CHAOS AND ORDER:

RUDOLPH ARNHEIM'S GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY OF ART

Stephen K. Levine

Rudolf ARNHEIM once described his life as having taken place ''in the company of the century'' (1992). Born in the early 1900's, he witnessed the chaos and disorder of a turbulent epoch. At the same time, he continually affirmed the need for order, balance and structure in human life and art. This essay, a revised version of an earlier attempt (LEVINE, 1994), will discuss ARNHEIM's psychology of art, based on Gestalt theory, in terms of the fundamental opposition between chaos and order.

Reflection on ARNHEIM's Gestalt psychology of art raises questions concerning Gestalt theory in general. Gestalt psychology and modern art emerged in the same epoch; the Gestalt emphasis on structure matched the formalistic tendencies in modernism. Can Gestalt theory do justice to the chaos that characterizes post-modern art and, more generally, the post-modern world? We will return to these questions at the end of this essay.

Born in Berlin to a secular, assimilated Jewish family, Rudolf ARNHEIM passed his early years in the twilight of the German Empire. It was, in his words, ''an age of innocence. Around us the world seemed still at peace'' (1992). After the shock of the First World War, the Weimar Republic ushered in a creative but uncertain epoch. ARNHEIM talks about a ''profound sense of unreliability […] a sense of not being able to trust the foundations of our habitat'' (1992). Reassurance came for him from the study of the arts and the emerging science of Gestalt psychology. In both areas he found an antidote to the prevailing disorder:

> ''Great painting and sculpture as well as great architecture offered the perfection of harmony and order indispensable as a framework of reference by which to judge the precarious insufficiencies of the world surrounding me. Gestalt psychology was equally committed to the striving of organized forces toward a goal state of equilibrium, clarity and simplicity.'' (1992, p. 238)

The history of art and the science of psychology, then, became the dual sources of ARNHEIM's subsequent writings. Drawing from both traditions, he produced an impressive collection of systematic works as well as numerous essays that show an increasing mastery of these two fields and an ability to apply their principles to other

areas of human experience and thought. This essay will not provide an overall review of his work but will attempt to focus on his search for order in psychology and the arts, a search which, it seems to me, is the dominant theme of his work.

Already in *Film as Art* (1957), published in Germany in 1932, ARNHEIM emphasized the priority of order in art and life:

> "[…] a population constantly exposed to chaotic sights and sounds is gravely handicapped in finding its way. When the eyes and ears are prevented from perceiving meaningful order, they can only react to the brutal signals of immediate satisfaction."

As a consequence, ARNHEIM concluded that the introduction of sound into film, by breaking the structural unity of the visual image, created a "radical artistic impoverishment." The talking picture, for him, is a "hybrid form" that fails to achieve the necessary unit of the work of art (1957).

With the appearance of ARNHEIM's masterwork, *Art and Visual Perception*, in 1954, the full outlines of his theory became clear. In this work (extensively revised in 1974), ARNHEIM provided a systematic application of the principles of Gestalt psychology to the study of visual perception and the arts (with a special focus on, but not limited to, the arts of painting and sculpture). In order to understand ARNHEIM's accomplishment here, it is necessary to recall the original project of the Gestalt psychologists, formulated in Germany in the early decades of the past century.

Up to that point, psychological research into perception had been dominated by the theory of association, according to which the discrete data of the senses are unified by the intellect according to rules of contiguity and resemblance. According to this traditional view, if we are able to recognize the objects about us, it is because the shapes and colors of the visual world, meaningless in themselves, are tied together by the repetition of innumerable experiences. By recalling experiences that were similar or that occurred next to each other in space or time, the intellect is able to give form and order to the meaningless chaos of the senses.

For associationist theory, the senses by themselves are dumb; they contain nothing except raw data that have to be processed by the faculty of judgment into meaningful forms. Gestalt psychology showed that not only did this theory denigrate perception, it also made the practice of art unintelligible. If the visual artist works with meaningless shapes and colors, then meaning can only reside in a semantic content that is superimposed on the work. The visual shape of the work would then be the arbitrary carrier of a meaning derived from a linguistically-centered tradition. Art is then understood to use a visual image as an inadequate representation for a thought. The logical conclusion is that art is suitable only for those incapable of pure conceptual thinking.

The discoveries of the early Gestalt psychologists, KÖHLER, KOFFKA and WERTHEIMER, revealed the inadequacy of associationist psychology. The Gestaltists conducted laboratory experiments in perceptual variation that showed that perception is always structured. Gestalt or form is basic to the perceptual act, not imposed by the intellect.

By showing that a shape is always affected by its context, for example, Gestalt psychology revealed the dependence of the parts upon the whole. A sense datum is never an isolated independent entity; it always occurs within a context that modifies its values according to its relationships with other entities. Moreover, not only does the whole determine the parts, but the parts constitute the whole; if there is a variation of a sub-group, the entire structure will be modified. This mutual dependence of parts and whole revealed an organic unity in the field of perception. Holism, for Gestalt theory, is not a philosophical conclusion; it is the empirical condition for the experience of any perception whatsoever.

ARNHEIM demonstrated that this confidence in the structural unity of the perceptual field had radical consequences for the understanding of vision as well as of art. Meaningful forms are already present in the visual field before any act of judgment, but these structures are not passively received by the organism. Rather, the organism conducts a formative structuring of its environment as a creative act. ''Far from being a mechanical recording of sensory elements, vision proved to be a creative apprehension of reality - imaginative, inventive, shrewd and beautiful'' (1954/1974). The phenomenal world around us is characterized by meaningful relationships; vision is a comprehension of that world in its essential features. As ARNHEIM put it, ''eyesight is insight'' (1954/1974).

Moreover, the structures that characterize vision are not static and inert presences; rather they are dynamic tendencies. ''Visual experience is dynamic'': it is characterized by ''an interplay of directed tensions'' (1954/1974). Shapes and colors combine in ways that affect each other; they show a tendency to move in a certain direction depending upon the context. Percepts interact in order to form dynamic wholes. The visual world is alive with meaning and form.

The implications for art of ARNHEIM's Gestalt analysis of visual perception are clear. In the first place, from this point of view, there is a continuity between art and vision that makes artistic practice comprehensible and human. If vision itself is creative, then artists are only explicitly doing what is implicit in every perceptual act: they shape the environment in a creative and meaningful way in accordance with certain basic principles of perception. Art is not a mystical capacity remote from everyday experience. In a sense, we are all artists by virtue of being embodied in the sensible world. The artist merely makes this common heritage explicit.

Secondly, the presence of structure in the act of perception implies that forms have meaning. At the same time, however, meaning can only be embodied in forms that express it in a suitable manner. The forms of art are not accidental and extrinsic to the meaning of the work; rather, they are the media that carry the meaning. An artwork is thus the creation of an expressive form that directly conveys a meaning through sensible experience. Conventional and traditional meanings or symbols find their place in the work only through the sensible forms themselves; the latter carry these meanings in a more or less appropriate way.

ARNHEIM's analysis of art is based on a rehabilitation of the senses. The meaning of the work appears through sense-experience; we see it directly. Just as we see

the world as a field of directed forces, so we immediately see the work as a whole in all the dynamic interplay of its parts. The work reveals itself to the senses; its meaning is carried by the play of sensible forms within it.

Furthermore, the emphasis on sensible form in ARNHEIM's work makes possible an understanding of modern art. If forms carry meaning directly, then it is not necessary for representational images to bring significance to the work. Indeed, ARNHEIM thought, the preference for realistic representation is a relatively new and ''unnatural'' way of making art. We have to be taught to see realistic art: it is by no means a direct expression of our human nature.

The abstractions of modernist art, for ARNHEIM, carry the deepest spiritual values in a direct and unmediated way. The paintings of MONDRIAN, for example, make perfect sense when understood within this framework. Abstract shapes and colors convey meaning in a world in which traditional symbols are without significance. Modernist abstraction thus takes us back to the sources of art-making in the creativity of visual perception.

In ARNHEIM's view, the power of a work of art comes from its creation of order and balance. This emphasis on balance is particularly appropriate to our encounter with ARNHEIM's work. What, after all, does he mean by a structure? A structure, for him, consists in the balance of an interplay of forces. In general, ARNHEIM, following the principles of Gestalt psychology, sees perception as tending toward an equilibrium that reduces tension in the phenomenal field. Tension-reduction is a fundamental goal of the organism. This perceptual tendency is expressed in what ARNHEIM calls the ''law of simplicity'', the tendency of any perceived structure to express itself in the simplest form possible.

Balance in the work of art, then, is achieved by following the law of simplicity so that the forces depicted find a satisfactory equilibrium. At the same time, ARNHEIM is clear that simplicity alone is not the goal either for the organism or for the artist. If it were, the simplest form would be the most satisfying. In fact, the organism also obeys a counter-tendency toward vitality and enhancement of its level of energy. This goal is achieved perceptually by the experience of tension and complexity in the environment. As ARNHEIM put it in the first edition of *Art and Visual Perception*, ''[…] the most characteristic feature of the organism is its revolt against what the physicist calls the increase of entropy […] The processes of growth and the striving for vital aims are most typically organic'' (1954).

Accordingly, the work of art distinguishes itself not so much by its simplicity as by its ability to encompass the highest levels of tension and complexity within the simplest possible form. Modernist art may look simple, but in fact a perceptual analysis of the visual forms of a work reveals that its simplicity is limited by the tension and complexity needed for the expression of a particular theme. It is in fact the theme or meaning of the work that determines its level of simplicity or complexity. A complex theme demands the simplest structure capable of containing its complexity; anything simpler would be inappropriate for the expression of the theme.

What interests us particularly in ARNHEIM's argument here is his attempt to account for this counter-tendency to the principle of simplicity. Although mentioned in

the writings of the Gestalt psychologists, ARNHEIM is, I believe, the first of them to place so much emphasis on the principle of complexity. Perhaps he is able to do so because of his focus on the structure of the work of art, a structure impossible to comprehend in terms of simplicity alone.

In the second edition (1974) of *Art and Visual Perception,* ARNHEIM called the tendency to complexity an ''[…] anabolic or constructive tendency, the creation of a structural theme. This structural theme constitutes what the mind is about, what it is after.'' In a short monograph published in 1971, *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order,* ARNHEIM elaborated on this notion.

The structural theme, he states, ''[…] introduces and maintains tension. In the arts the theme represents what the work 'is about' ''(1971). The anabolic tendency satisfies a ''need for complexity'' that is basic to our humanity but perhaps particularly strong in creative personalities. A structural theme contains a message about the relationship between human beings and their world. Order itself is not enough: ''What is ultimately required is that this order reflect a genuine, true profound view of life'' (1971).

In *Entropy and Art,* ARNHEIM explicated the second law of thermodynamics, the principle of entropy, in order to draw certain conclusions about the significance of order in art. In fact, the argument of the book is designed to show that this principle, according to which the amount of entropy in the universe tends to increase to an absolute state, should not be interpreted to reflect a fundamental preference of the universe for disorder and thereby to justify chaos as a model for artistic practice. Rather, in ARNHEIM's view, the dissipation of energy envisioned by the increase in entropy results not in chaos but in the simplest possible form of order, a side-by-side homogenous similarity of elements. This is not chaos but mere orderliness without complexity.

Chaos, on the other hand, is produced by what ARNHEIM called the ''catabolic effect'', a category that comprises ''all sorts of agents and events that act in an unpredictable, disorderly fashion and have in common the fact that they all grind things to pieces'' (1971). Catabolic destruction produces chaotic disorder. It destroys structures and thereby also the meanings that they express. Insofar as art is the creation of dynamic structures, catabolism is anti-art.

Anabolism and catabolism are variations on the fundamental tendency of an organism to change or transform itself (i.e., ''metabolism'' - from the Greek, *metabole:* to change). Anabolism is, literally, to change ''up'' or in a constructive direction; catabolism is to change ''down'' or destructively. Building-up and breaking-down are two fundamental ways of bringing about change. Their action has the effect of increasing or decreasing complexity, respectively.

Thus, in addition to the aforementioned tendency toward simplicity that counteracts complexity, there is also the possibility of the breaking-up of complex wholes through destructive disintegration. Catabolism breaks up complex structures into chaotic, disorderly parts. We note that ARNHEIM described this process as an ''effect'' rather than a ''tendency'', as in the anabolic case. This is because he sees the

constructive building up of complex systems of order as an inherent human drive. Break-down, on the other hand, is something that happens ''from without''; it represents pathology in the organism and in cultural life. Therefore catabolism is not intrinsic to human existence; it is an accidental process that interferes with the essential tendency toward order.

Within this framework, then, contemporary tendencies in art toward chaos and disorder are seen by ARNHEIM as a degradation of our essential humanity. He objects to the accepting of ''disorder in the work of an artist as an interpretation of disorder when we recognize it as a mere addition to it'' (1971). We should note that ARNHEIM is not rejecting the depiction of disorder; he is far from calling for a seamless, harmonious art without tension or complexity. But he demands that the disorder expressed in the work not be the product of a disorderly work itself.

Catabolic tendencies in art are, for him, a symptom of cultural breakdown; they reflect the latter without surmounting it. Chance, accident and randomness in the creation of artworks represent ''the pleasures of chaos'' rather than the responsibilities of art. ''Disintegration and excessive tension reduction must be attributed to the absence or impotence of articulate structure. It is a pathological condition [...]'' (1971).

ARNHEIM does acknowledge the positive goal of what we might call ''catabolic art'': the ''[…] almost desperate need to wrest order from a chaotic environment […]'' (1971). He also acknowledges the value of such art as symptomatic of the cultural chaos in which the contemporary artist and audience live. But, at the same time, ARNHEIM resists the tendency in present-day art-making toward break-down and disorder; for him, this tendency transcends the limits of art in the direction of anti-art.

ARNHEIM returned to the theme of order and disorder in *The Dynamics Of Architectural Form*, published in 1977. Here he again rejected the possibility of an art based on disorder, criticizing in particular Robert VENTURI's book, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), one of the founding texts of post-modern architecture. ARNHEIM cited approvingly VENTURI's emphasis on tension and complexity in the history of architecture, in opposition to the sometimes enforced simplicities and geometric regularities of modernist architectural style. This emphasis fit in well with ARNHEIM's own recognition of complexity as a basic human tendency.

At the same time, however, he rejected VENTURI's notion that architectural complexity can be understood as a form of contradiction. Contradiction, for ARNHEIM, is ''an offense against order. It is a mistake committed out of ignorance or oversight or for a misguided purpose'' (1977). Such contradiction prevents an object from carrying out its purpose; and, because architecture is above all else a functional art, contradiction has no place in architectural design.

ARNHEIM's criticisms here are particularly significant given the development of architecture in the last two decades. Post-modernist architecture, with its emphasis on the discordant combination of different stylistic impulses and the consequent lack of an overall unity of design, represents a challenge to ARNHEIM's aesthetic standards. Whereas his earlier championing of the abstractions of modernism in opposition to the demands of traditional realism seemed to put him in harmony with the development of contemporary art, his insistence on the primacy of order has made it difficult for him to acknowledge the value of any art that deliberately seeks out the disorderly and tries not to master but to embody it.

Of course, ARNHEIM might argue that the whole post-modern impulse in art is a fundamental mistake, more a symptom of the ills of the times than a remedy for them. But I wonder if this standpoint does not run the risk of becoming a reactionary one, unable to adequately comprehend the development of contemporary art in its own terms. This would be all the more remarkable inasmuch as the whole thrust of ARNHEIM's career has been to defend modernism against its conservative detractors. In fact, however, the very standard that led him to champion modernism, viz., the primacy of expressive form as embodied in the structure of the work, is what has caused him to reject the postmodernist impulse toward de-structuring.

The congruence of Gestalt psychology and modernist art rests, I believe, on the notion of the expressive totality. Whether it be a percept or a work of art, meaning, from a Gestalt perspective, is contained in a structure which gives coherence to the parts of a whole. Without the dynamic structural unity of the whole, meaning cannot be expressed.

As ARNHEIM has emphasized, this structure need not be simple or regular. Because meaning is often complex, the work of art must admit tension and complexity as intrinsic to its structural wholeness. Nevertheless, in his view, this complexity cannot lead to disorder or else the work will lose the capacity for expression that is its reason for being. For ARNHEIM, an ambiguous, confused or contradictory work is a failure. Even the expression of disorder requires order. A work may seek to express the chaos of our times, but it must contain this chaos within an orderly structure or lose its capacity to express meaning altogether.

ARNHEIM does recognize that there are different ways of arriving at order. In *The Dynamics of Architectural Form* (1977), he distinguished between order imposed ''from above'' and order emerging ''from below.'' It makes a difference whether order comes from an overarching framework that integrates the component parts of a structure or whether it emerges from the interplay of these parts as a by-product of their mutual relationship. Although ARNHEIM clearly has a preference for the former, seeing order ''from below'' as the expression of an atomized society that lacks an integrative principle of being, nevertheless he recognizes the legitimacy of the order that emerges ''from below'' as a possible way of attaining wholeness. He has compared it to ''[…] the attempt of a group of musicians to improvise a piece of music […] Together the musicians search for the theme of the whole. It is a spirit of collective cooperation, not of atomistic competition'' (1977).

This distinction between two ways of attaining order is a suggestive one and comes close to accounting for some tendencies in contemporary life and art; however, it still assumes the primacy of order *tout court.* Whether from above or below, the result, for ARNHEIM, must be a structured totality expressive of meaning in order for the work to be art. This is perhaps, however, the very point of contestation in post-modernist art and thought. Is it still possible to embrace the notion of wholeness as a fundamental principle? An encounter with ARNHEIM's Gestalt psychology of art demands that we raise this question.

One of the dominant features of our age is an overwhelming sense of chaos and fragmentation. Not only have larger social units like the nation-state broken down, but the micro-units of family and community no longer provide a coherent basis for social life and individual development. In fact, even the notion of the individual as a coherent totality has become suspect. As the psychologist Robert J. LIFTON suggests, perhaps the best we can do is to celebrate the fluid and ''Protean'' character of the self, capable of changing in changing circumstances (1993).

If the critique of totality were based solely on the break-down of social relations, then ARNHEIM's standpoint would still be the appropriate one: to uphold the standard of order in the face of an emerging chaos. However, the challenge of post-modernism, as I understand it, is that it has shown the very notion of totality to be an illusion, a mask for the intrinsic chaos of existence.

This attack on the notion of totality can be traced at least as far back as KANT, who saw the concept of the whole as a dialectical illusion (albeit a necessary one). As we are ourselves part of the totality we claim to know, our knowledge of it can only be partial and relative to our perspective. We are not capable of a god-like survey of the universe. As embodied beings, subject to the conditions of space and time, our knowledge goes only as far as the limits of our possible experience. For KANT, any claim to a totalizing knowledge is relegated to the field of dogmatic metaphysics.

In our own century, HEIDEGGER and DERRIDA have elaborated on KANT's critique of metaphysics to show that the history of Western philosophy rests on what DERRIDA calls the ''metaphysics of presence'', the belief that truth can be bodily present in the moment. This metaphysics of presence rejects time and historicity in favor of a spatial conception of objectivity in which the world is seen as present-to-hand. Presence, in this conception, is what is given to us primarily through the sense of sight. The metaphysics of presence thus privileges sight above all the other sense.

Vision, in this analysis, is understood as presenting objects in their simultaneous co-presence. The philosophical tradition, based on the metaphysics of presence, prizes vision as the sense that comes closest to knowledge, since sight provides the immediate presence that is a sign of truth. Thus, the primary metaphors for knowledge in the West have been derived from the sense of sight: if, as ARNHEIM put it, ''eyesight is insight'', then the converse is also true: insight is eyesight. Knowing, in this tradition, is understood as a form of seeing.

If it is true that seeing, understood in this way, misleads by presenting a world that is pure presence, we might ask whether there are other senses that would serve us better as models for knowing. Many thinkers have noticed the difference between Greek philosophy with its emphasis on sight (the philosopher ''sees'' the truth; the truth is what is visible to the intellect) and the Hebrew Bibleical tradition's emphasis on audition (God ''speaks'' to the Israelites; the primary refrain for the communication of truth is, ''Hear, O Israel''). Hearing, of course, is an experience primarily dependent upon time rather than space. It grasps what is as a temporally contextuallized message rather than as a spatially displayed object.

This emphasis on hearing in contemporary thought goes with a recognition of the role of language in the formation of human being. From this perspective, we are essentially speaking beings, and our speech is a conversation that binds us in a discourse that never ends. There is always more to be said, and we will never say it all, never express the totality of our being in one present moment. The wish to do so leads us astray.

Is ARNHEIM's work subject to the critique of the metaphysics of presence? Is it, in spite of (or because of) its modernist sympathies, beholden to a traditional philosophy of totality? Certainly ARNHEIM emphasizes the concept of structure. Although he gives a subtle analysis of the relationship between order and disorder, he does not make the concept of order into a problem. For ARNHEIM, order, in the sense of an organized totality, is the touchstone for aesthetic and cultural criticism.

Similarly, ARNHEIM takes his stand on the primacy of the visible. Vision is understood to be the royal road to truth. The objectivity, detachment and universality belonging to the visual field are taken as the essential characteristics of knowledge. ARNHEIM is sensitive to the effects of context upon visible form, but he does not seem to include himself as a theorist within this context. He often refers to himself as an observer and strives to maintain the position of detached objectivity that observation affords.

Furthermore, ARNHEIM consistently gives precedence to spatial relations over temporal ones; this in part reflects his preference for visual art above all other artistic modalities. Even music is understood by him in a spatial sense: the melody needs to be surveyed as a whole in order to be understood. Thus, it seems to me that temporal process tends to give way to spatial structure in ARNHEIM's Gestalt understanding of art.

Finally, language is given a secondary place in ARNHEIM's thinking in terms of its access to the real. Because language is discursive, it can never achieve the simultaneous co-presence of the parts that a true totality demands. In fact, ARNHEIM seeks to show that all valid thinking is essentially visual thinking: the sensible image contains the truth expressed through words (1969). For him, language approaches truth only insofar as it embodies the visual.

ARNHEIM's perspective has important implications for an understanding of the psychological function of the arts, in terms of their possible therapeutic effects. In the first place, it is clear that art, for ARNHEIM, is oriented toward the world and not the self. At several points in his writings, he inveighs against ''self-expression''. The goal of artists, for him, is not to express themselves, but rather to find the form for a more universal truth that can be shared by all.

Similarly, the purpose of artistic creativity is not to express one's emotions, but to give form to one's thoughts. ARNHEIM sees art as primarily a cognitive not an emotional activity. In *New Essays on the Psychology of Art* (1986), ARNHEIM stated that ''My own bias is that the arts fulfill, first of all, a cognitive function.'' A journal entry of 1978 characteristically notes that

> ''Far from 'expressing his emotions,' a good composer confines his feelings to his private life. When I hear music outpouring joy or suffering, I turn off the radio, irritated by someone inconsiderate enough to importune me with his own business.'' (1989)

In fact, ARNHEIM has a rather negative view of the very concept of emotion. In his article, ''Emotion and Feeling in Psychology and Art'', he suggested that emotion is a ''label that stops research''. Far from being a specific state of mind, emotion refers only to the ''*tension or excitement level*, produced by the interaction of mental forces […] Thus, emotion does not contribute impulses of its own; it is merely the effect of the play of forces taking place within the mind'' (1966).

ARNHEIM does not deny the role of emotion in mental life or in the arts. However, he tries to show that what counts in art is the dynamic structure of the percept. What we call ''emotion'' refers primarily, in his view, to the degree of tension produced by our perception of a significant whole. Although art has an emotional resonance, this is a by-product and not the source of artistic creativity.

One would expect ARNHEIM, then, to be rather unsympathetic to art therapy, in which the expression of the self and, particularly, the emotional component of the self, has been viewed as primary. In fact, however, ARNHEIM turns out to be a friend of therapy conducted by means of art, seeing it as a legitimate method for healing the disorderly world of the patient.

Again, it is in terms of the primacy of order that ARNHEIM approaches the topic. The art therapist, for him, helps patients to find a structural form in art that is missing in their own turbulent inner world. Thus, art becomes ''[…] the creation of a meaningful order offering a refuge from the unmanageable confusion of the outer reality.'' In fact, ARNHEIM suggests, the alienation of many contemporary artists could be overcome if they took a lesson from art therapists here: ''[…] the blessings experienced in therapy […] can remind artists everywhere what the function of art has always been and will always be'' (1992).

Although ARNHEIM does not develop a theory of art therapy, I believe that one could clearly derive such a theory from his work. In the first place, the primacy of sensible experience in ARNHEIM's writings indicates that ''talk therapy'' would be an incomplete form of treatment addressing only a partial component of the personality. The human personality is expressed through bodily presence in the world. Any breakdown of this personality requires a treatment that is an adequate response

to this bodily presence. Therapy must, therefore, be a therapy of the senses in order to be a therapy of the soul.

Secondly, ARNHEIM's analysis of the arts shows that art is a primary way of expressing our being-in-the-world. Art uses the media of the senses as its forms of expression. In so doing, art raises the capacity of our senses to a reflective and conscious level. The therapy of the senses must then be a therapy through art.

Moreover, I believe it is a fair conclusion to be drawn from ARNHEIM's writings to see art therapy as a primary rather than adjunctive mode of treatment. Art therapy is not a supplement to the ''real'' treatment carried out in verbal psychotherapy. Rather, by addressing the core of the personality, art therapy places itself at the center of therapeutic work.

This justification of art therapy, however, also implies a certain view of its nature. Within ARNHEIM's framework, mental illness would have to be seen as a break-down of structure. In the words of the poet, W. B. YEATS, ''Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.'' The integrated nature of the human personality, in which all the parts form a harmonious though complex whole, is destroyed. Whether through schizoid withdrawal into simplicity or catabolic breakdown into a chaos of conflicting elements, the overall unity of the personality is lost.

Consequently, the goal of art therapy should be to restore the structural wholeness of the personality. The arts, as the highest embodiment of order, structure and balance, serve to re-integrate the discordant elements of the person and to enable him or her to express the complex meaning of their lives in a significant form. The therapeutic value of the arts, for ARNHEIM, consists in their capacity to bring order to a dis-ordered soul. Art therapy can overcome inner chaos by providing the means to structural integration.

I have attempted here to draw some conclusions, in accordance with the general tendencies of ARNHEIM's thinking, as to how a theory of art therapy based on his principles might be formulated. Among contemporary art therapists, Shaun McNIFF, in particular, has been influenced by ARNHEIM's work and has attempted to integrate his emphasis on structure with an appreciation of the possibilities of spontaneous play (1981).

In general, it seems to me that ARNHEIM's thinking does provide the basis for a coherent framework for the practice of art therapy. Grounded in a scientific psychology and the humanistic practice of the history of art, ARNHEIM's theory of artistic expression offers a conception of human nature that explains the necessity and effectiveness of the therapeutic use of the arts. Such a conception seems to me to be necessary if art therapy is to achieve an understanding of its own possibility.

Moreover, the emphasis on structure in ARNHEIM's psychology goes a long way to explaining both mental illness and the kind of treatment that it requires. If illness is the result of a break-down of structure, then the cure would seem to be a re-structuring and reintegration of the personality. Art therapy, then, would be important as a means of carrying out such a re-integration.

However, I wonder whether the consistent emphasis on structure and the consequent opposition to chaos and break-down in ARNHEIM's work can also be seen as possible limitations in his thinking. Just as post-modernism in philosophy and the arts has challenged ARNHEIM's conception of art and its role in the modern world, so a similar trend in psychological thought can be understood to be a challenge to any conception of art therapy that can be drawn from ARNHEIM's writings.

In the first place, it is questionable whether the personality, any more than the world, can be interpreted as a structured totality. In Jacques LACAN's view of the development of the subject, for example, the integral self, capable of grasping its wholeness in a glance, is the product of an imaginary identification in the mirror stage of development. The child, according to LACAN, experiences its own fragmentation, but wishes to escape from the chaos that this implies. Accordingly, when it grasps its image in the mirror (or in the gaze of one who mirrors it), the child eagerly seizes upon this image as an expression of its true identity. The adult, consequently, who remains in this imaginary stage of identification, will search always for the person, institution, work of art or, for that matter, theory, that reinforces his or her view of themselves as an integrated whole (1977). As LACAN once rmarked, ''The idea of the unifying unity of the human condition has always had on me the effect of a scandalous lie'' (1972).

LACAN's solution, ultimately, is to transcend the imaginary in the direction of the symbolic, which demands the recognition of otherness as an essential component of the self. I am different from myself, and I can only express this difference in modes of signifying that point beyond themselves. This perspective accounts for LACAN's preference for surrealist poetry as well, perhaps, as his own rather gnomic style of expression.

One need not be a Lacanian to take seriously his questioning of the principle of totality as it applies to the personality. Is the integrated self a myth that we invent to avoid our fragmentation? Is chaos more than a mere reflection of a disordered period of history? Rather, does it perhaps express an essential truth about the human condition? If so, then how can we distinguish the chaotic effects of catabolic breakdown from the ''normal'' non-identity of the subject?

Furthermore, if chaos is intrinsic to human being, is it appropriate to treat catabolic break-down by means of the building up of order? Might it not be more appropriate to find creative forms of disorder to match the experience of a fragmented self? The psychoanalyst D.W. WINNICOTT's conception of ''formlessness'' comes close to this kind of perspective. It might be interesting to contrast a conception of art therapy based on the notion of formlessness with ARNHEIM' s emphasis on structure.

For WINNICOTT (1971), the analyst's attempt to find order in the patient's chaotic presentation of self reflects anxiety on the analyst's part. The latter fears his or her own internal fragmentation and thus strives for wholeness by foreclosing the space of formlessness that the analytic encounter produces. As a result, the patient either remains stuck in an adaptive mode of behavior, the ''false self'' system, or

else internalizes the aggression produced by a thwarted creative expression of self and enters into depression.

If the analyst were able, instead, to tolerate a period of formlessness, then a creative use of symbol formation might emerge. WINNICOTT described this dwelling in formlessness as a rudimentary form of play. The notion of formlessness as play needs to be correlated with WINNICOTT's well-known conception of the transitional space. The transitional space between self and other is one in which the clarity of oppositions that enables order to be achieved does not exist. Transitional space is disorderly, multiple, ambiguous and confused. Meaning has not yet emerged. For this reason, it is impossible to know or control what takes place within this space. Being-with replaces doing, as purposive activity gives way to letting-be.

If we recall that the notion of transitional space is seen by WINNICOTT as the model for all creative experience as well as for the practice of art, then the consequences for art therapy become clear. From this perspective, art therapy is not seen as an attempt to find or produce order within the disorderly inner world of the client. Rather play and art are used as forms of formlessness - as media for attaining the state of productive unintegration that allows the creative attainment of meaning.

Thus, if we were to develop a theory of art therapy based on a chaotic or unintegrated view of the self, would it not emphasize spontaneity, play and improvisation rather than structure, form and balance? Would it not be more accepting of aggression in its capacity to de-structure an imaginary order? Would it, therefore, not encourage formlessness as an essential way of being rather than seek to find orderly outcomes?

On the other hand, the value of ARNHEIM's work is that it reminds us that formlessness is not enough. The work of art always presents itself as an ordered whole. Can we demand any less for the products of art therapy? To see a client's work as only self-expression would be to limit it just as much as if we were to see it as only a formal structure. Form and feeling, then, go together. As McNIFF has stated, ''[…] *art intensifies feeling while simultaneously providing a protective and guiding structure*''(1981). Similarly, in the expressive arts therapies, Paolo KNILL has developed a conception of an ''*oeuvre*-oriented'' approach which sees the making of works of art as the shaping of forms which have an ''effective reality'' for the client, i.e., an effect which ''moves'' or ''touches'' them so that their experience of the world is fundamentally affected and their restrictive ''range of play'' is unbound (KNILL, 2001).

Ultimately, perhaps, it is not a question of an ''either-or'' - either structure or chaos, form or formlessness. Perhaps each has its place within a fully developed theory of art therapy. ARNHEIM takes us as far as we can go in one direction. A more comprehensive view might wish to incorporate the counter-perspective to his own.

ARNHEIM's emphasis upon structure, as we have noted, results from taking the point of view of the observer. As he has himself said, ''[…] my life has been one of contemplation rather than action; and since I watch the artists, who are contemplators, I am twice-removed from active life […] I am […] the little owl perched on the shoulder of Athene'' (1989). The little owl, of course, represents wisdom, the wisdom that comes from witnessing the tumult of history.

Rudolph ARNHEIM has been a witness to the chaos of the past century as well as to the creative attempts of artists to overcome it. His work is a testament to the human capacity to master disorder and to find meaning and balance in the world through artistic creativity. His writings thereby testify to the nobility of art. As we begin to experience the first years of the new millenium, we can only wonder whether this nobility is enough, whether it can contain the tendencies to destruction that we see around us.

Can the arts as they have presented themselves in modernity resist the catabolic break-down of our culture or is it necessary to find new artistic forms to express and live with this catabolism? Perhaps, in a homeopathic manner, these forms themselves need to embody some of the chaos that they encounter. Post-modernism may be, in part, a symptom of cultural breakdown and disintegration; but it may also be a way of creatively encountering and embodying that breakdown in order to find new and more appropriate forms of meaning.

A similar question may be asked of psychology, in particular of Gestalt psychology. Is the Gestalt emphasis on structural integration itself a kind of modernism that needs to be re-thought within the framework of a post-modern epoch? The conception of an ordered totality is only partially adequate as a means of encompassing the chaotic multiplicity of contemporary experience. Gestalt theory tends to look for order and structure everywhere. Even ARNHEIM's conception of complexity as an essential element in the creation of order ultimately sees structure as the overcoming of contradiction and chaos in human experience.

However, the legacy of post-modernism is that chaos is essential to human life. Multiplicity is not the antagonist in a drama played out by the conflict between order and disorder. Rather chaotic multiplicity and non-identity is intrinsic to all human experience. Formlessness can be a creative as well as a destructive force.

The important thing is to distinguish between violent forms of destruction and the destructuring that takes place in any creative process. Violent destruction forces a breakdown that impedes the transformation of a person or group. The destructuring that is part of the creative act, on the other hand, is a necessity in the production of forms adequate to experience. There can be no transition without such an act of destructuring.

Moreover, what post-modernism teaches us is that such a process of destructuring is ongoing; it is not a mere stage in the emergence of order. Rather, the dynamism of order itself depends on the element of creative chaos within it. Every totality is non-identical with itself; even the body is, we might say, a ''fragmented totality'' (LEV-

INE, 1996). It can never become a whole in the sense of that which is identical with itself.

Life itself, we might say, is non-identity; its dynamism consists in being other than itself, containing difference within itself. Temporality is another name for this non-identity in terms of which we all live and have our being. In every structure there is a necessary flow; else there is no life in it.

Ultimately, we might say, totality does not exist. That is to say, the word does not name an entity but rather indicates the horizon of all being. ''World'' is another name for this totality of being which cannot be identified; perhaps, as KANT said, other names are ''soul'' or ''God.''

And we, who attempt to name and think this totality, are creatures within it, limited by our incapacity to stand outside of the world and survey it. This limitation, however, is also the condition of our very being: existence, as HEIDEGGER has said, is being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*). But to be in the world is to be unable to grasp it as an objective whole. We are always in a hermeneutic circle, in which we who seek to understand are part of that which is to be understood.

The challenge for Gestalt theory today is, not to abandon but to re-think the concept of structure to encompass an element of non-identity and difference. Gestalt thinking has, I believe, an important role to play in the contemporary intellectual scene. Its emphasis on order, structure and form can be a dynamic component in a world-view in which chaos, anarchy and formlessness are given priority. However, it seems to me, the very concept of a Gestalt as a meaningful totality must be revised to take account of the principle of difference which is at the basis of the critique of the metaphysics of presence. Otherwise Gestalt theory runs the risk of being an intellectual holdover from the cultural epoch of modernism, upholding once revolutionary standards that in the contemporary world serve a reactionary role.

Can we conceive of order in such a way that chaos is given its due? What concepts and principles would be adequate for this task? How, in particular, can Gestalt theory be re-formulated to be adequate to the experience of human beings in the post-modern world of today? Perhaps Gestalt theory itself needs to suffer a breakdown; perhaps it must allow itself to experience a de-structuring that would lead to the emergence of a new concept of order, one that would encompass chaos within it.

And perhaps this development will also lead to a renewed emphasis on the importance of the arts for human life. For, just as in modernism, it is primarily in post-modern art that new forms have been developed that break down the structures we have been given and show us the world in which we actually live. The arts, as ARNHEIM has emphasized, present us with the most essential aspects of our humanity. By revealing to us the world as it is, with its chaotic as well as orderly aspects, the arts give us the ability to encounter the real. This is, perhaps, their therapeutic function as well: not to present an idealized harmonious totality but to allow us to come to terms with our own experience of disintegration and to transform it into play. If we are capable of playing in the ruins of our culture, we may yet find new forms with which to build a world.

Summary

This article is a critical examination of Rudolph ARNHEIM's Gestalt psychology of art. ARNHEIM's aesthetics is based on the validation of structured order in perceptual experience and, consequently, in aesthetic experience as well. His conception of order as structured totality is drawn from Gestalt theory and finds a correspondence in tendencies in modern art. However, the post-modern world is characterized by fragmentation and disorder, as is post-modern art. Can ARNHEIM's thinking and, by implication, Gestalt theory itself, adequately grasp the de-structuring which is the principle of post-modernity? The article suggests that a post-modern aesthetic requires a new concept of totality that can encompass difference as well as identity. The question is raised as to whether Gestalt theory itself needs to re-think its basic concepts to be able to take account of contemporary experience and thought.

Zusammenfassung

Im Kern dieses Beitrags geht es um eine kritische Würdigung von Rudolph ARNHEIMs Gestaltpsychologie der Kunst. ARNHEIM, der zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts in Berlin als Kind einer assimilierten jüdischen Familie geboren wurde und die Wirren des ersten Weltkrieges, die der Weimarer Republik und die Vorläufer der Nazi-Zeit hautnah erlebte, sah sowohl in der Gestaltpsychologie als auch in der Kunst einen Gegenpol zur erfahrenen Unordnung und Turbulenz seiner Epoche. Beide **–** Gestaltpsychologie und Kunst **–** hatte er Gelegenheit in Berlin zu studieren, und sie bildeten die Basis seines späteren umfangreichen Schaffens.

ARNHEIMs Konzept von Ästhetik basiert auf der Bedeutung strukturierter Ordnung bei der Wahrnehmung und damit auch in der ästhetischen Erfahrung selbst. Seine Vorstellung von Ordnung als einer strukturierten Ganzheit stammt aus der Gestaltpsychologie und findet ihre Korrespondenz in bedeutsamen Strömungen der modernen Kunst. Diese Korrespondenz zwischen ARNHEIMs Verständnis von Ästhetik, den Gestaltprinzipien und der Auseinandersetzung um Chaos und Ordnung in der modernen Kunst wird im vorliegenden Essay anhand von zahlreichen Textstellen belegt und diskutiert.

Im Gegensatz zur Moderne und ihren ästhetischen Vorstellungen ist die gegenwärtige sogenannte „Post-Moderne" durch eine Betonung der Fragmentierung und der Unordnung unserer Welt gekennzeichnet **–** was sich auch in der postmodernen Kunst widerspiegelt. Kann, so wird kritisch gefragt, ARNHEIMs Ansatz und Konzeption und, damit verbunden, die Gestalt-Theorie selbst diese De-Strukturierung, ja, Destruktion in jedweder Form, und Fragmentierung, die sich als Prinzipien der Postmoderne darstellen, noch adäquat erfassen?

Dieser Essay schlägt im Hinblick auf diese Frage vor, daß postmoderne Ästhetik ein neues Konzept von Ganzheitlichkeit braucht, welches sowohl Unterschiede als auch Gleichheiten umfassen und ausdrücken kann. Dies mündet in die Frage, wie weit die Gestalt-Theorie selbst ihre Grundannahmen überdenken bzw. reformulieren müsse, um besser die gegenwärtigen Erfahrungen und das damit verbundene Denken zu berücksichtigen, wo Destruktion und Chaos einen weitaus größeren Stellenwert haben als früher. Wenn die Gestalt-Theorie sich stärker dieser Herausforderung stellen würde, den Wandel der Weltsicht (und des Welterlebens) von der Moderne zur Postmoderne theoretisch aufzugreifen, könnte sie eine bedeutendere Rolle in der gegenwärtigen intellektuellen Szene einnehmen.

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Anschrift des Autors

Prof. Steve K. Levine, PhD, D.S.Sc

Devision of Social Science

York University

4700 Keele Street

Toronto Antario

Canada M3J 1P3