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Visualization and the Aesthetics of Films

The title of my paper includes two traditional concepts that can be interpreted in many ways: Visualization and Aesthetics. The relation of the two concepts can be interpreted as an empty tautology, if we focus on the similarity: the Latin word „visualis” means the sensation of seeing, and the Greek word „αἰσθησις” means sensation in general. In this aspect, the Aesthetics is the genus and the Visualization is the species, so the title refers to the simple fact that the sensation of seeing is a sort of sensation.

In my work I focus on the differences of this complex relation, in particular I will deal with a well characterized aspect. For explaining this aspect, I interpret the expression the Aesthetics of Films that it includes the message of the film. So in my presentation I focus on, if we can talk about the meaning of the films or scenes and their comprehensible messages, then what the role of the Visualization in understanding those meanings is.

Questions

For the inquiry of the role of the Visualization we need to provide a theory and a theoretical dictionary that helps to explicate the subject. The meaning theory of Paul Grice and Donald Davidson is one of the most important meaning theories of the contemporary philosophy of language. The basic concepts of the theory go back to Gottlob Frege. Their theory provides the interpretive framework to understand the concept of visualization. All this sounds pretty scary. It is time to fix the initial question then repeat the central problem in the form of a question:

1. How can we talk about the Visualization in the viewpoint of the meaning theory of the philosophy of language?
2. What role does the visualization play in understanding the message of the film?

Deflationary theory

Let's start with the first question! What I want to say about the relation between the message of the film and the visualization is very similar to the redundancy or deflationary theory of truth that was said in the philosophy of language.

According to this theory, to assert that a statement is true is just to assert the statement itself. For example, to say that ‘snow is white’ is true, or that it is true that snow is white, is equivalent to saying simply that snow is white, and this is all that can be said significantly about the truth of ‘snow is white’.¹

According to deflationist, truth has no nature beyond what is captured in ordinary claims such as that ‘snow is white’ is true just in case snow is white. In other words truth is not a property and therefore if a proposition is true, it is mistaken to say that the proposition has a property, the property of being true. As Ramsey formulated it in his famous classic lines:

“Truth and falsity are ascribed primarily to propositions. The proposition to which they are ascribed may be either explicitly given or described. Suppose first that it is explicitly given; then it is evident that ‘It is true that Caesar was murdered’ means no more than that Caesar was murdered, and ‘It is false that Caesar was murdered’ means no more than Caesar was not murdered. They are phrases which we sometimes use for

¹ Compare: “The Equivalence Schema” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth-deflationary/>

emphasis or stylistic reasons, or to indicate the position occupied by the statement in our argument. So also we can say 'it is a fact that he was murdered' or 'that he was murdered is contrary to fact.'

In the second case in which the proposition is described and not given explicitly we have perhaps more of a problem, for we get statements from which we cannot in ordinary language eliminate the words 'true' or 'false'. Thus if I say 'He is always right', I mean that the propositions he asserts are always true, and there does not seem to be any way of expressing this without using the word 'true'. But suppose we put it thus 'For all p , if he asserts p , p is true', then we see that the propositional function p is true is simply the same as p , as e.g. its value 'Caesar was murdered is true' is the same as 'Caesar was murdered'.²

But there is an essential difference between deflationism and my suggestion about the role of visualization. When we get rid of the nature of the concept and its special properties the role of the concept will not come to nothing.

Frege and the assertive force

I shall now advert from the truth theory to the meaning theory. Let's see, what role we can find for the Visualization in the meaning theory.

According to Davidson, what the speaker, or in our case, a director of a film knows, must correspond to something the interpreter knows if the speaker is to be understood, since if the speaker is understood he has been interpreted as he intended to be interpreted. There are two kinds of intention, one that is understanding and the other one that makes me understand. The keyword is the intention, the intention is the message itself. If the speaker is to be understood then his intention is to be understood. What is meant by intention? Above all it is force, it is assertive force. How can we interpret this?

For understanding it we have to go back to 1918, to the essay of Gottlob Frege, *The Thought: a Logical Inquiry*³. Gottlob Frege was the grandfather of the philosophy of language, although he is not the past but the present because his statements belong to the contemporary philosophical discussion. It is very interesting that Michael Dummett, who is one of the most important critics of Davidson's meaning theory, did the most to make Frege present in the contemporary philosophical discussion.

Frege starts his essay with this sentence: "The word 'true' indicates the aim of logic as does 'beautiful' that of aesthetics or 'good' that of ethics."⁴ When we continue to read Frege's work we can exchange the word logic to the phrase sense of the sentence: "When we call a sentence true we really mean its sense is. From which it follows that it is for the sense of a sentence that the question of truth arises in general." When am I entitled to say about a sentence that it is true? In other words, what do I know about a sentence, when I know it is true? To answer this question, let me emphasize two important aspects following in Frege's track.

On the one hand although grammatically the word "true" appears as an adjective the truth is not a quality that corresponds with a particular kind of sense-impression. So it is sharply distinguished from the qualities which we denote by the words „red" or "bitter". According to Frege being true is not a material, perceptible property.

² Ramsey, F.P., 1927. 'Facts and Propositions', Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 7 (Supplementary): 153–170, pp. 157-8.

³ Frege, Gottlob, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry", *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 65, No. 259. (Jul., 1956), pp. 289-311.

⁴ Ibid 289.

“It is also worthy of notice that the sentence „I smell the scent of violets” has just the same content as the sentence “it is true that I smell the scent of violets”. So it seems, then, that nothing is added to the thought by my ascribing to it the property of truth. (...) We declare the recognition of truth in the form of an indicative sentence. We do not have to use the word „true” for this. And even when we do use it the real assertive force lies, not in it, but in the form of the indicative sentence and where this loses its assertive force the word „true” cannot put it back again.”⁵

We can summarize that the truth of a sentence is not a quality that corresponds with a particular kind of sense-impression, but it is a kind of force that is manifested in the sentence.

Seeing things is basically non-sensible

On the other hand, according to Frege, it is impossible for the truth or the vision to be a private idea or sense-perception.

“Sense-perception indeed is often thought to be the most certain, even to be the sole, source of knowledge about everything that does not belong to the inner world. But with what right? For sense-impressions are necessary constituents of sense-perceptions and are a part of the inner world. In any case two men do not have the same, though they may have similar, sense-impressions. These alone do not disclose the outer world to us. Perhaps there is a being that has only sense-impressions without seeing or touching things. To have visual impressions is not to see things. How does it happen that I see the tree just there where I do see it? Obviously it depends on the visual impressions. (...) Another person sees the tree in the same place. (...) We have visual impressions, not only not the same, but markedly different from each other. And yet we move about in the same outer world. Having visual impressions is certainly necessary for seeing things but not sufficient. What must still be added is non-sensible. And yet this is just what opens up the outer world for us; for without this non-sensible something everyone would remain shut up in his inner world.”⁶

A third realm must be recognized. The third realm is the realm of Platonic thought in the philosophy of Frege. In my view the visual field is the third realm which is an intersubjective, social space. It is essential that the vision is always accompanied by the knowledge that what I can see is the same or very similar to what the others see. Fundamentally the visuality is not a subjective but an intersubjective, not private, but public occurrence.

The force of visuality

At the end of my paper the theory is going to be illustrated with some short film scenes. The first example shows the force of visualization. I think that the need for force of visuality is our anthropological sign. It is fundamentally that the documentaries and news confirm the information by vision.



⁵ Ibid 292-294.

⁶ Ibid 308-309.



Death Kaddhafi

What does the photos say to us? The news about the death of Kaddhafi becomes more certain if we can see the corpse and the mortal wounds. Notice there is no new information about the news “Kaddhafi is dead” but the visuality only confirms the news.

My second example comes from a modern cult film. There are some college students in the movie *Pulpfiction*. They know there are cold-blooded killers. Do they really know? Is it clear enough? Their knowledge becomes totally clear when they see for themselves the killers, when they can see that killing is a simple daily routine so the boys’ doubts disappear. The killer's words are given weight by the seeing. The boys understand more deeply because he could see the events.



But our confidence is not always determined by the sight. Let see the next part of the film! While one of the two killers executes two boys, the fourth boy is hiding in another room. Suddenly he jumps and fires, fires and fires... all bullets. It is unbelievable that the boy missed them. It is a fact, everybody could see it, but what does it mean? The interpretation is free. We know from the film that Vincent Vega, John Travolta and Winnfield, Samuel L. Jackson understand this fact in two very different ways. Winnfield understand it as divine miracle, as an intention of God or Providence. Therefore he abandoned the life of crime. But Vincent considers it as a chance, there is no intention of God or Providence so it is impossible to understand this fact as a message. He continued his life of crime, and Butch, the hero of the film shot him at the end of the story.



Summary

The starting point was if the message is to be understood then its intention is to be understood. This thesis comes from the meaning theory of Davidson and Grice. According to deflationary theory the truth of a sentence is not a quality that corresponds with a particular kind of sense-impression, but it is a kind of force that is manifested in the sentence. In the same way the role of visuality is not a quality that corresponds with a particular kind of sense-impression, but it is a kind of force that is manifested in the understanding of intention. The understanding claims social space and cooperation no exception is the visuality as a kind of understanding. As we could see the visual field is an intersubjective, social space, in other words the visuality is not a subjective or individual but an intersubjective, not private, but public occurrence.