

Displacement, Distortion and Two Paintings by Hockney

Paul Melia

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Summary by Frank Kelley



1972 painting by David Hockney, 'Chair and Shirt', copyright The artist

Besides being an organiser for the NWRPA Paul Melia is a psychotherapist and an artist and art historian. His presentation about the art of David Hockney is an acute psychoanalytic understanding of art and the history of art.

This picture, *Chair and Shirt*, has similarities to an earlier work.



Henry Geldzahler, a friend of Hockney, asked the artist to make an original art work to auction for the charity Phoenix House.

Geldzahler recalled their conversation. Hockney said, "Let me do a portrait of you" and I said *You really can't because I am fund-raising for them. It would look a little funny.* So Hockney said, *Well,* and just sat down... and in about an hour, he did my jacket, my hat, my pipe and my iced coffee. This was a portrait of a subject with the subject missing.

This alerts us to an aspect of symptoms in therapy. Symptoms often seem nonsensical. Affect is displaced or somatized. Symptoms will relate to the original idea by association and connection. These new ideas will have little affect, or seem unconflicted, or be absurd or obsessive. Like a client who has to check the door is locked not once but many times, or flies into a rage over what seems in retrospect to be a trivial matter.

The association between ideas may be by contiguity where ideas share a boundary or edge. These transformations make it impossible to find the way back to the original idea. In Hockney's picture of Geldzahler the real subject is missing or disguised.

Paul returned us to the picture *Chair and Shirt*. Hockney's partner had left him. You will see a shirt on the chair. This shirt is exactly like the one his partner Peter used to wear. You can see Peter wearing the shirt in Hockney's photos in 1968 and 1969.

The painted shirt refers back to Peter at a specific time early in their relationship.

For Freud transference was a *mésalliance*, a *false connection*. Originally *mésalliance* referred to a marriage with a person of inferior social status.

It may appear the people we see for therapy have absurd ideas or their affect is too great for the situation. However for the analyst the affect is never false but it is linked to unknown content. Whatever we try to ward off will always eventually infiltrate whatever we are using to fend it off with.

Hockney took a photo of a travelling companion who is wearing that shirt.

There are associations by similarity, ideas are fused or condensed, have a strange unity or substitute for each other.

There is a long tradition of artists painting art collectors, connoisseurs and art critics. Unusually Hockney painted a collector who was a woman. Usually in paintings collectors are men and their subjects are women.

In 1964 Hockney met his representative and members of the art circles in California. They all had the same tastes in art.

Some of Hockney's paintings though modern are in the western tradition of paintings of the Annunciation which include the Holy Ghost and the Angel Gabriel. Apparently abstract bands of colour in a Hockney painting are strikingly similar to the colours of angels wings. This is a point of fusion between Hockney's work and the traditional paintings of the Annunciation.

For Freud these associations are a short circuit. Lacan referred to them as sparks. Hockney's paintings have sparks which fly between different paintings and traditions.

For Freud there are primary processes of thought of displacement, condensation and representation. These are processes that come into dreams and into works of art.

**Thank you to Paul Melia** for drawing on a depth of knowledge that allowed him to weave for us art, art history and psychoanalysis.