

## PREFACE

WHEN I was honored by an invitation to deliver the A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, at the National Gallery in Washington, I proposed as my subject the psychology of representation. I was very grateful to the Trustees for agreeing to a field of inquiry that extends beyond the frontiers of art to the study of perception and optical illusion. For the mysterious way in which shapes and marks can be made to signify and suggest other things beyond themselves had intrigued me since my student days. In my book *The Story of Art*, I had sketched the development of representation from the conceptual methods of the primitives and the Egyptians, who relied on "what they knew," to the achievements of the impressionists, who succeeded in recording "what they saw." While thus making use of the traditional distinction between "knowing" and "seeing," I ventured to suggest in my last chapter that the self-contradictory nature of the impressionist program contributed to the collapse of representation in twentieth-century art. My assertions to the effect that no artist can "paint what he sees" and discard all conventions were of necessity somewhat aphoristic and dogmatic. To clarify and substantiate them I had to re-examine the very theory of perception I had found so serviceable. This book is a record of this re-examination. It does not aim at upsetting the previous interpretation but at justifying and refining it in the light of contemporary work in psychology. The earlier book, in short, applied a traditional hypothesis about the nature of vision to the history of representational styles; this book has the more ambitious aim of using the history of art, in its turn, to probe and test the hypothetical framework itself. Thus I had to assume that the reader would know the main phases of representational styles which are described in the earlier book. No more specialized knowledge than that is required. Even less do I assume a knowledge of psychology, for in this field I am myself a layman and a learner. In stressing this fact, however, I do not want to sound unduly apologetic. As I see it, the great purpose for which the A. W. Mellon Lectures were founded was to keep the discussion of art in flux and to advance the subject. I believe we can do so only if we learn from the artists to shun the ready-made and to take intellectual risks. All I promised my understanding audience in Washington was not to play safe.

The seven lectures I gave in the spring of 1956 were entitled "The Visible World and the Language of Art." All of them are incorporated in this book, the majority with only slight changes (Chapters I, III, X, XI). Of the remaining three, one survives in a considerably extended form as Chapter IX; the other two have expanded into several chapters and constitute sections of Chapters II and V, VII and VIII respectively. A good deal of supplementary matter also came from lectures on this general topic which I gave at various times during my tenure of the Slade Professorship at Oxford, at various institutions of the University of London to which I belong, during a visit to Harvard University, and at the annual congress of the British Psychological Society in Durham in 1955, where I outlined my program of research.

Such a process of expansion was probably inevitable as soon as the material here presented was released from the tyranny of the clock. Indeed, my main difficulty was to make the underlying argument sufficiently explicit without allowing every chapter to swell into a volume. Despite much recasting and rewriting, therefore, I decided to take advantage of the lecture form, which enjoys the privilege of leaving stones unturned and avenues unexplored. It also encourages the optimistic assumption that the reader will settle down in a chair, as the listener has to, and will follow the arguments and the illustrations in the sequence in which they are presented. For it should be clear by now that this is not a picture book with explanatory letterpress. It is reading matter with explanatory pictures. The publishers have spared no effort to keep the illustrations close to the passage which they support. The arrangement of the notes serves a similar purpose. We don't interrupt our lectures, as a rule, to bombard the audience with bibliographical data. I have kept the references out of the reader's sight and assembled all the notes at the end, referring back to the pagination of the text and to the topic there discussed. Any reader looking for chapter and verse or seeking the way to further literature should find it easy to spot the relevant information. The full titles of books sometimes cited in a shortened form are listed at the end.

It was no lack of gratitude toward the authors I have used which made me thus remove the titles of their works from immediate view. On the contrary, I should like at this point to acknowledge my profound indebtedness to the self-denying work of those experts, who must have sacrificed years of their lives and much rewarding research to make their knowledge available to nonspecialists. The fact, for instance, that the notes contain some of the quoted passages in the original language and that I have sometimes used my own translations should not obscure my indebtedness to the editors and translators of the Loeb Classical

Library. Nor should an occasional reference to individual papers in psychological periodicals hide my dependence on the books which stood on my shelf throughout the time of writing: I have in mind such indispensable surveys as C. E. Osgood, *Method and Theory in Experimental Psychology* (1953), R. S. Woodworth and Harold Schlosberg, *Experimental Psychology* (1954), and also the compact, small volume by O. L. Zangwill, *An Introduction to Modern Psychology* (1950). Among specialized studies of vision, M. D. Vernon, *A Further Study of Visual Perception* (1952), presents an admirable conspectus, while Wolfgang Metzger, *Gesetze des Sehens* (2nd edn., 1953), surveys the whole field from the point of view of the Gestalt school. I also owe much to Ralph M. Evans, *An Introduction to Color* (1948), but most of all to J. J. Gibson, *The Perception of the Visual World* (1950), which, I hope, prevented me from underrating what the author calls "the awe-inspiring intricacy of vision."

Even closer to the fringe of my intellectual horizon I hope to have profited from D. O. Hebb, *The Organization of Behavior* (1949), Viktor von Weizsäcker, *Der Gestaltkreis* (1950), F. H. Allport, *Theories of Perception and the Concept of Structure* (1955), and most of all, perhaps, F. A. Hayek, *The Sensory Order* (1952).

The enumeration of books representing different schools of psychology will arouse, in the mind of the specialist, the suspicion that my approach must be fundamentally eclectic. Up to a point this suspicion would be justified, but my selection was not without a bias of its own. If any student of the subject should wish to know at this stage what direction this bias took, I would refer him to the famous joint paper by E. C. Tolman and E. Brunswik, "The Organism and the Causal Texture of Environment," *Psychological Review*, 1935, which stresses the hypothetical character of all perceptual processes.

It so happens that I saw this paper only after having completed my book. I do not mention this fact in order to claim originality; I rather want to emphasize the part played by living traditions in the shaping of our selective interests. The paper was written in Vienna in 1934, at a time when I had some fleeting contact with Egon Brunswik, who kindly served as a subject in a series of experiments on the reading of facial expressions in art which I helped to organize under the direction of my late friend Ernst Kris. Above all it was Ernst Kris, the art historian turned psychoanalyst, who, during a friendship lasting more than twenty years, taught me the fruitfulness of a psychological approach. Our joint research into the problem of caricature first brought me up against the question of what is involved in accepting an image as a likeness. The basic results of our research are embodied in an essay in his book *Psychoanalytic Explorations in*

*Art* (1952), on which I have drawn in these chapters. What the printed word can hardly convey was the passion and versatility of his ever-inquiring mind, to which I owe the conviction that the history of art will become sterile unless it is constantly enriched by a close contact with the study of man.

It was in the same years, before Hitler's occupation of Vienna, that I was fortunate enough to meet Karl R. Popper, who had just published his book *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Eng. tr., 1959), in which he established the priority of the scientific hypothesis over the recording of sense data. Any acquaintance I may have with problems of scientific method and philosophy I owe to his constant friendship. I should be proud if Professor Popper's influence were to be felt everywhere in this book, though naturally he is not responsible for its many shortcomings.

It was from Dr. Gottfried Spiegler, an X-ray physicist, that I learned to see the interpretation of all images as a philosophical problem. Professor Wolfgang Köhler generously gave me of his time in Princeton and reassured me that the complex questions encountered in the practice of art are still of potential interest to psychological research. Professor Richard Held, of Brandeis University, elucidated several points and introduced me to the department of psychology at Princeton University, where I saw the Ames Demonstrations. Oskar Kokoschka, who invited me to speak at the "School of Seeing" at the Salzburg Summer Academy, convinced me that the mysteries of perception can still fascinate a great artist of our time. Conversations with Professor Roman Jakobson, of Harvard University, and with Professor Colin Cherry, of the Imperial College of Science in London, have given me tantalizing glimpses into the exciting fields of linguistic theory and information theory.

Naturally I cannot enumerate all my immediate colleagues at the Warburg Institute and the Slade School of Art of the University of London to whom I owe stimulation and encouragement. But I should at least like to mention those who kindly read the manuscript of this book at various stages and offered suggestions for its improvement: they are Professor Ian Bialostocki, Professor Gertrud Bing, Professor Harry Bober, Mr. B. A. R. Carter (who also contributed diagrams), Professor Philipp Fehl, Mrs. Ellen Kann, Mr. H. Lester Cooke, Miss Jennifer Montagu, Mr. Michael Podro, and Mrs. Ruth Rubinstein. Mr. William McGuire at the publishing end and my wife and my son Richard on this side helped nursing the book and its author.

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