

THEORIZING MULTI-TALENTED ARTISTS VIA C.S. PEIRCE'S CONCEPT OF ABDUCTIVE REASONING

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Multiple talent in artists, as an issue of scholarly debate, is only recently beginning to be viewed as central to the broader theoretical concern of interrelationships between the arts. Even today, moreover, although mention is often made of individuals such as Michelangelo or William Blake who were productive in more than one medium, seldom are the relations among their works in the different media explored in any systematic fashion.

As a way of addressing this situation, my paper will commence with a discussion of general views about the subject of the multi-talented artist, and why in the past it has tended to be relegated to the fringes of the interarts field. My main focus here will be on what might be termed failed solutions to the problem, and amongst these, I will argue, are those studies which rightly recognized the need to attend to formal similarities between the various media used but which lacked an awareness of the kind of theoretical framework necessary for making such comparisons. Arguing then that such theorizing must begin at the most basic level of the sign and involve an examination of the interpretive process itself, I will attempt to outline the requisite framework by enlisting the ideas of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), primarily those concerned with semiotics and kinds of reasoning procedures. Also drawing on Umberto Eco's revisioning of Peirce's theories, I will, however, conclude that when it comes to interarts issues Peirce's scientific view of abductive reasoning is more helpful than Eco's attempt to isolate a particular kind for creative works. In this way, I hope to provide the methodology that will be conducive to further and more sound ways of investigating the role to be played by such artists in discussions of relations between the arts.