Art as mimesis : Presenting a World / Representing the World

Introductory Speech Delivered at the First Seijo International Colloquium of Art Studies

TSUGAMI Eske

1. "Art" as "Representation" of the "World"

At the very outset of this Colloquium, which bears the title "Art as Representation of the World," it seems a good policy to make explicit the concepts of representation, the world, and art, for the purpose of securing a common denominator for our subsequent discussions.

(a) Representation

Obviously, representation implies two things : a thing representing and a thing represented.

Now, in the remark "A is a representation of B," A and B are not interchangeable. The *Pietà* is a representation of the Virgin and Child and not vice versa. In this way, *representation* implies a distinction between the original and its derivative. This distinction is a qualitative as well as an ontological one. That is to say, a representation, unlike a reproduction, is never confused with its original. Difference is more salient than similarity in representation.

We can see this also from another angle. In order for my utterance "This is a representation of X" to be meaningful, some difference is expected in this utterance from the simple one "This is X." When I say, "This is a representation of X," it means, "The author has represented X to be this." It will be worth noting that the judgment "This is X" is itself an identification of two different things, the subject "this" and the predicate "X." If you do not bother to make

such a judgment, "this" remains "this" and no identification occurs. Identification, i.e. considering (things) as the same, presupposes difference. A simple judgment thus implies difference. But representation does more. Its implication is that this representation differs from that one according to who represents X and how X is represented. This may be formulated as $A=x_1$, $A=x_2$, $A=x_3$, and there will be as many x's as there are representations. Representation therefore boils down to different ways of predicating of the same subject. To formulate this as a second desideratum, a representation has to attribute a new predicate to the subject.

(b) The World

As to the concept of the *world*, I would only like to define it as the sum of the correlatives of our experience, leaving behind the serious question of what the world is. Following this definition, we can include *this table*, as a correlative of our experience, in the "world," with the corollary that a representation of this table is also a representation of the world. Observe that the table presupposes a space in which it is located (the AV Hall at Seijo, Tokyo, to be specific), materials which it is made of (a tree growing in a wood, to name the most important one), and people who made it, use it, and will dispose of it (to say nothing of the people who see it, listening to my speech). In sum, this table is a part of the world. And if we say, "*I* am injured," when we hurt some part of our body, a representation of this table is justifiably a representation of the world. This is the first notandum about the *world*.

A second notandum is that the world, as opposed to the universe or space, is taken to be a closed entity which we can expect to grasp intellectually in some way or other. To put it the other way round, we, in talking of the *world*, conceive of it as something meaningful. The world invites us to interpret it.

These remarks put together mean that everything in the world awaits different predications in the form of representation in the arts. Now, predicate or *praedicatum* is the Latin translation of the Greek word *κατηγορία*. For Aristotle the ten categories or *κατηγορίαι* are the ways in which something is judged. They are substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state,

action, and affection. For example, when I say, "This is a table," I am judging it from the viewpoint of substance. When I say, "This is 60 cm wide," I am judging it from the viewpoint of quantity, whereas when I say, "This is brown," I am judging it from the viewpoint of quality etc.[1] I leave it open whether this enumeration is complete or free of redundancy for the ways of *being*, because my point here is only that there are some other ways of *being* than *substance*.

Then, if representation lies in predication, different ways of representation should correspond to different ways of predication or *κατηγορίαι*, or different combinations of them.

Such a position opens up a new perspective of art in which the so-called imitative arts and the non-imitative arts are of little difference, as far as their representational function is concerned. We may tentatively put it like this : the imitative arts like painting and sculpture predicate of something chiefly in *substance* (as "This is the Virgin and Child"), while the non-imitative arts like music and architecture do in *relation* (as "This (note) is higher than that"), or in *place* (as "This (pillar) is in line with that"), etc. In both cases, however, an artwork *is* representative of the world, provided every part of the work stands for something particular of the world in some category. I will come back to this issue again.

(c) Art

Concerning the concept *art* I will merely make a preliminary remark, because I am well aware that a due discussion about "What is art?" would trigger an intense, prolonged argument in its own right. So, I refrain from making a frontal attack and restrict myself to the question of whether an art without representation is possible.

The minimum requirement for something being a work of art is that it be and look like an intended product of a human being. If it fails to look so, it ceases to be a work of art. This means a work of art is something which is not only what it is. In other words, it has a meaning. But a word has a meaning, this table has

1) Aristotle, *Categories*, Chapter 4, 1b25-2a4.

a meaning, the world has a meaning, too. In what way does a work of art differ from other meaningful things?

As is well known, *art* etymologically meant "skill." When in the eighteenth-century people distinguished what we now call art from among the arts in the wider, etymological sense, they did so because it was more of an art (skill) than other arts like the art of weaving or the art of mnemonics were. This is the new conception of art as skill for skill's sake, in which art does not serve other uses but its own.[2] Compared to this, in the case of a tool it is shaped in conformity with the use it serves. Its form can be explained by its usefulness, which forms its meaning. In the case of a work of art, on the other hand, its form must be explained out of the work itself. Put in more concrete terms, the meaning of a work of art is different, each time it looks different. Form and content are inseparable, if you prefer to use a conventional expression. A work of art has this kind of meaning, which I call representation. As this is the least common denominator in every work of art, it is legitimate to conclude that there is no art lacking a representational aspect.

2. How Does Each Art Represent the World?

Given the impracticability of discussing every art form here, we shall take up sculpture, tragedy, and music, which are severally most typical cases of artistic representation.

(a) Sculpture

Let us begin with the (seemingly) most obvious case of representation. A statue is a three-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional person, animal, or the like. The Virgin and Child, or Mary and Christ, are represented as the statue *Pietà*, according to the category *substance*. There is no doubt, it might seem.

---

2) Imitation as opposed to production was its original conception.

But what makes this statue the Virgin and Child? On what grounds can it be identified as the Virgin and Child? It is not the substance of this statue, marble, needless to say. Rather, it is the form. To be more precise, the absolute size of the statue matters less than the mutual relationship of each part to another. It is on account of the inner relations of the parts that the *Pietà* is identified as the Virgin and Child. This connotes that Michelangelo had to put his image of the Virgin and Child (if not real) into relational terms. Accordingly, it is only as the result of the fact that the statue *Pietà* is a representation in *relation* of the Virgin and Child that the former is a representation in substance of the latter. This is also how the second desideratum of *representation* is met.

(b) Tragedy

I take up tragedy for a second form of artistic representation, because the problem of separation and connection between the real world and the world represented is most conspicuously at issue in tragedy. Nevertheless, as I have already discussed this subject elsewhere on the basis of Aristotle's theory,[3] we only need to quote some conclusions here.

Tragedy shows, or is a representation of, what consequences one action necessarily or probably entails. And in feeling "pity and fear" at a tragedy we do not look upon the events on the stage as somebody else's problem. This means that the world on the stage stands in relation to our actual world. Tragedy functions as a model by which or a prism through which to view the real world. The image projected this way is the world as a realm of causality.

In addition to the points already made in my previous paper, it should be noted that particularities like who, where, or when in the initial setting matter less than the course of events. Put in terms of category, tragic representation is more in *relation* than in *substance*.

Sophocles' *Oedipus* may serve as a typical example. Oedipus, as King of

3) Tsugami Eske, "In What Sense Is the 'Real World' Real? : Re-Interpreting Aristotle's Discussion of Poetry Compared with History," *Selected Papers of the 15th International Congress of Aesthetics*, Tokyo, 2003, pp. 434–439.

Thebes, tries to find who killed the previous king Laius, in the hope that with the banishment of the murderer his city will be freed from the current epidemic. However, Oedipus digs his own grave in carrying out his *bona-fide* action, because he himself is the true criminal. This truth further involves his identity as a patricide and as an incestuous son. To be sure, all these disasters were caused by his own fault, in killing someone, marrying a woman without knowing who she (and he himself) was, and in compelling the reluctant Teiresias to tell the *truth* of the murder etc. But was he able to avoid these by foreseeing their horrific consequences? By no means. Oedipus, and any other human being, cannot precisely know at the moment of his action what will ensue from it. It is true that he did foresee something, from his own point of view. But what he saw was different from what his action meant *in the world*.

This story tells us three things. First, the meaning of an action becomes clear only retrospectively. Second, tragedy is not about this or that particular person's case, but about human beings in general. Third, tragedy has the world as its theme.

(c) Music

Music is usually classified as non-imitative or non-representational art, on the grounds that it normally does not represent this or that particular thing or event in the outer world. However, it does not necessarily follow that music does not represent anything.

Richard Kuhns has considered music as a representational art.[4] Although his argument is often superficial and insufficient to establish his point, he is sharp-sighted in discerning mutual referential character in musical notes, motives, and passages. Based on his opinion and our grasp of representation, I argue that music does represent the world, if not in substance, but in relation.

In western music, typically music of the classical period, one event is succeeded by another according to certain rules like scales, meters, or cadences, and

4) Richard KUHNS, "Music as a Representational Art," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 18-2, 1978, pp. 120-125.

according to certain norms for repetitions, the relationship of the second theme to the first theme in a sonata movement, modifications of the themes in the development section, etc. We may well say a musical composition is a series of conformity to and deviation from the expected course of tonal events, whereby satisfaction, suspension, surprise, and other emotions are aroused in the listener. Music is comparable to tragedy up to this point.

But what after all does it represent, if music *is* a representation (desideratum 1 above)? It does not directly represent anything, evidently. Yet, if a musical composition affects us with emotions, it is a token of the fact that we accept the course of tonal events in a manner analogous to that in which we accept tragic events in feeling pity and fear.[5] And if the spectator feels pity and fear by relating tragic events to his or her own life, the same should be true of the listener of music. It is because the listener shares or even takes part in the course of tonal events that he or she feels satisfaction, surprise, etc. in following it. I venture to say that we *live* music just as we live tragedy. The course of tonal events stands in parallel to a course of events in our real life. In conclusion, music represents life or the world in which we live, in terms of the relation of tonal events.

I quote an example, to make clear what I mean. It is the first movement of Mozart's piano sonata in C major, KV 545. I choose it because it contains much to attend to in its moderate, lovely composition, as KOBAYASHI Yoshitake has pointed out.[6]

The first half of the first theme in C major (bars 1–2) is followed by its inversion-like second half (3–4) and a transition (5–12). Prepared by modulation into G major (13), the second theme in G major appears (14–15), repeated literally (16–17). Then a long transition (18–25) comes, with a reminiscence of

5) It is beyond the scope of this speech to discuss as a whole the nature of emotions evoked by musical and tragic works. Mark DeBellis' article "Music" in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001, pp. 531–544) contains a brief summary of this issue. What is important here is that such emotions have some kind of relevance to our behavior in real life.

6) KOBAYASHI Yoshitake, "Complex aspects of Mozart's 'Sonata facile'" in *Mozartiana: The Festschrift for the Seventieth Birthday of Professor Ebisawa Bin*, Tokyo, 2001, pp. 38–44, published in Japanese.

the first theme (22) and of the second theme (24). Following the codetta in authentic cadence in G major broken chord (26–27), a G major chord (28) concludes the exposition section, which is indicated to repeat in accordance with the established convention of the time.

The short development in thirteen bars is a succession of thrills. It starts with the broken chord heard immediately before at the codetta (26–27), this time in modulation to the parallel minor key, G minor (29–30). The next passage in upward and then downward conjunct motion (31–32) reminds us of the transition passage after the first theme (5–8). After four bars of similar construction (33–36), there are four bars of tonal transition (37–40), which is concluded with F major (41). Following this, we hear the first theme return, feeling bewildered, if not cheated. It is true, as Kobayashi has indicated, that a development in which no theme appears is not exceptional in Mozart. Nevertheless, it is also true that we as listeners expect it. We almost feel cheated because we have been waiting all through the development for the themes to come and receive modifications. To be more precise, we are not yet in a position to tell whether the motive we hear at bar 42 (in F major!) is some modification of the first theme, or else the first theme recapitulated (as is the case). It is not until the second theme reappears in C major at bar 59 that we are quite sure of the end of the development at bar 41.

In any case, we feel suspended, as long as our expectation of hearing the themes is left unmet (and even after the first theme appeared). But the transition from F major to C major at bars 50 to 58 is so convincing that the recapitulation of the first theme in F major at bar 42 appears quite natural now. Thus the motive at bars 59–60 serves three functions: the second theme recapitulated, an *ex post facto* affirmation of the recapitulated first theme at bar 42, and an explanation of its being in F major. With this second theme, our thrill and suspense turn into relief and satisfaction. To be noted here is that the relation of each event to another becomes clear only *retrospectively*. More evidently, when it comes to the concluding chord in C major, it looks as if every note, every chord, every motive, in a word, every event preceding this were preparation for this end. What is still more, C major is the very key in which this movement started. We have returned to the point of departure (that this is absolutely normal for an eighteenth-century

composition is irrelevant here). Being looked back at in this perspective, the entire course of tonal events even appears to have been predestined.

If we are allowed to put these into more human terms, the analogous course of life is a very harmonious one in which every action, though after some uncertainty, proves to be contributory to the desired end. This is exactly a teleological image of the world. In this way, music *is* representative of the world.

(d) Addenda

Thus far, we have dealt only with "classical" examples. Some may wonder if our conclusion also applies to our contemporary art. I argue it does. The images of the world contemporary art projects may be different. Still, they *do* represent the world in some way. To illustrate this, I will cite one more example: John Cage's *4'33"*.[7] It may appear absurd to talk of it as a representation of something, because it lacks (a course of) tonal events. Does this mean that this anti-classical work does not satisfy the first desideratum of representation?

4'33" owes its being a work entirely to the prescription "TACET (be silent)" repeated for each of the three "movements." While it does not prescribe any *tonal* event, it *does* prescribe the "pianist" to be silent, i.e. to do nothing. Doing nothing in this case is totally different from being idle. Indeed, to remain silent before the suspicious or even agitated audience requires enormous mental energy. The pianist plays or *represents* the role of doing nothing. If we dare to draw a parallel with Mozart's Piano Sonata, the life represented by *4'33"* should be a life in which you accept anything that comes, without choosing or avoiding anything. As such an interpretation shows, *4'33"* is a representation of the world at least to the same extent as Mozart's work[8].

Another uncertainty may be whether other categories than *relation* are appropriate for a way of artistic representation. "Tone" is a suggestive word in this context. For along with its etymological meaning of musical sound and some of its qualities like timbre, this word was later transferred to the fields of literature and the plastic arts, to mean "a particular style in discourse or writing" and "a

7) Edition Peters, No. 6777, 1960.

quality of colour, a tint." Besides that, and probably *through* that, the word took on the meaning of "a state or temper of mind."[9] Thus, the same word "tone" denotes the *ways* of representation on the one hand, and what may be the *object* of representation, on the other. A close relationship suggests itself between these two correlatives of representation. To be specific, a *quality* of mind (e. g. excited mental *tone*) can be represented in a *quality* of a work (e. g. harsh musical *tone* or intense color *tone*). Other candidates for categories relevant to artistic representation include *quantity* (e. g. a huge monument to honor a great historic achievement), *place* (e. g. the painter's point of view in perspective), *time* (e. g. a flashback in a film), and possibly more. More than one category may be involved in a work (e. g. *substance*, *place*, and *time* in film), and one category only operates as the result of another (e. g. *substance* based on *relation* in sculpture).

3. Presentation and Representation

Causality, or the necessary link between a cause and its effect, dominates our world—this is our credo. We live our everyday life in accordance with this, even in such a disorderly world as ours. Actually, we are blamed, if a bad event or state is judged to have been caused by our decision. But notice the perfect tense in "to *have been* caused." This grammatical structure reveals the inevitable gap of time between our action and the event or state that followed, or between a

8) Amadinda Percussion Group's "recording" of this silent work is in accord with my interpretation. The three "movements" are realized as three different soundscapes in which we hear faint church bells, bird calls, street noises, buzz of insects, etc. Listening to this recording means paying equal attention to every sound existent in the environment. It is different from no sounds recorded, because in this case we would try to avoid hearing the noise produced by the audio set. For my interpretation of *4'33"*, I am indebted to Daniel Charles' article "Le son comme image du temps," *Revue d'Esthétique*, 7 (1984), pp. 103–108.

9) These definitions are from *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition on CD-ROM Version 3, Oxford U. P., 2002.

cause and its effect.

Let us consider the matter through an extreme case. My decision to raise my right hand and my action of doing so might seem to be connected by an undeniable and exclusive causality. But they are not, because my action may have been caused by an agent of which I am not conscious. Apart from mystery, my action at least depends on the circumstances in which it is taken. In order for an action to take place, it must be exempt from hindrance. Evidently, it is a matter of contingency, at least for me, whether there is a hindrance or not. My action is susceptible to contingency. As this example clearly shows, my decision and action, or a supposed cause and its effect in general, are not connected by one single link, notwithstanding the definition of causality as the *necessary* link between the two. As a result, more than one candidate may come up for the cause of one event or state, or a regress *ad infinitum* on the causal nexus may occur. This is how things stand in the real world.

Instead, works of art, typically but not exclusively classical ones, consist of "beginning, middle, and end," to borrow Aristotle's words.[10] Even Cage had to indicate the beginning and the ending of his silent work with the pianist's closing and opening of the keyboard lid. The artist lays down a limited set of elements for the initial setting. In the case of a novel, for example, the author not only names the when and where of its setting, but also specifies the relevant circumstances, events, characters, etc. Consequently, since every element is supposed to be related to the plot, we can talk of a closed series of cause and effect. This closed entity is independent of the real world, insofar as inward closure implies outward discontinuity. Art presents a world in its own right, or, if you like, a world of appearance.

But does art have nothing to do with the real world? Far from it. Indeed, it *does* have much, as we have observed on tragedy above. Now that we have also seen that even a so-called non-representational art like music and an anti-classical work like *4′33″* are analogous to tragedy in their representational function, we are entitled to replace "tragedy" in Aristotle with "art."

---

10) *Poetics*, Chapter 7, 1450a 26-31.

Art functions as a model by which or a prism through which to view the real world. Art represents the world in presenting a world.