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Presumptuous claims

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1

Trying to make sense of the world and to classify it probably goes back as far as there have been systems for observing differences. The capacity to make distinctions is the first step towards sorting out, ordering and systematizing the world. Amoeba, which have no sensory organs, no nerve systems or brain are nonetheless capable of recognizing whether there is nourishment near them or not. They do this by registering concentrations of matter in their environment, in a process of perception called chemotaxis.

Even simple surfaces of objects can generate distinctions by allowing a certain proportion of the wavelength of light to pass into their interiors and be stored there in the form of warmth. We perceive the components of a light wave that a surface reflects into the environment as its colour.[1] If we see colours, what we are observing is rejected remnants reflected by closed bodies that have been sent on a journey out into the world again. We can't see what is allowed through by the surfaces of bodies.

Networks or membranes are likewise simple ordering systems that create a distinction between objects that can pass through the mesh because they are smaller than the mesh and objects that get stuck in the net because they are too large. Sorting out objects into two different piles according to certain characteristics such as large/small, light/dark, coloured/black-and-white, beautiful/ugly, useful/useless and so on produces simple binary codes for dividing up the world.

In principle, that means that the world itself is in a position to make distinctions, order and sort itself out. This generates the remarkable paradox that it seems as if the world were constructed to observe itself and make distinctions. In his book *The Laws of Form*, mathematician and logician George Spencer-Brown draws attention to this fundamental connection resulting from any attempt to produce order or distinctions. The measuring process divides the world into two zones, a measured one and one that does the measuring. The latter part, which does the measuring, cannot in turn itself be measured.

'Let us then consider, for a moment, the world as described by the physicist. It consists of a number of fundamental particles which, if shot through their own space, appear as waves, and are thus (as in Chapter 11), of the same laminated structure as pearls or onions, and other wave forms called electromagnetic which it is convenient, by Occam's razor, to consider as travelling through space with a standard velocity. All these appear bound by certain natural laws which indicate the form of their relationship. Now the physicist himself, who describes all this, is, in his own account, himself constructed of it. He is, in short, made of a conglomeration of the very particulars he describes, no more, no less, bound together by and obeying such general laws as he himself has managed to find and to record. Thus we cannot escape the fact that the world we know is constructed in order (and thus in such a way as to be able) to see itself. This is indeed amazing. Not so much in view of what it sees, although this may appear fantastic enough, but in respect of the fact that it *can see at all*. But *in order* to do so, evidently it must first cut itself up into at least one state which sees, and at least one other state which is seen. In this severed and mutilated condition, whatever it sees is *only partially* itself. We may take it that the world undoubtedly is itself (i.e. is indistinct from itself), but, in any attempt to see itself as an object, it must, equally undoubtedly, act so as to make itself distinct from, and therefore false to, itself. In this condition it will always partially elude itself. It seems hard to find an acceptable answer to the question of how or why the world conceives a desire, and discovers an ability, to see itself, and appears to suffer the process.'[2]

2

Measuring the world therefore not only makes one ordering system visible but also makes another one disappear. That is the paradox and at the same time the presumption of measurement. A measurement is a form that always has two sides, i.e. a measured inside and an unmeasured outside. The unmeasured outside is the point where the world disappears, where it becomes invisible, unobservable, concealed, latent and excluded. Every measurement thus has its costs and its benefits. The costs reside in the price of blindness or, perhaps one should say, the bedazzlement you pay to get the result. The price consists of what is excluded by the classification system—what it makes invisible, veils, covers and does not name. The benefits on the other hand comprise the classification system and systematization that you can achieve via the measuring procedure. One of the first to grasp this fundamental connection between measured results and the measuring process in theoretical terms as well was physician and philosopher Werner Heisenberg. In his early writings on the uncertainty principle, he addresses this problem clearly. The

measuring process changes the measured result. And there is no measured result that can ever have been independent of a particular measuring procedure.[3]

3

Every form of measuring thus sorts the world. It divides it into two parts, an ordered and a measured part, and an unordered and chaotic part. The outer side of order, measurement, and systematization is disorder, indeterminateness or chaos. The outer side of reason is madness.[4] Every attempt at systematizing an order has to be seen against the background of this excluded element. That means that measurements, orders and systematisations not only make something visible or produce insights but also make the world disappear on the outside, making it invisible, indeterminable, immeasurable and unsystematic. The question therefore is which side of order we ourselves are on or want to be on. Do we operate only on the inside of determination, i.e. in the system of measurement in the zone where order, system and the power of reason prevail, or do we wander as intellectual nomads outside the disciplining and disciplined power of the scientific set-up? Thus, in the matter of the way the world is ordered, it always involves the boundary, crossing it, changing sides, reconnoitring and where the boundaries are anyway. What happens if I cross it as an artist? What happens if I cross it as a scientist? These are questions that are widely discussed today under the heading of artistic research.[5]

4

If we consider this topic as applied to the world of museums and ask how museums generate scientific connections, we likewise have to engage with this distinction between fading in and fading out, making visible and causing to disappear. With their ordering systems, museums make just as much visible as they cause to disappear. They suppress certain forms of knowledge as much as they bring out others and make them visible. Ultimately, an ideological critique of museums needs to be attached to that.

The Universalmuseum Joanneum was founded in 1811 by Archduke Johann for the purpose of making learning easier and stimulating the population's desire for knowledge. It was a creature of the Enlightenment and part of the education of mankind, the process of civilizing the wild barbarian into an *honnête homme*.[6] The museum put together by the Archduke was to be handed over to the estates 'for educating the youth of Styria, expanding knowledge, encouraging hard work and the industry of the population of Styria.'[7]

Museums as institutions turn the diversity of the world into museum exhibits. They take objects out of the river of life and the perishability of matter and make them permanent. If you consider the whole process of making objects into museum exhibits, it begins with

collecting. This may happen from personal preference, as with the various *wunderkammer* of Archduke Ferdinand II of Tyrol at Schloss Ambras near Innsbruck, Emperor Rudolph's curio cabinet in Prague or Prince Paul Eszterházy I's at Forchtenstein in Burgenland. But it also can be done by means of a systematic collection policy based on an explicit collecting philosophy that sets up or develops precise criteria for which things should be selected for the museum and acquired from the profuse diversity of a period.Once the artefact is acquired, there follows the process of archiving, classifying, systematizing and setting it up as a museum exhibit. The historic importance of an object turned into a museum piece is the result not solely of the fact of its preservation or collection but only of its having been investigated for museum or scientific purposes as well.
This includes the scientific documentation of the object. It is divided into primary and secondary documentation. The primary documentation includes documentation of the find, morphological description and the systematic classification in accordance with rules of the relevant source science and the classification principles of the collection field concerned. [8]

Over and beyond scientific documentation, the museum piece has on the one hand to be preserved for posterity for the long term as cultural heritage. On the other hand, it has to be presented for public edification and put on show. It has therefore in turn to be looked after for conservation purposes and where necessary given restoration treatment. Moreover, the object has to be presented, published and made available to the public. These twin tasks of the museum—long-term preservation and the presentation of artefacts—set up an irresolvable conflict that has to be dealt with over and again between conservationists and curators. Only through the procedure of presentation, interpretation and publication can a museum object be experienced and passed on in the whole breadth of its historic authenticity. [9]

5

How does knowledge arise in a museum? Measuring, classifying, systematizing, archiving and storing do not in themselves constitute knowledge. That is often misunderstood. Naturally, knowledge from the field of scientific understanding goes into archiving the object. But that does not mean that the knowledge deployed for investigation automatically becomes visible in exhibiting objects to the public. For something to become knowledge, several conditions need to be met in principle. A complete memory process has to go through three phases, namely encoding, storage, and retrieval. Only when archived objects are fetched out of the depository of the museum and thus made topical again do they become the object of knowledge-forming processes in the present time. If a living person of the present day, *qua* contemporary, connects with artefacts of the past, knowledge may arise. To be able to answer the question of how knowledge is

generated in the museum, it is necessary to define the term knowledge more precisely and distinguish it from related concepts such as opinion, conviction or belief.

6

On the whole, we may distinguish two different forms of knowledge. The first may be designated as 'knowing how' or 'ability to'. This is sometimes called procedural or implicit knowledge.[10] Implicit knowledge functions unconsciously, automatically and habitually. It is a form of knowledge that is available to the person concerned without attention, cognitive effort or consciousness. Generally it cannot be formulated in language, or only with difficulty. It is the knowledge that an artist has. If a person can do something, i.e. has an ability to do something particularly, for example, ride a bike, play the piano or draw a portrait, we may justly say of this person that he or she 'knows' how to ride a bicycle, play the piano or draw portraits. Ability is an example of implicit knowledge that is not necessarily subject to linguistic formulation.

The second type of knowledge can be designated as 'knowing that' or simply 'knowing'. This kind of knowledge is often also called propositional or explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is conscious. It can be formulated in language, and is subject to the constraints of attention. It is an attentive knowledge whose bandwidth and resources are limited by the involvement of consciousness. If someone can express in speech what he knows and if what he says is true, we may say of this person that he 'knows' something. 'Knowing' is an example of explicit, propositionally formulated knowledge articulable in language.

7

As sharper conditions of truth exist for the term knowledge than for opinions or convictions, it is sensible to draw a line between this term and other concepts similar to it in meaning.[11] Concepts such as belief, conviction, opinion or experience represent concepts that are closely related to the concept of knowledge but not identical to it. Knowing comes with stricter conditions of justification and substantiation.

In *Theætetus*, Plato defines knowledge *(episteme)* as true opinion (*doxa*) combined with an explanation *(logos)*.[12] The difference between subjective opinion and objective knowledge is linked to the capacity for explanation. This sounds very modern since, in the *Baum der Erkenntnis*, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela likewise associate scientific insight with the capacity to supply an explanation.[13] According to American philosopher Edmund Gettier, if someone can justify his opinion and deliver a well-founded explanation, he has not only a subjective opinion, but also objective, true knowledge of the world.[14]

Now, does this also apply to visual or artistic knowledge? Here, we need to first clarify what we mean by 'visual', 'shaping' or 'artistic' knowledge. By way of an initial definition, it will have to suffice that this is understood as including all forms of knowledge production, distribution and reception that can be generated, organized and diffused with the aid of sight.

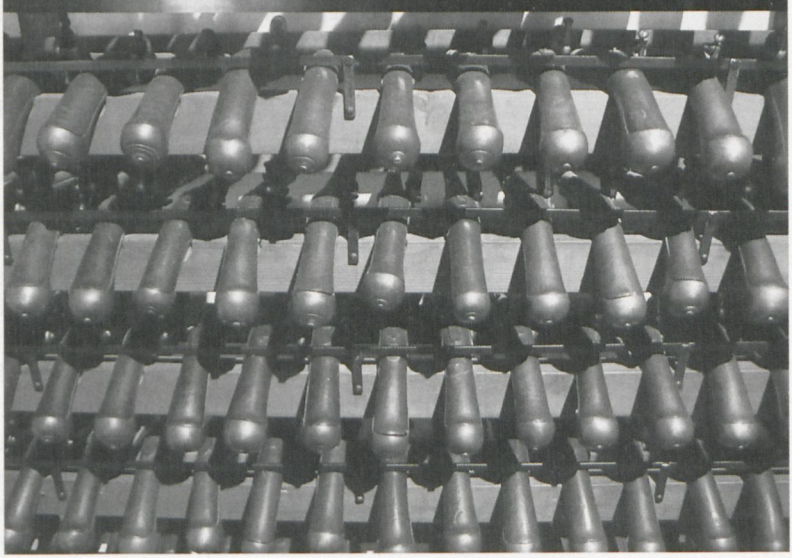
Specific, visually based knowledge would thus be, in contrast to a visual idea, conviction or opinion, the capacity to explain and justify something subjectively imagined by visual, design or artistic means.[15] Do we need to make concessions here in the justification and claim to truth? I do not think so. Combining a visual idea or notion with an artistic styling allows it to become substantiated visual, designed or artistic knowledge about the world. Is that enough for a definition? That pushes the problem on to what we mean by 'justified'. What are the conditions that make an explanation 'justified'?

Many modern definitions of knowledge are based in principle in one form or another on this early definition of Plato's. Thus, in his early essay *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?,* Edmund Gettier for example distinguishes three different conditions for knowing. A given person (S) knows that something (P) is the case if

i. P is true,
ii. S believes that P is the case, and
iii. S is justified in believing that P is the case.[16]

Here again, knowing is linked with concepts of truth, opinion and justification. In all cases, it is clear that a necessary and (possibly) adequate condition of knowing must be connected with the concepts of conviction, justification and truth. What does it mean that someone is justified in believing that something is the case? When is anything ever justified? What do the procedures of justification, substantiation and the discovery of truth involve? How can we talk of substantiation or justification—and above all justifying it to whom?

Information and knowledge are frequently confused with each other. In itself, information is not knowledge. It is a necessary preliminary stage that under certain circumstances can become knowledge. Only once information has been imparted to others can it become knowledge. Private information or information not imparted that is not made publicly available is not knowledge but a secret. Knowledge is always socially formulated if it is knowledge. It is imparted, shared or communicated. In Latin, *communicare* means to have something in common or to share something. The shared involvement is the decisive interface and the social basis whereby information becomes public, shared knowledge. Information becomes knowledge via a social process of publication. And it is justified vis-à-vis others in the social



process. It is then either justified or not. That applies as much to implicit as to explicit knowledge. Ability is justified via the quality of its results, i.e. ultimately via an aesthetic judgment, whereas propositional knowledge on the other hand is justified by the judgment of truth.

8

Any attempt to classify something generates a world therefore, as we have seen. The construction of an ordering system is an attempt to reduce uncertainty and achieve a high degree of predictability. The invention of an ordering system however at the same time also generates a statement about the way the world is or is not. Any attempt to design a classification system thus has ontological implications. It is the basis of a perspective or an outlook. That is precisely where works of art play a decisive role in the construction of ordering systems and the generation of ontology. Pictures of the world become images of the world, by generating and producing and making visible world situations via their specific structure. Works of art that produce ordering systems or develop systematic structures create an ordered image of the world.
The exhibition looks at the way contemporary art designs ordered systems. The diversity of reality is collected in an artistic fashion, ordered, archived and systematized. This is done according to artistic and not scientific rules. The effect of this is to produce an artistic view of the world, an ontology of art, that is possible only in art and via art itself in the first place. That means that ultimately the differences between scientific and artistic knowledge systems are a meta-theme of the exhibition. Artistic classification systems endeavour above all to facilitate an implicit, aesthetic experience of nexuses in an ordering system in which on the one hand the world can be interpreted and understood as it appears to the artist in his work. On the other hand, however, the observer's self, which is part of the world, gains a better self-understanding of his personal, social and cultural identity.

Artistic ordering systems indicate from the other, unmarked outer side in what areas scientific ordering systems can cause reality to disappear. Artistic research can make visible what science neglects, forgets, excludes or suppresses, and turns it into a visible form as an aesthetic counter design, counter image on autonomous reality structure. Aesthetic and scientific ordering systems mutually comment and criticize each other. Aesthetic ordering systems of art challenge scientific ordering systems' power of definition. Scientific ordering systems in their turn attack aesthetic ordering systems as unjustified structures of world, and question the truth of their form. Both ordering systems thus have a critical relationship to distinctions. They expose the blindness of the other discipline as a kind of bedazzlement and flag the ideological claim of measurement and ordering as presumption and regulation. In this mutual and critical

relationship, art brings out the relativity of science, and science the relativity of art. Both social systems deconstruct the absoluteness of their respective ideological claims to power as presumptuous claims. (Translation: Paul Aston)