent variables of a given system. With it comes a claim (...) To be capturing in some depth whatever is being simulated, rather than simply its surface. In fact, the simulated representation might not be verisimilar nor replicate our immediate phenomenological perception, it might for example merely take the form of data points on a computer printout.

[C] Digital media gain their cultural authority in part because of the perception that they function on mathematical principals. The relationship between digital images and their encoded files, and in other cases, between digital images and the algorithms that generate them as display, lends itself to a conviction that the image and the file are mutually interchangeable. This relationship posits a connection of identicality between the file and the image according to which the mathematical basis and the image seem to share similar claims to truth. Since the history of images within Western culture is fraught with charges of deception and illusion, the question arises whether the ontological condition the digital image, its very existence and identity, challenges this tradition. Or, by contrast, does the material instantiation of images, in they display and output, challenge the truth claims of the mathematically based digital file?

Johanna Drucker (2011)
Digital Ontologies: The Ideality of Form in/and Code Storage — or — Can Graphesis challenge Mathesis?
in Leonardo Vol.34, N°2
p.141

[D] At first glance, digitalization seems to guarantee a precise, literal reproduction of a text or an image and its circulation in the information networks more effectively than any other known technique, being merely a technically improved version of mechanical reproduction. However, it is not so much the digital image or text itself as the image or text file, the digital data, that remains identical through the process of its reproduction and distribution. But the image file is not an image – the image file is invisible. The digital image is an effect of the visualization of the invisible image file, of the invisible digital data. Accordingly, a digital image cannot be merely exhibited or copied (as an analogue, 'mechanically reproducible' image can), but always only staged or performed. Here, the image begins to function like a piece of music, whose score is not identical to the piece – the score being not audible, but silent. To be heard, music has to be performed. One can argue that digitalization turns visual arts into performing arts.

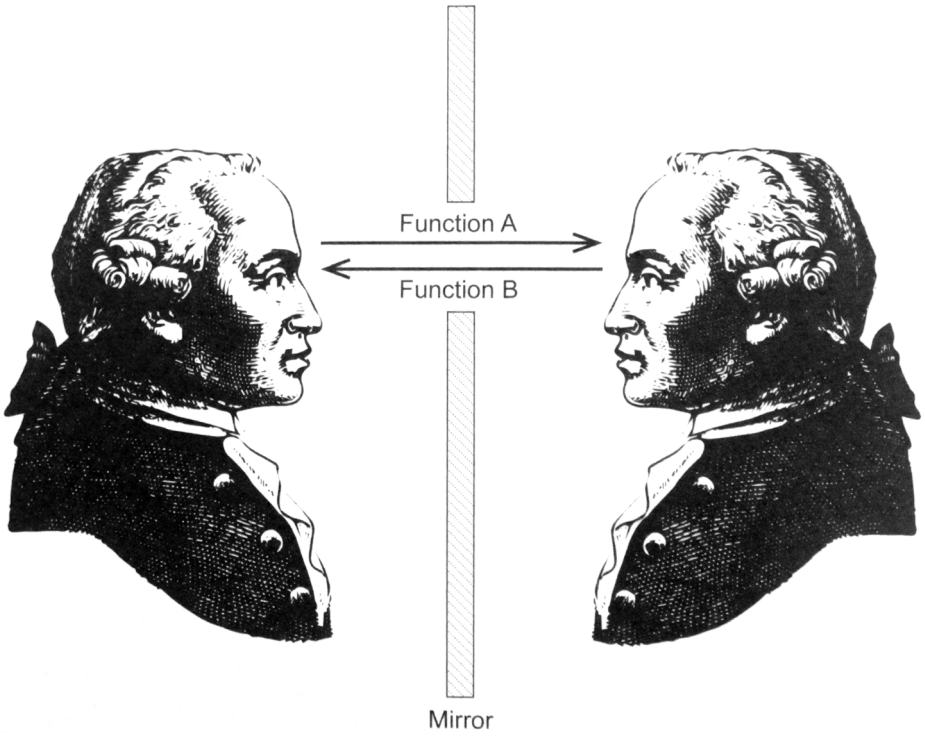
Boris Groys (2011)
In The Flow
p.115

But this performative character of digital reproduction means that the visual identity between the original and the copy – or, rather, the visual identity among different digital copies – cannot be guaranteed. Just as a music performance is always different from a previous performance of the same score, a digitalized image or text appears always in a new form, according to the formats and software that a particular user applies when he or she causes the digital data to appear on a screen. The visualization of digital data is always an act of interpretation by the Internet user. I speak here not in terms of interpretation of the content, that is, the meaning, of this data, but rather of the interpretation of its form. And such an interpretation cannot be submitted to any criticism, because it cannot be visually compared to the original – the original being invisible. In the case of mechanical reproduction, the original is visible and can be compared to a copy – so the copy can be corrected and any possible distortion of the original form reduced. But if the original is invisible, no such comparison is possible: Every act of visualization of digital data remains uncertain in its relationship to the original; one could even say that every such performance itself becomes an original. Under the conditions of the digital age, Internet users are responsible for the appearance or disappearance of digitalized images and texts on their computer screens.

The digitalized images do not exist unless we as users give them a certain 'here and now'. That means that every digital copy has its own 'here and now' – an aura of originality – that a mechanical copy does not have. Thus, the relationship between original and copy was changed by digitalization in a radical way – and this change can be described as a moment of break between modernity and contemporaneity.

[E] In looking at the object or the thing in the mirror, it is the object or the thing in the mirror that looks at me as me. This adjoit formula of mutually disturbing transitions can be expanded even further and recapitulated in terms of the process of crafting: In making X, it is X that makes me under the guise of me.

Reza Negarestani (2014)
Torture Concrete
p.20



[F] Welcome back to kindergarten (...) We all remember a moment in our childhood when toys were our surrogate parents, far more generous, interactive, manipulable, cooperative and informative than our parents. Perhaps, toys first—and not the preachings of our adult guardians—made us realize that there is a world out there, a world that despite its malleability is constrained by what we eventually learned is called objectivity. Recall those nights when we chose the company of toys over adults, we chose to sleep in a tent made of a few pillows simulating the environment of a universe brimmed with possibilities. There was a mountain outside—a cardboard box covered with a brown satin. The meadow inside the tent was comforting and smelling nice. But it was an an old smelly green blanket shrunken and wrinkled after being washed in hot water for many times. In that very tent, we waged war against three metal pencil sharpeners which looked like three thousand armored cavalry units. We were at the end triumphant. The three colored pencils staved off the advance of the metal sharpeners after much sacrifice. They are now far shorter than what they once were. The remaining forces are currently in an eternal alliance. They are the people of this tent which I call my world. After we concluded the battle, we fell asleep dreaming of a bigger tent with ever more new alliances, new friends. But the peace did not last long, for soon a flying saucer carrying an army of disfigured teaspoons delivered a cryptic message, ‘there is a world out there even larger than your toy universe’.

Reza Negarestani (2018)
Toy Philosophy Universes
www.toyphilosophy.com

Among the greatest educationists, from Friedrich Fröbel to Rudolf Steiner, Leo Tolstoy, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, the idea of toying around with the furnitures of the world has been advanced as one of the most important aspects of education, that is, the augmentation of autonomy (what I am and what I can do in the objective world). Philosophy of toys in a sense takes seriously the idea that education does not end with autonomy or with the initiation into the space of theoretical and practical cognitions. On the contrary, it sees the autonomy of the child, the child’s synthetic ways of manipulating and understanding things, its proto-theoretic attempts at constructing a world prior to even conceptualizing that world as the premises of education. For this educationist philosophy, the role of toys

in the recognition of the child's autonomy and world-structuring abilities are more than necessary. They are indispensable.

From Logos to Lego and Back — We can only represent the world to the extent that we have built a world in which our representations coherently hang together. The scope of our world-buildings demarcates the limitation of our attempts at representing the world.

[G] It is only what it does (...) from a functionalist perspective, that mind is only what it does; and that what it does is first and foremost realized by the sociality of agents, which itself is primarily and ontologically constituted by the semantic space of a public language. What mind does is to structure the universe to which it belongs, and structure is the very register of intel ligibility as pertaining to the world and intelligence. Only in virtue of the multilayered semantic structure of language does sociality become a normative space of recognitive-cognitive rational agents; and the suppos edly 'private' experiences and thoughts of participating agents are only structured as experiences and thoughts in so far as they are bound up in this normative—-at once intersubjective and objective—space.

Reza Negarestani (2018)
Intelligence and Spirit
p.110

In this cursory sketch the reader may recognise Hegel's characterization of Geist or Spirit. Indeed, Hegel was the first to describe the community of rational agents as a social model of mind, and to do so in terms of its function. The functional picture of geist is essentially a picture of a necessarily deprivatizedmindpredicatedonsocialityasitsformalconditionofpossibility. Perception is only perception because it is apperception, and appercep tion is only apperceptive in that it is an artefact of a deprivatized semantic space within which recognitive-cognitive agents emerge as by-products of a deeply impersonal space which they themselves have formally conditioned

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[H] Nelson Goodman introduces concepts such as: "worldmaking", "projectiles" and the paradigm of "the languages of art" as constituted by a plurality of worlds (without fearing like Quine overpopulating an already inflated universe). For Goodman, phenomenal predicates and the interceding of play and game in the structuring of perception is critical to understating the senses and uses of art as a form or forms of knowing. Similarly, through toy-aesthetics one can regard the world of toys and toys as models as mutually inclusive without dreading ontological reversals. This is so since a toy is never simply a representational manifold of something in the world to which it is ontologically derived from. A toy such a hobbyhorse is not ontologically less or more real than the animal 'horse' and there is no reason to be concerned about reversing the causal order of any state of affairs. Ontological reversals are the nightmarish scenario of misapplied modal logic whereby counterfactuals obey two distinct sets of rules, that of objects and that of language. Goodman's debt in his aesthetics and its capacities (and which goes beyond Quine's nominalism and various species of linguistic transcendentalism) is to Cassirer's Neo-Kantian symbolic triadic constitution, Langer's structure of feeling and studies in psychophysical research of perception. All of which suggest that the structure of appearance with its sensory and symbolic import is made out of a complex dynamics of projections. Symbols in Goodman's sense are not simply 'projectiles' but rather the ossifications of projections (predicate perception-language-observation protjectiles) which act as constructions in art as in science; this is in a nutshell the significance of worldmaking.

Adam Berg (2018)
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Goodman's contention that we need to replace the ontological query of "what is art?" with that of "when is art?" raises four pivotal aspects in relation to the toy aesthetic model. The first that rather than assuming the fixity of both the phenomenal and conceptual perception of art we need to address it in relation to temporality and its changing modes of conditionals (i.e. by conditionals I refer to art necessary and contingent constituents

which are totalized in the phenomenon of the artwork). The second is that art addressed by the question of when and not what is situated within the context sensitive conditions (environment) of its nominal predication rather than affirming universally its law-like (nomological) character. As opposed to science, art is predicated as a systematized irregularity or singular emergence that obey the rules of pure only in retrospect after the social conditions of its production ceased to dominate culture (Adorno). And as such, Goodman's When is art? also suggests that the vector of projectability leads us to toy-aesthetic model as formulated through the question: how do we play such and such art?