

Buchler would no doubt have some sharp questions for me about the work I have here described. He would likely want to make adjustments to my account of how he understood the nature and practice of philosophy. But I am certain he would have been supportive and encouraging. In one sense, he has been gone for many years. But insofar as his students, persons like myself, feel a steady line of influence connecting Buchler's teachings and writings from a half century (or more) ago to our present activities in philosophy, he has never left us.

WORKS CITED

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"Breaking the Linguistic Stronghold on Meaning: The Case of the Arts."

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Richard Hart's invitation to participate in this panel gave me an opportunity to reflect back over the years that have passed since I began my studies here at Stony Brook. The panel's title, "The Impact of Justus Buchler: American Philosophy at Stony Brook," gave me the lens through which to look back. Buchler introduced me to American philosophy and, in particular, the two key figures in my philosophical life, Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey. In the late 70s these philosophers were not widely read nor discussed in the then dominant philosophical circles. This picture has changed considerably in the intervening years. There has been a renewed interest, both in philosophy and in many non-philosophical disciplines, in their writings. The chief interest has been on Peirce and Dewey's pragmatism and also, in Peirce's case, his semiotics. A greater acceptance of pragmatism can be found in parts of the mainstream analytic tradition, witness the work of Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty. Within my area of

specialization, aesthetics, this has also been so. I will give a brief overview of the field, followed by a discussion of the contribution that Peirce, Dewey and Buchler have made to my own work.

While my dissertation was not in aesthetics per se, I did, in my examination of Dewey's metaphysics, focus particular attention upon his important work, *Art as Experience*. From its publication in 1934 through the late 1950s, this book had been at the heart of philosophical discussions of art. The chapter "Having an Experience" was often anthologized but beginning in the 1960s this book was just as often ignored, especially by mainstream philosophy. I vividly recall that in my first two graduate aesthetics seminars no mention was made of Dewey. These were courses taught by a leading philosopher of art, Arthur Danto - a philosopher trained and then teaching at Dewey's final institutional home, Columbia University. Richard Wollheim, George Dickie and especially Nelson Goodman were the names most often bandied about. In the 1950s there had been a very marked shift from a concern with aesthetic experience to a concern with identifying and defining art's objects. This shift can be attributed to a number of causes, including a fear of psychologism and analytic philosophy's obsession with definitional precision. By now we should all be aware of the vacuity of the charge of psychologism against Dewey. While at times Dewey himself regretted his choice of the word "experience," one would have to seriously misread him to associate Deweyan experience with an essentially subjective, atomistic sensation or feeling. Dewey's concept of enhanced experience was intended to blur the traditional line between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic, between art and non-art. If one is trying to reform traditional ways of seeing the world, then it is inevitable that such "reconstructed" concepts will resist entrenched analytic definitional techniques. In the 1950s and 60s philosophy became fascinated and absorbed with metaphilosophical issues. This was not only true of aesthetics but also true of ethics and political philosophy. The 1960s culminated with that tour de force in definitional gymnastics, Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art*. Goodman reached the paradoxical extreme of treating the identity and authenticity of an artwork as independent of its aesthetically important properties. A miserably uninspired performance of a musical work is more authentic if it is note-perfect, that is, compliant with a score, than a brilliant but one note misplaced performance - pity a Glen Gould.

The titles of Dewey and Goodman's respective works, *Art as Experience* and *Languages of Art*, capture the distinctively changed emphases that took place in the 34 years that separated their

publication. These works are divided by the linguistic turn that affected both Anglo-American and continental philosophy. This is not to say that Dewey had no concern with language and its role in the arts. Both *Experience and Nature* and *Art as Experience* have fairly extensive treatments of language as a medium of communication. But by the 1960s a different model of language dominated analytic philosophy, one that had been crafted by the "sciences" of semantics and linguistic analysis. The allegedly generalized symbol system that Goodman argues for in his book is ultimately modeled upon that of verbal language. This is a system dominated by reference. Some form of reference is always generic to an artwork if it is to have meaning, even in nonrepresentational arts, such as abstract painting or absolute music. Much ink had been spilled over the success or failure of Goodman's attempt to capture art in a basically dyadic theory of signs. I will not rehearse these arguments. Yet what I will say is that my general dissatisfaction with what I have called "the stranglehold of linguistic meaning" became the guiding motive behind much of my own work in aesthetics. The Peircean semiotic resources I first encountered in Buchler's courses supplemented by his own theory of human judgment and Dewey's insights into experience provided the tools with which to break this stranglehold. Let me briefly sketch what these are and then identify areas in which I have applied these resources.

The first resource is Peirce's sign theory, in particular his notion of the interpretant. The interpretant translates the referential aspect of the sign, that is, it gives the meaning of the relation between the sign and its represented object. It does so by placing this relation within an ever-widening context of other signs. Meaning is engendered by a continuing process of translation which, at the same time, makes the sign more determinate. For Peirce the emphasis is upon the translatability of the sign by subsequent signs and not merely upon semantic reference. Without interpretative translation there is no meaning.

Interpretative translation lies at the heart of the alternative approach to meaning that I have pursued. In my writings I have employed these Peircean insights into both my analyses of musical meaning and the reading of poetry. To illustrate, take these two examples of translations from the Japanese of a poem by Saigyō Hōshi (AD 1118-1190):

1. Those ships which left the same harbor side
by side have rowed away from one another towards an
unknown destination.

2. Those ships which
left The same
harbour
 Side by side
 Towards an unknown destination
 Have rowed away from one another!

(My readings of this poem are indebted to both Justus Buchler and Roland Garrett.)¹ The first is a literal prose translation, while the second is the Arthur Waley verse translation. Both convey meaning to the reader, but in starkly different ways.

In the first example we are told that some ships that had left a harbor together are now heading off in different directions toward unknown destinations. The words of the first example are being used to suggest or support a belief or claim. As merely a descriptive proposition, no evidence is explicitly cited in the sentence to support our belief as readers that this event has taken place. Yet it would not be out of the ordinary to raise the question of evidence in this case.

Clearly, in the Waley/Hōshi poem, something different is going on. The truth and falsity of the assertions are not at issue here. Different kinds of interpretive translation are taking place in this artistic sign. The thought sign generated by reading this poem is itself an interpretant of the relationships within the structure of the poetic sign itself. A distinctive new array of sign properties gains prominence over those in the prose reading. Our understanding of the meaning of the poem has as much to do with how these properties relate to each other and to the conventions of reading verse than it does to any explicit referential relationship.

In a work, such as this poem, there are simultaneous multiple forms of interpretive translation going on. The relations exhibited in and manifested by the poem itself give us its poetic meaning. Put in terms of a revised Peircean formulation, the "exhibitive" interpretant is the aesthetic meaning of the poem. I now borrow Buchler's distinction between the exhibitive and assertive modes of human communication, or what he calls judgment. He writes: "When we contrive or make, in so far as the contrivance rather than its role in action is what dominates and is of underlying concern; when the process of shaping and the product as shaped is central, we produce in the mode of exhibitive judgment, we judge exhibitively"² (e.g., the planting of a flower garden, the arranging of dinnerware on a table, the writing of a poem, or the setting of a psalm to music). By contrast: "When we can be said to

predicate, state, or affirm, by the use of words or by any other means; when the underlying direction is to achieve or support belief; when it is relevant to cite evidence in behalf of our product, we produce in the mode of assertive judgment, we judge assertively,"³ (e.g., President Bush's claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, or my walking through the "No goods to declare" exit at airport customs).

In a poem *the product as shaped or arrayed* is of central concern. The shaping must not be taken in a purely visual sense, for we can shape a musical phrase, shape the meter of a line of verse, as well as shape a line on a canvas. The beliefs that these works may support or suggest are either secondary or in addition to the *exhibitive confrontation*. This is typically what we mean when we say that an artwork has an integrity of its own and is not a surrogate for some other purpose. When artists are asked what their works are about, that is, what their works mean, the interrogator is often looking for a simple message that can be formulated propositionally. Yet, as often as not, the response, if there is one, is not easily captured in words. To put it more precisely, the words do not capture the meaning of the work. The failure to answer the "about" question is not a failure in meaning but a failure in our conceptual approach to meaning.

The concept of exhibitive interpretation does not deny that artworks can have other ends or purposes, ones that can be formulated propositionally. Artworks often do function in more than one mode of judgment. Artworks, whether they be Beaumarchais' *La folle journée, ou Le mariage de Figaro*, or Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, may support certain beliefs (e.g., beliefs about the morality of the French aristocracy) or be themselves acts of great moral courage (e.g., act as catalysts for broadening the reach of the American abolitionist movement). Works of art may thus function simultaneously in different interpretive schemes or modes of judgment.

Returning to the Waley/Hōshi poem, we see that it consists of five lines linked in a single sentence. Each line presents an image in the sequence of events: 1) Naming the ships; 2) The original location in the harbor, 3) The togetherness; 4) The unknown destination; 5) The separation. The stresses and pauses of the line structure create a specific form of temporal regularity. If we add to this the number of syllables and natural stresses of the individual words, a larger pattern of emphasis emerges. The rhythmic structure of the poem articulates the meaning of the poem. Meaning is exhibited, not asserted. The first three lines,

besides identifying three distinct images, are also dominated by monosyllables in a pattern of 4,4,3:

Those / ships / which / left
The / same / har/ bour
Side / by / side

The monosyllabic regularity contributes to a slow, evenly paced reading that is visually closed by the fact that the words 'side' and 'side' are themselves side by side, as if they were literally the boats themselves. Here the sight and the sound together exhibit the meaning. This regularity is interrupted by the fourth line. Here the length of the words and the consequent spacing between accents speeds up the reading: "To /wards / an'/ un /known' / des' /ti /na' /tion". The fifth line recalls the pattern of stress and wording of the first three lines but ends ("from one another") with an alteration of pattern (stressed and unstressed syllables) that may recall the fourth line: "Have / rowed / a /way / from / one / an /oth /er!" The rhythmic pattern has been interrupted precisely in the fourth line, which has introduced the disquieting image of the "unknown destination." But a resolution is achieved in the final line, which recalls the prior four lines. The finality of this parting is also rendered in the disappearance of the 's' and 'sh' sounds that marked the prior lines.

The point of this example of poetry reading is to highlight the pervasive nature of interpretation in our experience with art. Aesthetic meaning is neither reducible to prepositional content nor is it some primitive, uninterpretable intuition pervading works of art. There is no need to go beneath interpretation in order to identify some basic, yet meaningful, experience we have with art. Even the basic sound structure and rhythm of the poem evoke meaning, but this is a meaning that is only made possible by the deeply embedded interpretive processes underlying aesthetic experience. There can be no understanding without meaning; there can be no meaning without interpretation. This is a lesson that has kept me in good stead in all my work in aesthetics, a lesson learned in Justus Buchler's seminars here at Stony Brook.

¹ Arthur Waley, *Japanese Poetry: The "Uta,"* new ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), p. 103. See Roland Garrett, "Reading Poems with Buchler," in *Nature's Perspectives: Prospects for Ordinal Metaphysics*, ed. Armen Marsoobian, Kathleen Wallace and Robert Corrington (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 263-65.

² Justus Buchler, *The Main of Light: On the Concept of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 97.

³ Ibid.