

The neglected purposes of educating art history: isomorphism and facilitation

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In 340 B.C. Plato wrote of the harmony of beautiful music that imitates that virtue which can be equated with the harmony of the soul. By 320 B.C. Aristotle had written: “*the play-going citizen, in the long run, is probably the calmest and the wisest, for he gets rid from time to time of those festering emotional irritations that poison the temperament and the mind*”.¹

“How will we know it’s us without our past?” John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*.²

Samevatting

Die basiese vertrekpunt van argumentasie van hierdie artikel is gesetel in die suggestie dat die huidige stand van kunsgeskiedkundige onderwys nie totaal in voeling is nie met die ontsaglike moontlikhede wat binne hierdie vakdissipline verskuild lê. Dit wil dan as rigtingwyser dien om minstens een moontlike aspek van die toekomstige belangrikheid van kunsgeskiedkundige opvoeding te beklemtoon, met spesifieke verwysing na die wyse waarop ’n visuele kultuur van toenemende belang word. Hier word ten doel gestel om te dui op die wyse waarop kunsgeskiedenis beter ge-posisioneer kan wees om aan die behoeftes van ’n post-moderne gemeenskap (spesifiek leerders en/of studente) te voldoen, en dit impliseer ’n hertaksering van wat ten beste beskryf kan word as die persoonlike funksies met kuns.

Die argument ontplooi verder deur die rol van fasilitering wat moontlik gemaak word deur die boodskap wat in die (n) kunswerk vervat is, te benut met die oog op homeostase van die persona. Die begrip wat hiervoor gebruik word, is isomorfisme, en die metode of tegniek waardeur dit gebeur, kan beskryf word as isomorfiese fasilitering. Kortliks gestel kom dit neer op die aan-

1 This quote from MC Beardsley, *Aesthetics from classical Greece to the present* (Alabama, University Press, 1975) p.67, focuses the attention on the fact that even as early as the period of the Greek philosophers the value of understanding art as a facilitative preoccupation was noted.

2 From a first edition print, J. Steinbeck, *The grapes of wrath* (s.a,1958), p.120.

wending van feite wat met die omstandigheidsfaktore van kunsgeskiedenis en kunswerke verband hou. Hierdie feite word vervolgens as gereedskap gebruik ten einde dialoog te stimuleer en 'n atmosfeer te skep waarbinne die leerder of student kunswerke mag gebruik ten einde tot isomorfeise identifikasie te kom ten opsigte van soortgeluyke aspekte binne haar- of homself. Hierdie identifikasie word wederkerend gebruik om die proses van homeostase te bevorder, en dit impliseer dat die onderwyser of dosent kuns(geskiedenis) kan gebruik in die proses van fasilitering ten einde stres te verlig. Hierdeur word uiteraard 'n enorme bydrae gelewer tot die geestesgesondheid van die individu.

Introduction: resistance to art history in education

In its nomenclature Art History states clearly what it is about. It is the field of human endeavour that studies the human-made products that, by definition, have an aesthetic purpose.³ But just how far back should this intended "historical" study go, and to what purpose? Are only those objects that have withstood the test of time and popularity such as ancient Greek sculpture, Gothic cathedrals, Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* or Picasso's *Guernica* important enough to take note of? Or dare we say that all art works, even recent and insignificant works, may have functions beyond the grander scope of high art? As Steinbeck says; how will we know it's us without our past, and can art works help us to keep in touch with that past? Can art works help us to come to terms with that sometimes very recent past?

According to Edmund Burke Feldman there exists a popular and preconceived notion that art, generally speaking, serves little or no practical purpose.⁴ And yet art, and particularly visual art, has served as the most reliable record of civilization and its progress through the ages. In quoting Ruskin Lord Kenneth Clark makes this point very succinctly:

Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts, the book of their deeds, the book of their words and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others, but of the three the only trustworthy one is the last.⁵

In posing the problem to explain why art, if it is so useless, has throughout history survived as landmarks of humankind's highest achievements, Feldman makes the point that the (visual) arts are, in fact, employed in many useful

3 From H Honour and J Fleming, *A world history of art* (London, Laurence King Publishing, 1995), p.xiii.

4 Feldman is regarded as one of the primary arts education scientists from the early phases of educational pragmatism; see EB Feldman, *Varieties of visual experience* (New York, Harry Abrams, 1967), p.15.

5 This quote, from K Clark, *Civilization*, (London, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1974), p.1, is based on an essay by John Ruskin in the series on Art and Government during the nineteenth century.

ways in the lives of everyone.⁶ Clearly therefore art, and the art history that records these achievements of humankind, can be seen as a reliable indicator of a particular societies' levels of cultural development. It can also serve as a reliable record of the levels and methods of interaction of such societies, whether these are political, economic, religious, social or personal. It furthermore very obviously portrays the character of the artist; his or her preoccupations, likes and dislikes, and art history as a subject therefore also serves the very important function or purpose of helping us to understand not only past and present interactions between people, but can be used to explain the dynamics of personal and interpersonal relationships.

In a recent study author of this article, in researching the relationship between art works and interpersonal relationships, came to the conclusion that a great deal more could and should be done within this field of research.⁷ It was suggested that history of art as an academic subject is the ideal vehicle through which the aesthetic aspirations of mankind can be relayed to the student, whether this happens as an integrated part of a broader curriculum or as an autonomous subject.⁸ By way of this subject content, a multitude of content dealing with the art work, the circumstances regarding the time when it was made, but especially regarding the artist, can be transmitted via the work of art to the viewer. The purpose of this article is to argue that the way in which the viewer may identify with the work of art, could and should be read as an extension of the personal functions of the work of art, but that this function of art is not being utilised to its full potential.

As such the following will be addressed:

- The need for art historical education with a focus on re-creation
- The purposes of art through art history education and
- in particular, the functions of art in facilitation through a process described as isomorphic identification
- The role of the art (history) teacher or supervisor as facilitator will be discussed briefly.

In doing this, it is necessary to understand the changes in aspects of both art and art education which may have been instrumental in creating the environ-

6 Compare EB Feldman, *Varieties of visual experience* (New York, Harry Abrams, 1967), p.15.

7 JR Botha, "A psycho-educational programme for the utilization of visual arts in the facilitation of stress management in young adults" (Johannesburg, University [Thesis – D.Ed.], 2004 p. 320.

8 See FS Kleiner, CJ Mamiya and RG Tansey, *Gardner's art through the ages* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 2000), p. xxxiv.

ment in which it is necessary to write an article of this nature. An era of post-modernism and the particular way in which it has influenced approaches to art and art education is here described as a possible contributing factor to the neglected functions of art history. Much of what is argued in this text may prove true on the international scale, but some of the arguments are specifically focused on the South African situation. Even though art as a learning area in the South African situation has received new impetus in primary and secondary education, the actual serious study of art as a subject in the curricula of both secondary and tertiary institutions, and therefore too art history as a subject that focuses on aesthetic education, is still deemed by many to be a “nice to have” but still a rather superfluous subject.

The current nature and future importance of art historical education

The teaching of art history generally forms part of some wider curriculum, such as serving as an adjunct to the teaching of learners in so called Arts and Culture at school, the training of students in the fine arts, as part of a course in graphic design, or as a foundation course for architectural students. While it is true that many students do study art history as a subject within the humanities purely for the sake of the subject itself, relatively few do so with the intention of becoming art historians. Even fewer focus on the peripheral function of created art works, namely its role in re-creation. Re-creation, as used in this article, implies the many aspects of the dialogue between the art appreciator and the work of art. It implies the achievement of a certain level of competence in “reading” the work of art, usually comprising identification and description of art works, and competency in analysis and interpretation of these works.

Unfortunately experience in the classroom indicates that for the most part students and/or learners who study art tend to prefer getting to grips with the creative and practical components of their chosen subject. This could be ascribed to the preferences of the teacher in their particular teaching method (with art history demanding greater intellectual input than the practical part of the subject which is often a matter of merely being there and fulfilling their role as supervisor) or because the typical art student tends to see art history as boring. While this is not the area of focus of this article, this syndrome of neglect is of great concern, but even broader issues are addressed in this

article. An editorial by P Villeneuve in *Art Education* highlights a number of these issues.⁹

In the first place she (Villeneuve) mentions the case of a teacher who states that her students are not interested in art history, and says that she believes that these students were creating art in a vacuum. In this way she underlines the dilemma probably experienced by thousands of art educators' world wide, namely that many art students and teachers cannot or will not see the need for art history in the curriculum. Secondly she quotes one Bob Lloyd, one of her "most diligent" correspondents as saying:

(A)rt history is not art. Art criticism is not art. Studying the art of other cultures is not art. These are art-related areas, but they are not art. Art is creating and expressing using art media of some sort.

While this is perfectly true, Villeneuve reminds us of the following:

(A)rt production is, indeed, a cherished part of art education. However, most of our students will not grow up to be artists. A narrow focus on studio activities fails to produce knowledgeable adults who are comfortable visiting museums or able to discern good design from bad. Studying art history, evaluating works of art, examining the visual world, and learning about objects from other cultures does not diminish art education. Rather, those activities replicate how artists approach art and prepare students to live in a complex visual world.¹⁰

The importance of history of art as an academic subject becomes even more apparent when one considers that contemporary society seems to be becoming an increasingly visual society, and that popular culture has now challenged the very notion of what art is, even compelling a reappraisal of art history itself. In most academic institutions the modernist concept of an established canon of art and art historical practice has given way to post-modern paradigms in which many new facets or varieties of art have to be considered. In a recent publication by Van Eeden and Du Preez contributions vary amongst others from focusing on the shopping mall as visual culture to cinema and popular magazines.¹¹

9 P Villeneuve, "Beyond art making", *Art Education: The Journal of the National Art Education Association*, 56(5), September 2003, p. 4.

10 P Villeneuve, *Beyond art making...*, p. 4.

11 J van Eeden and A du Preez (ed). *South African visual culture* (Belville, Van Schaik, 2004). This study of visual culture has become the latest academic catchphrase to try and broaden the base of traditional art historical study as a discipline. It is very broad based and typically post modern in approach.

Visual culture on the increase

In an article entitled *Is visual culture becoming our canon of art*, Heise refers to sports and fashion commercials, billboards, music videos and cartoon violence as some of the ways in which American (and world) culture is being bombarded with imagery.¹² These images, it is argued, are advanced through new media technologies, and creates and confirms the new visual culture, summed up by Heise as sometimes referred to as the sum of all humanly designed visual images and artefacts that represent us.

Notwithstanding the above, most curricula dealing with early and secondary education still revolves around alphabetic literacy and numerical programmes, on which the average learner spends 12 years of his or her life. This article does not argue for a shift away from this; that would be preposterous. But while the three r's (reading, (w)riting, (A)rithmetic) dominate school programmes, another form of literacy, namely visual literacy, is not receiving remotely the emphasis that it needs, because if, as this discussion suggests, we are turning into a visual culture, surely teaching and training should be focused on that?

Visual literacy and a concerted effort towards greater emphasis on visual research are, in a post-modern society, imperative. The need for this emphasis is underlined particularly by humankind's ever growing love affair with popular media, with particular focus on the electronic media that has become so accessible in every home.

According to Rose the argument that visual research should be taken seriously can be supported by pointing to a change in society itself as well as to continuity with core traditions in social theory.¹³ It is certainly true that we have entered a new social era, in which the role of the visual has become pivotal to surviving in contemporary society.¹⁴ The term visual literacy has become commonplace, yet very little is done to teach it in our schools. Arnheim more than thirty years ago described this as a "much more serious disease" when compared to a debate regarding the so-called "cultural divide" that raged at

12 D Heise, "Is visual culture becoming our new canon of art?", *Art Education: The Journal of the National Art Education Association*, 57(5), September, 2004, p. 41. See also the previous point.

13 This text by G Rose, *Visual methodologies: an introduction to the interpretation of visual materials* (London, Sage Publishers, 2001), p. 15, reflects very astutely on the need for visual research, and the prediction may be hazarded that this will become an even more important area of research soon.

14 G Rose, *Visual methodologies...*, pp. 9-15.

the time.¹⁵ Today, in what we have all come to know as a post-modern era, the media, both printed and electronic, depend heavily on the ability of humans to be able to communicate visually. The advertising industry is one of the fastest growing global industries, and the Internet depends largely on visual impact for the success of its pages on the World Wide Web.

Although visual literacy could and should be happening at every level of the educational cycle, no other subject is as well positioned to fill this gap as is art history. Art classes could be a centre for dialogue using works of art, television, music videos, movies, advertising, magazines and the huge variety of other media, new and old, to elicit visual literacy training. Again this dialogical interaction must be facilitated by the teacher, guiding the discussion to “a dialogue that creates deeper levels of understanding, empathy and mutual enlightenment”.¹⁶

The changing face of art history in a post-modernist society:

In the post-modern tradition, with art having become inclusive and much more focused on addressing the needs of society, our pre-occupation with the “rules” of post-modernism could imply that some of the good characteristics of modernism may have been sacrificed along with the recognisable “defects” that went along with that era.

When Bicket lists characteristics of post-modernism he underlines the lack of interpretation that sometimes accompanies the reading of art works, and also confirms pastiche and a depthlessness as typical of this era.¹⁷ Because the end of modernism and the emergence of post-modern theory tends to blur the centuries old distinction between so called high and low art, contemporary art theories have been well placed to embrace other paradigms typical of the post-modernist approach. At the same time as modernism was being sacrificed in the name of a whole new round of –isms, the formal structures that

15 This remains an important text which, although dated, remains to this day one of the basic departures for all serious art educators: R Arnheim, *Visual thinking* (Los Angeles, Calif., University of California Press, 1969), p. 307.

16 MJ Zander, “Becoming dialogical: creating a place for dialogue in art education”, *The Journal of the National Art Education Association*, 57(3), May 2004), pp. 48-51.

17 This linking of valueless and superficial characteristics regarding the era of post-modernism must be seen as a disconcerting symptom of the times we live in; read also: D Bicket, *Postmodernism.k.i.s.s.of the Panopticon*, p.16 (http://www.geneseo.edu/~bicket/panop/subject_Phtm# POSTMODERNISM as researched on 20 February 2005).

characterised aspects of modernism, such as the exclusivity of the art-for-arts-sake principle and primarily abstract visions of “pure art”, were also discarded. Perhaps Feldman’s words to describe contemporary art are not completely misplaced when he writes that the idea of art held by many persons begins to seem too chic, too much a matter of fashion, too superficial.¹⁸

Contemporary trends in art such as body and performance art, environmental art and happenings as well as issues forthcoming from the post-colonialist debate and especially the focus on gender related trends such as feminist and queer art and art theory, have all served to render previously revered and long standing theories and theorists impotent. In most instances the focus shifted from an art-centred approach to a spectator/viewer centred approach. This, according to Heise, was more consistent with life in a democracy, and all responses to art would now be considered valuable.¹⁹

While this argument in itself cannot be faulted, there has been at the same time that the modernist paradigm declined an increasing tendency to also allow the critical response to art and art appreciation to be sacrificed. In accordance with the post-modernist aesthetic, it would not be proper to pass aesthetic judgement on the work of art. The art works of post-modernism, being open-ended and inclusive, are not supposed to judge, and from a variety of sources it is clear that this attitude of non-judgementalism has become one of the distinguishing marks of our culture.²⁰ This, according to my experience in the classroom, also influences learners and students alike to want to conform, to not venture an opinion, to not evaluate.

Post-modernism, says Mukherji, covers a wide uneven terrain, difficult to grasp, which began primarily as an umbrella term to denote a particular style in art.²¹ It initially and on a practical level began with architecture and soon encapsulated especially literary criticism and the arts.²² Characteristic of post-modernism is a deliberate mixing of styles and conventions, often incorporating images related to consumerism and mass communication. It

18 Compare EB Feldman, *Becoming human through art: Aesthetic experience in the school* (Upper Saddle River, Prentice-Hall, 1970), p.16.

19 This point of view as found in D Heise, “Is visual culture becoming our new canon of art?” *Art Education: The Journal of the National Art Education Association*, 57(5), September, 2004, p. 41, remains controversial.

20 XOFC. *Postmodernism*. 2004; (http://www.exorthodoxforchrist.com/non_judgementalism.htm), as researched on 28 February 2005); (http://www.exorthodoxforchrist.com/non_judgementalism.htm).

21 PN Mukherji, ed. *Methodology in social research: dilemmas and perspectives* (New Delhi, Sage, 2000), p.30. The term post-modernism, has by now become completely accepted and even seen as already over by newer more contemporary cutting-edge theorists.

22 C Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* (London, Academy Editions, 1986), p.8.

now embraces cinema, music, fashion, experiences of space and time, aspects of identity and sexuality, as well as philosophical, political and sociological (aspects).²³

Generally, in the post-modernist alternative:

- There is an explicit rejection of all forms of meta-narrative or meta-theory. Modern knowledge based on reason is regarded as oppressive, disciplining, normalising, and very often totalising.
- Society can be interpreted as a text.
- It is characterised by deconstruction as methodology of post-structuralism and post-modernism, which involves a shift from structure to culture.²⁴ Theoretical primacy is given to culture in which the role of agency loses much of its significance.
- The condition of post-modernity is plurality and cultural relativism, in which there is no single correct view. This point of view has had particular significance in the world of the (visual) arts, and should be seen as one of the cornerstones of a post-modernist approach to art.²⁵
- Deconstruction and post-modernism have no explicit normative foundation, and we are not clear what the post-modern society really comprises.
- Post-modernism elaborates ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity and the anarchic.

The fact that post-modernism is so multifaceted, or that one can argue with the post-modernists that there are many truths, truly mirrors contemporary society. Even so, it confirms the value of isomorphic facilitation as method of counselling, because it compliments the underlying theory of strength-based supervision or facilitation. As Edwards and Chen put it:

With post-modernism, supervisors are not seen as having a privileged view that is more “true” than those whom they supervise. There is a focus on discourse that acknowledges the social, religious, political or any other context, and emphasises the creation of meaning and construction of reality. Post-modern supervision works toward co-creating new realities through deconstruc-

23 See M Lovejoy, *Postmodern currents: art and artists in the age of electronic media* (Upper Saddle River, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1997), pp. 66-69; PN Mukherji, ed. *Methodology in social research: ...*, p.30.

24 In this way, PN Mukherji, ed. *Methodology in social research: ...*, p.31, points the way in which contemporary art theory emphasises the role of human beings as central to the artistic act.

25 See B Taylor, *The art of today* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), p.162. Any text of this nature should be read in its entirety if the reader should want to understand the implied terminology.

tion of old narratives and replace them with new, more useful ones that do not pathologise people.²⁶

Thus when post-modern supervision / facilitation occurs, it focuses on the positive rather than on the negative; lifts out solutions for the future rather than dwell on problems of the past, and seeks multiple perspectives rather than universal truths.²⁷ In reference to the way that post-modernism should be approached in the classroom, Parker says that it is not a passive discovery of facts about classroom life but an active construction of those facts, implying that something more needs to be done with stimuli than just receiving them.²⁸

This in turn has led to an increased acceptance of the multiplicity in interpretation that approaches towards the work of post-modern art have to offer, compelling both arts administrators and educationalists as well as the artists themselves and eventually the art loving public to increasingly shift the focus to embrace other and newer (or contemporary) forms of art.

Much of the art created within this new paradigm has also centred on its being of practical use rather than focusing on the inherent aesthetics of the art work itself.

Within the African paradigm the shift towards increased focus on crafts is self evident. One has but to visit any museum or peruse their more recent exhibition catalogues to see that this is true, and the crafts, after all, must be read as a practical even utilitarian form of art practice. While again this in itself is not a bad thing, the combination of a philosophic-theoretical onslaught on a modernist canon of artistic “appraisal”, a post-critical preference for the cutting edge art and socio-humanist endeavours of gender-dominated practice, as well as an increasing emphasis on the promotion of the crafts have combined to (deliberately) divert the focus away from the “other” purposes that art may serve.

Thus the major purpose behind much contemporary art and art history is embedded in its role as serving the needs of society. In this way art creation

26 This text by JK Edwards and MW Chen, “Strength-based Wu-Wei supervision”, *Family journal*. (<http://www.nciu.edu/~jkedward/wu-wei.htm>, as researched on 23 July 2002). This source is one of very few texts in which the term isomorphic identification was found in the same relation as implied in the research done for this article.

27 JK Edwards and MW Chen, “Strength-based Wu-Wei supervision...”, p.4.

28 Compare S Parker, *Reflective teaching in the postmodern world: a manifesto for education in postmodernity* (Buckingham, Open University, 1997), p.149.

but also the peripheral act of recreation have become dominated by issues around the art work rather than the art work itself, and so the extrinsic perspectives, comprising the history of ideas, the ways in which art (history) may be used to study psychology, and for the purposes of this article especially those aspects related to society and culture, may be regarded as the “needs” to be extrapolated from the work of art.²⁹

These needs may be functional such as our need for shelter by way of architecture or the design and creation of other useful objects. It may be a need from the greater variety of social functions such as educational or religious needs, or can even serve a political or propagandist-ideological function. Many such examples exist. In feminist art the work of art must focus the attention on the role of women in a previously male dominated society, or within the ambits of post-colonialism art works must reflect on the injustices exercised on previously disadvantaged societies and the many ways in which this affected their daily lives. Examples of this abound, from the extreme exhibitionist works of Carolee Schneeman, described by Robinson as the sculpture of indeterminacy, to the beautifully thought provoking work *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago.³⁰ This work is intended to establish a respect for women and their art, but is a very aloof experience for the average person wanting to connect emotionally with the content that an art work has to offer.³¹

In the South African context all those works that have been described as resistance art can be cited, and more recently the combination of post-colonialism with a feminist angle, such as in the works by Thembisile Shoji and Nokhuphiwa Maphumulo.³² Becker also says in this regard that apartheid had obliterated social history in South Africa, and reflects on the combined injustices of politically motivated hate as well as the subjugated position of women. Contemporary art can therefore also be deemed a vehicle for the transmission of political statement or even as a tool for propaganda. Again this is nothing new, and has been a characteristic of many great pieces such as the *Raft of the Medusa*, painted by Gericault in the early 19th century or Picasso's *Guernica* in 1937.

29 WE Kleinbauer, *Modern perspectives in Western art history* (New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), p. 271. In terms of Art Historical methodology, Kleinbauer is deemed as of extreme importance for his postulation of the intrinsic/extrinsic approaches to art historical research.

30 Compare J Robinson, “The sculpture of indeterminacy: Alison Knowles's beans and variations”, *Art Journal*, Winter 2004, Vol 63 (4), p.97.

31 As a seminal text, the complete volume by FS Kleiner, CJ Mamiya and RG Tansey, *Gardner's art through the ages* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 2000), should be seen as suitable for a basic overall guideline.

32 C Becker, “Amazwi abesifazane (Voices of women)”, *Art Journal*. Vol 63 (4), Winter 2004, pp.116-134.

Much of the approaches described above are socio-politically motivated. Although art within the socio-political context performs a valuable and necessary function it has contributed to the very nature of both art and art education. This is characterised by continuous flux and a shifting emphasis that has been the basic essence of art throughout history. Today much art (and art education) is directed and dictated by expectations from either indirect political influences (such as the educational policies and outcomes based curricula of our schools) or the domination of art education by women, which in turn influences in one way or another how and what is created or taught at virtually all levels of the educational system.

In all this, the reasons why human beings create art seem to have eddied once more in the direction of art as primarily a social response. Predominantly art seems to be made to serve a “greater” purpose, for example to create art for the sake of aids awareness, or a larger social response to previously marginalised issues within feminism and the gay rights movement which highlights or confirms the artists’ right and individuality to be gay. Much art now takes on the form of social commentary by focusing on queer theory and related issues. Little of this art is now focused on the needs of the average individual, and even less on the work of art itself. It is the value of the work of art as part of the collective, part of the larger issue, and part of the divine debate (in having to be politically correct), that confirms its *raison d’être*.

Even so, Etlin eloquently describes the way that the arts in general contribute to a societies’ well being by promoting the sensory experience of art as an integral part of personal homeostasis.³³ Botha quotes examples from Aristotle onwards to underline the importance of art employed as a cathartic experience.³⁴ Csaky devotes a whole chapter to explain the social significance of artists leading the way in terms of sensory enrichment.³⁵ As Dewey (in Janesick) advises, art is the bridge between experience of individuals and the community.³⁶ So too, the qualitative researcher is someone who must establish a bridge as part of the community under scrutiny. There can be no doubt that the use

33 Homeostasis, or balance, as outlined by RA Etlin, *In defence of humanism: value in the arts and letters* (Cambridge, University Press, 1996), p.8, is an insightful rendering of the meaning of “balance”.

34 JR Botha, “Intuisie in die kreatiwiteits- en herkreatiwiteitsprosesse van die visuele kunste” (M.A., PU vir CHO [Potchefstroom], 1982), p.78. This study, although dated, gives a thorough overview of the way in which intuition can be used to “get in touch” with the persona through art.

35 Compare M Csaky, *How does it feel? Exploring the world of your senses* (London, Thames & Hudson, 1979), p.139.

36 VJ Janesick, *‘Stretching’ exercises for qualitative researchers* (London, Sage Publishers, 1998), p.61.

of art, whether for pure aesthetic enjoyment or in facilitation programmes of this nature, contributes hugely as a social service.

In debating the purposes of art, it may be of value to reassess Feldman's basic categorization as suggested in his *Varieties of Visual Experience*.³⁷ He introduces the first chapter by saying that although man is a social animal who must live in groups and communities to survive he does have a private and separate individual existence. Thus art has the ability to involve, on a very personal basis, any individual who is motivated to or develops the appetite for dialogue with the work of art.

It is clear therefore that artists create art works for a large variety of reasons, whether to earn a living or to make an ideological statement, but for the purposes of this article it is the third possibility that will form the major focus, namely that art can be created for personal functions. When Feldman proposes that art therefore has as one of its characteristics the possibilities of serving and having purposes within context of human activities, he outlines – amongst others – the personal and social functions of art. He refers to art as an instrument of personal expression, although he too confirms the broader scope and purpose of art when he says:

[A]rt is not confined solely to self-revelation; that is, it does not deal exclusively with the private emotions of an artist's life. Art also embodies personal views of public objects and events. Basic human situations like love, death, celebration, and illness constantly recur as themes.³⁸

It is exactly this turn of events, or the swing of the pendulum if you like, that has the current focus so strongly on social issues, perhaps to the detriment of the personal functions of art.

The personal functions of art

Art serves a very important purpose in that it is prized because it satisfies vital personal and social needs. These aspects of the creative or the re-creative act are when compared to the other functions of art certainly the most intimate, and depend very much on the one-to-one experiences of and with

37 See also previous references to this text by EB Feldman, *Varieties of visual experience* (New York, Abrams, 1967), pp.16-17.

38 EB Feldman, *Varieties of visual experience*, p.17.

the work of art. It also implies the most meaningful aspects of the personal dialogue with the work of art.

Perhaps the way in which Kandinsky put this emphasises too strongly the self centred approach implied by this focus on the personal functions of art, while at the same time being reminiscent of the modernist's focus on the autonomy of the work of art:

I value only those artists who really are artists, that is, who consciously or unconsciously, in an entirely original form, embody the expression of their inner life; who work only for this end and cannot work otherwise.³⁹

Even so, this article in the final analysis concerns the individual response to the work of art, not the collective, but as Arnheim states:

[T]he arts, to sustain their vigor must serve substantial human needs...by demonstrating what it can do for the distressed, art reminds us what it is supposed to do for everybody.⁴⁰

This "everybody" is here interpreted as the individual, and the way in which the individual's needs are addressed through the personal functions with art and particularly the recreation of art in education.

There is nothing new about the utilization of the arts, generally speaking, as a method of facilitation. It is used not only in the context of the performing arts such as dance, drama and music, but particularly too in painting, sculpture, pottery, weaving, and a number of other art media and types. Yet all of these use a hands-on approach whereby it is expected of the participants to be active in the act of creation or performing. Of these, music stands out as an art form that can be used in a non-performance mode, and where a passive engagement with the completed work of art receives the focus. A long tradition exists whereby the mere act of just listening to music (whether consciously or even subconsciously) without personally being capable of playing a musical instrument or of delivering a performance on it, forms part of an intervention programme.⁴¹

Although this form of music therapy has traditionally formed part of guid-

39 The early and seminal book by W Kandinsky, *Concerning the spiritual in art* (Toronto, Dover, 1977), p.vii, should be read in conjunction with his 1913 developments towards total abstraction.

40 R Arnheim, *New essays on the psychology of art* (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1986), p.257.

41 D Amir, "Research in music therapy: quantitative or qualitative?", *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 2(2), (<http://www.hisf.no/njmt/amirresearch.html#top>, as researched on 26 September 2003); <http://www.hisf.no/njmt/amirresearch.html#top>, 1993. Cross-over studies related to music also form a powerful topic for further research.

ance or stress-relief programmes over many decades, no such comparable programme has yet been developed for the visual arts. The study mentioned in the introduction (Botha, 2004: et al) suggests and researches a process whereby visual art works are used without involving any form of a hands-on creative process, developing a psycho-educational facilitative programme as its end goal.

In this study it is proposed that the visual arts be used in a method similar to that used in music therapy. In the case of this research the programme will focus on how the visual arts would use a method of narrative psychology through isomorphic intervention in stress facilitation.⁴² Participants could be guided towards a fast track identification of problems and the application of remedial facilitation through focused choices of intervention, made possible by virtue of particular examples of art works (paintings, sculpture, and to a certain extent, films) chosen and/or used.

This process is described as an isomorphic identification with the work of art, and even though it may sound incredibly obvious, it is interesting that very little research has been done in which the research design has been characterised by the relative novelty of the suggested approach towards intervention and stress facilitation as outlined in this article.

The argument inherent to this article implies that the very essence of why artists create art works has been – to a certain extent - sidetracked within the contexts of a post-modernist aesthetics. It would seem that because contemporary aesthetics prefers to place a large onus on the idea that art should serve the needs of society, less emphasis is put on the intense and personal nature of the artists involvement with the work of art.⁴³

This may be deemed by many a gross generalisation, but the fact remains that art education at especially secondary school level focuses, as suggested earlier, on collective issues rather than individual creativity. If the basic tenet can be accepted namely that artists create art from an inner necessity or spiritually creative need, it automatically follows that in the re-creation of such an art work, it will or should again be the inner need that must be deemed the primary motive or reason why any person should want to (or need to) engage in communication with the work of art for the purposes of personal homeos-

42 JR Botha, "A psycho-educational programme for the utilization of visual arts in the facilitation of stress management in young adults" (D.Ed., University of Johannesburg, 2004), p.320.

43 JR Botha, "A psycho-educational programme..." p.2004.

tasis. This can only be true if the work of art truly addressed the needs of the individual in the first place.

It is therefore the personal functions of art that is deemed in this context the most valuable characteristic of the work of art, and in particular the possibility of using this work of art in mental well being. At this point it is also necessary to ponder not the question of why human beings create art, but why teachers teach human beings (under their supervision) to create and/or appreciate art. Understandably teachers teach or guide students to create art for exactly the same reasons as given for the primary reasons why artists create art. They create art to mirror society; to comment on life; to create skills in order to do a job in order to earn a living. There may be many other reasons; teaching and creating art to participate in competitions, or simply because it is fun, or perhaps the most personal response of all: to fulfil an inner need, and to use art in this very private way to connect with the spirit. For the teacher or educator this therefore opens up one more possibility or purpose for the creation and/or re-creation of art, namely art in facilitation.

Facilitation / personal homeostasis: message in the work of art

Many approaches to the use of art in therapy or other guidance programmes have been developed through the course of the 20th century. Large volumes of work exist regarding the therapeutic application/s of the practice of art, and this practice of art cuts across the spectrum. It includes not only music and visual arts such as painting and sculpture, but extends towards the performing arts like dance and drama, and even includes writing.⁴⁴

The possibility to use art as a method of maintaining personal homeostasis is first encountered in the writings of the early Greek philosophers. Plato alluded to the way in which human emotions could play a part in the appreciation of art works, but it was Aristotle (in Beardsley) who clearly stated how the appreciation of art could be used in personal therapy.⁴⁵ The phrase *emotional catharsis* is used to describe the way in which a viewer would react

⁴⁴ This particular source indicates on the relevant page the cross-over referred to earlier. See D Capuzzi and DR Gross, *Introduction to counselling: perspectives for the 1990s* (Boston, Mass., Allyn & Bacon, 1991), p.207.

⁴⁵ MC Beardsley, *Aesthetics from classical Greece to the present: a short history* (Alabama, University of Alabama Press, 1975), pp.64-67.

on watching a tragedy, implying its use as a method of therapy to enhance mental health.⁴⁶

Even though Aristotle's words date back to the third century BC, and the implied method of therapeutic facilitation is clearly described in terms of art appreciation rather than the physical practice of art, the actual situation in contemporary facilitation procedures in which art is used, is quite different. In cataloguing the abundance of references to and actual application of the diversity of therapeutic facilitation or other remedial techniques to which the arts have been put, one common denominator seems to have surfaced regarding by far the greater number of methods used. In nearly all instances of arts therapy the actual method of facilitation has followed the route of the practical exercise of some form of art.

Particularly the visual arts seem to have depended very heavily on the idea that the participant should get personally involved with and in the creative process. It was/is therefore expected of the person undergoing guidance to draw/paint/sculpt or in some other way be involved in one or more aspects of the practice of art, painting or drawing or creating art in a hands-on way.

Unfortunately this method is of no use with particular participants, simply because the act of being involved with the creative process, even in the most elementary manner, in itself causes stress which leads to the avoidance or non-participation of such participants in the process of remedial facilitation (see also Williams and Taylor).⁴⁷ On the other hand, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that methods of remedial facilitation in which the principles of art appreciation is applied, would in it self be effective in the facilitation of stress management.

Well-tested measuring instruments such as the Rorschach or the Lüscher colour test have indicated meaningful interaction and responses to the tests by experimental groups.⁴⁸ In these the constitutive aspects characteristically used in (visual) art works, namely lines, shapes, colours, textures and a number of other aspects were used to elicit emotional responses.⁴⁹ These aspects or

46 (<http://www.lessonstutor.com/ciGreek.html>, "Aristotle" as researched on 4 November 2002).

47 Compare R Williams and JY Taylor, "Narrative art and incarcerated abused women," *Art Education: The Journal of the National Art Education Association*, 57(2): (47-52), March, 2004, p.48.

48 JW Santrock, "Psychology", *New York, Times Mirror*, 1997, pp. 28-29; I Scott, *The Lüscher colour test* (London, Pan Books, 1987), pp. 13-15.

49 N Goldstein, *Painting: visual and technical fundamentals* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1979), pp. 173-174. This source was used as an overall and general guideline. Although there are many other books or sources available that would offer similar scope, this particular source was found to be particularly succinct.

constitutive elements, being part of the technical form language of art works, form an integral part of the characteristics that define a particular work of art as being executed in a particular style. Thus the composition and rendering of a work of art in which aggressive lines or textures and harsh colour contrasts have been used with an emphasis on not being objectively realistic, may possibly be classified as falling within a style of emotion. The lines, colours, textures and shapes would contribute to the “reading” of the work of art as “emotional”.

It follows that questions could be asked regarding the efficacy of art appreciation (as opposed to the practice of art) in the process of facilitation. This suggests that needs exist for the development of a practical method or programme of facilitation and/or guidance through visual art appreciation. As recently as December 2002 the influential magazine *Art News* (devoted to the visual arts) referred to the “strange comfort” that (visual) art works could impart:

Art has always offered succor – Matisse thought it should be like a “comfortable armchair”.⁵⁰

The argument further follows that, as in music, the process of art appreciation should not be seen as merely a passive method whereby the participant looks at works of art, “enjoying” them as art for the sake of art. It is argued that the facilitation procedure should be seen within the context of art being re-created by the participant, and a programme developed to facilitate such re-creation. Building on a theoretical foundation, such a programme would have to be derived from a contextual study of existing literature, and shown to be of practical use in situations both relevant and meaningful to contemporary society.

It is not always absolutely possible to explain why a certain work of art makes you feel happy or angry, evokes emotions of grief or joy, and neither is it of great importance for the general art loving public to know this. On the other hand, as a tool towards a programme such as is being suggested and researched in this thesis, it is imperative that the researcher must know how and why isomorphic identification with a certain work of art by a certain participant could take place. It is equally important that the participant must, from within his or her own enhanced abilities or visual literacy, be guided in

⁵⁰ A number of recent texts, of which the following is a good example, have focused on the value of art as a method of relaxation: HM Sheets, “Strange comfort”, *Art News*, September, 2002, pp. 140-143.

the process of facilitation to recognise the “sameness” of emotional content/response between participant and art work.

How does the work of art contribute to the process of communication and possible “einfühling” between itself and the viewer? How is the content or idea, the message in the medium, relayed from what is ostensibly a static artwork to a dynamic living, feeling human being? The explanation of this can obviously and in the first place be found within the thematic material of the artwork itself. A human being portrayed as isolated, on the face of it in dire distress, without pertinent facial features yet emotionally charged as in Munch’s well known painting *The Cry* will, virtually guaranteed, elicit similar feelings in a responsive viewer.

On the other hand, the artist uses the tools of his trade to cleverly and with insight add on to the message embedded in this painting. The particular paint, the specific colours, the nature of the languid yet threatening curvilinear and decorative use of lines, the constrictive and biomorphic abstract shapes in the water and of the sky all contribute to the *angst* felt in looking at this painting. It is therefore not far fetched for the art historian to equate certain especially diagonal lines as more emotionally charged than would be a horizontal use of line. “Soft” and embedded triangles, such as in Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, tend to emphasise stability and solidity.⁵¹ Hard and graphic triangles as inferred in Gericault’s great work, *The Raft of the Medusa*, are more readily interpreted as expressively restless, even aggressive.⁵² Rounded forms or shapes and “cooler” colours such as blue or green are considered “soft” and peaceful (except when combined with certain textures and colours, as in the Munch below), while rectangles and squares in red or orange would evoke more active emotions such as anger or passion.⁵³

The research done by myself suggests that the sum total of the above could form part of an extensive psycho-educational programme for the use of the visual arts in the facilitation of stress management in young adults. As key words terms like isomorphic identification and the personal narrative of the learner/student/participant form part of an approach to facilitation which is primarily embedded in art history as a subject.⁵⁴

51 For purpose of visual reference only see Hamlyn, *Art treasures of the world* (London, Hamlyn, 1970), p. 149.

52 For purposes of visual reference only see Hamlyn, *Art treasures of the world*, p. 223.

53 H Chijiwa, *Color harmony: a guide to creative color combinations* (Gloucester; Rockport Publishers, 1987), p. 20.

54 JR Botha, “A psycho-educational programme...” forms the primary point of departure for this article.

As a programme, isomorphic identification as a strategy of facilitation fits well into a post-modern paradigm, as it focuses on a holistic stress management programme designed to be of benefit for the participants.

Isomorphism and art

Although the term isomorphic identification is not of uncommon usage, it appears only very rarely in literature, and then in context with very recent work primarily to be found on the Internet. Tangential use of the term appears in studies related to music and by far the most references, to mathematics, biochemistry and other hard sciences.⁵⁵ Isomorphism literally means equality or sameness (iso) of form (morphism).⁵⁶

The first reference to the term isomorphic appears when Aristotle uses it in order to explain that the human mind approximates in an abstract way the state of being of a thing:

...when claiming that minds become isomorphic with their objects, Aristotle must understand the way in which minds become enformed as somehow attenuated or non-literal.

The above term has traditionally been applied more to the natural sciences than it has found useful application within the humanities. In mathematics for example an isomorphism between two systems requires a one-to-one correspondence between their elements (that is, each element of one system corresponds to one and only one element of the other system, and conversely), which also preserves structures. In Gestalt psychology, on the other hand, the one-to-one correspondence between elements is not required; similarity of structures is required. The similarity of structures in the case of the visual work of art lies in the relationship between the experiential worlds of the viewer in relation to that art work, and the similarity evoked by the perceived message(s) inherent in the work of art and the mind of the viewer.

It is important to understand how this message is relayed to the viewer or perceiver of the work of art, but even more important to understand that this is a complex process which varies from person to person or even varies from

55 M Titlestad, *I was not yet myself: Representations of Kippie 'Charlie Parker' Moeketsi*, (<http://www.criticalmethods.org/p100.mv> 2002, as researched on 20 February 2005), pp.3-5.

56 See also the rest of this text: A Luchins, (http://www.enabling.org/ia/gestalt/gerhards/luch_iso1.html); http://www.enabling.org/ia/gestalt/gerhards/luch_iso1.html, 2002, as researched on 30 October 2002).

time to time within the same person. This happens because the process of communication between the viewer and the work of art is of a dynamic nature, and will vary according to a multitude of intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

It is therefore proposed that a work of art is *per se* a container and retainer of an idea, an idea that is intrinsically tied to a stylistic approach and an artistic form, which has encoded in its very structure a certain intention, or idea or message. Because it is important to “teach” the viewer to “read” the work of art on more than just a cognitive level, it follows that sensitivity training would form an essential part of the facilitation programme, and this is where the role of the teacher / lecturer as facilitator enters the picture. Training in art history as didactic proficiency implies that the learner or student is now ready to explore and discover new worlds. The knowledge garnered in the process of learning how to look at art initiates the possibilities of embarking on a whole new journey, a journey of discovery not only of the world of the visual and other arts, but also a journey of discovery of the self. This journey is “mapped out” in the narrative referred to previously.

As with colours and textures so too lines, forms or shapes, and even planes can be interpreted in the context of emotional attributes. Lines can be calm or aggressive, smooth or rough, harmonious or distorted, and elicit similar emotions in the viewer. A texture could be comforting or uncomfortable, aggressive or placid, intrusive or neutral. Forms or shapes, regardless of possible realistic attributes, may be “solid” or “fragile”, imposing or retiring, dynamic or static, and any or all of the above may be present in one way or another in any given art work. Clearly therefore artists, as highly emotive individuals, make it their business to impart emotive content to a work of art. These art works would in turn, in the perceptive viewer, translate itself to a similar or other emotive experience in the person who as an art appreciator, views the work of art and interprets the message in the medium, as is the intention with this research.

A sensitised viewer should have the ability to not only identify the attributes of a particular constitutive element (a line, a colour, a shape), but should also be in a position to transpose given attributes as experienced in the art work to isomorphically identify similar emotions in him- or herself.

Isomorphic facilitation

As stated above, isomorphism literally means “identity or similarity of form.”⁵⁷ The word comes from iso - meaning same, and morph - meaning structure. Any two systems that are connected are said to have isomorphic properties when there is similarity between the two. Isomorphic facilitation therefore indicates the active confrontation of the participant to a set of pre-determined interventions, with participant in this sense intended to imply the person who is unable to cope or manage healthy stress levels.

Isomorphic interventions are interventions that impact both on the individual as well as dyadic and extended family systems on multiple dimensions of causality. The seemingly complex mode of this type of interventive facilitation characterises it as a post-modern method of facilitation procedure.

According to Liddle, isomorphic processes serve:

...as the overlay of overlays’ — a framework under which all other elements of the training process can be subsumed.

Isomorphy differs from parallel process in that the latter is a process-level description of interaction between the facilitator or supervisor and the participant or supervisee, and does not bring into focus what Liddle calls the “action potential”.⁵⁸ Isomorphy refers to that part of two or more structures that have a correspondence. As there is an interconnection between all systems that are interrelated, this correspondence has the potential of influence.

Contextually therefore the facilitator and the participants, as well as in this case, the work(s) of art form a holistic unit creating a strategic identity bound by their isomorphic qualities.⁵⁹ A change in one part of the interconnected system will correspondingly change that part of the other system. Unlike the concept of parallel process, isomorphy implies a normalcy of pattern replication. It is expected that there will be similarity of process from one connected system to another. One may then use that principle to influence change. As an isomorphic facilitator, influence is a matter of whether the participant

57 See FN Kerlinger, *Foundations of behavioral research* (London, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1986), p.395.

58 Compare HA Liddle, *Systemic supervision: conceptual overlays and pragmatic guidelines*, in HA Liddle, DC Breulin, RC Schwartz, (eds.), *Handbook of family therapy training and supervision* (New York, Guilford Press), pp.153-171.

59 R Williams and JY Taylor, “Narrative art and incarcerated abused women”, *Art Education: The Journal of the National Art Education Association*, 57(2), March 2004 , pp.47-52.

finds a fit with what is presented by the facilitator in his or her supervisory capacity.

Isomorphic facilitation reflects the notion that the process of facilitation also allows for the altering and shaping of participants through an intentional facilitation. As Liddle states:

...using the isomorphic perspective, the supervisor can transform this replication into an intervention, redirecting a therapist's behavior and thereby influencing interactions at various levels of the system. Supervisors are not passive observers of pattern replication, but interveners and intentional shapers of the misdirected sequences they perceive, participate in, and co-create.⁶⁰

In summary; using art history as a tool to stimulate dialogue and to create an environment within which the learner or student may use art works to isomorphically identify with aspects within her- or himself, may be strategically used as a method of personal homeostasis. In this process the teacher or supervisor acts as a facilitator, using the works of art in the art history class as a facilitative process in stress relief, thereby assisting the mental well being of the learner or student.

60 HA Liddle, DC Breunlin, RC Schwartz, (eds), *Handbook of family therapy training and supervision*, pp.153-171.