

Foreword

I greet with great enthusiasm this collection of work that seeks to examine, explore, and explain the astonishing phenomenon of human thought that goes under the name of dialectical thinking. As an artist, I share the same preoccupation with how the human mind operates on its perceptions and experience. A painter expresses his thoughts, his vision, through the medium of materials, much as a composer expresses his thoughts in sound, and a writer through words on paper or on a screen. Of course, artists also express feeling, which is somehow inextricably bound up with thought, in their work. So, it is with great pleasure and excitement that I share some pieces of my work with you in this volume by way of illustrating how I think about the astonishing reality of our lives on this planet.

Just as dialectical thinking chooses opposites and complementarity for its primary subject matter, so does art. At its most fundamental a painting is a fusion of many opposites. A canvas is fused with layers of paint. Paint colors are juxtaposed and combined. Abstraction is merged with realism. But more than this, an artist is always seeking to address the dialectic between what is out there in the world and what is in his mind's perception of what is out there. It is essential to be aware of the interaction of inner and outer reality; of the balance between projection and introjection. This continuous dialectical movement I have turned into a motive itself, accepting that the ideal perfect conception of the outer world will always be a simultaneous mixture of many ways of viewing: To see and think about the seeing process itself at the same time. I use the title "Multiversal Realism" for this concept in painting. As a metaphorical example, I like to mention the similarity to Edward Elgar's Enigma Variations, where we have to accept that the original theme for the 14 variations **is never exposed**: We have to accept the relations between the pieces we **can perceive** as the whole united work. An artist is somehow attempting to make visible what people do not typically see or are not aware of. My painting is, in essence, an expression of what is in my mind about what is out there in the world, and yet it also has a way of taking on its own form and saying something new. That dialectic of opposites then continues as the viewer surveys an artwork and makes sense of it in their own mind.

Thinking is a continuous process of flow. To be an artist entails becoming aware of the way one's thought moves from one idea to the next. Likewise, while an artwork, such as a painting, is physically static it expresses movement and dynamism through its composition and juxtaposition of different elements. "Panta rei" ("all is flux/everything flows") was the descriptive title of the philosophical work of Heraclitus, which basically consisted of a series of aphorisms/epigrams from which 126 are conserved: "The sun is new every day"; "you cannot bathe in the same river twice"; "the road up and the road down is one and the same way" are examples of this awareness of thinking in unity or complementarity of opposites.

My works are painted on a special relief structure of wood which consists in many overlapping panels, constructed by the sculptress Silvia Magrinyà-Costán (who is also my wife). On the cover of this volume you will find my composition "Panta Rei". This painting, composed of many irregular shaped panels depicts a river and its tributaries flowing through time and space. The panels are arranged in a circle depicting the cyclical aspect of nature. Everything flows in our universe, no matter how static things make look at any one time, and in this particular case the center part of the painting, the "empty space (no matter)" is an active part of the whole work. I must quote as one of my inspirations the conclusive thoughts of G.W.F. Hegel (1812/1969) from the first chapter of *Science of Logic I*:

Pure truth and pure nothingness are therefore the same. What is truth is neither Being nor nothingness, but that Being passes into nothingness, and nothingness into Being, - not passes over, - but has passed over. But the truth is just as much not their indistinguishability, but that they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct, but also undivided and inseparable, and that each immediately disappears in its opposite. (p 70.)

At the introduction to this volume you will find my work “Confluence”. The confluence here is the process of merging different elements. There are streams of light resembling paths of a river and its tributaries. There are also many different panels with their own signature colors forming a kind of patchwork. The many parts make up the whole, but somehow the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. You may see this as analogous to the idea of this Handbook. There is a stream of thought about dialectic running through the book, with different themes that the editors have brought together to illuminate the concept of dialectic.

Prior to the section on History, you will find my work “Arabesque Texture”. This painting blends the motif of pyramids with historic and modern architecture, bringing the past into the present, and the mundane (in the form of a washing line) with the extraordinary (in the form of classical architecture). Here we become aware of movement through time and how the present builds on the past at the same time as providing the platform for the future. In the chapter offering a historical overview of dialectical thinking from antiquity to the present Michael Mascolo has shown us how present conceptions of dialectic build on the work of great thinkers from many different countries and cultures, much as we can see the building and structures of today’s cities.

I believe we need to take multiple perspectives, views that one cannot find together all at the same time but which, when combined, make up an holistic understanding of some complex reality. In many of my paintings I bring together different views, sometimes those of landscapes depicting these with different color tones and shapes of canvas, and sometimes those of people juxtaposing different moods and emotions. Similarly, this handbook contains different perspectives, some of which oppose others, but all of which need to be taken into account.

In the section on applications, I offer you one of my earlier works “Conquest of the morning (After the rain)”. The center panel depicts a number of structures, some finished, others under repair or construction, others incomplete or partially destroyed. Around the outside are numerous abstract textured square panels, and in the four corners are motifs of three animals and an angel. There is something extraordinarily generative about the combination of opposites. Life itself invites us to combine opposites, we choose partners who offer us something different but complementary to ourselves, and we may live in a place that is different in culture and geography to where we once grew up. One may view the juxtaposition of different applications of dialectical thinking similarly.

I have chosen a detail from a large work called “Harmonies” for the section on child development. There I depict the joy and energy of a group of three young women as they appear to swing through the air attached to cables from above. Once again there is movement throughout the painting, integration of panels of all different shapes, and dynamism in the position of the figures. There is also dialectic symbolism in the grouping of three, recalling the dialectic triadic formulation of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

Finally, I invite you to reflect on my vision “New World” as you read Part IV, the authors discussion on dialectical thinking and the future. “New World” is inspired and generated by very old worlds and perceptions: The Mappa Mundi (ca. 1300) from Hereford Cathedral (in England) and parts of ruins from ancient Rome. I think, respecting the efforts of the past and accepting the imperfection of the present, it is a good way to approach future thinking. Thought is the engine of creativity, and we humans have the power to transform the world for the better if we can move beyond dogma and find ways to harmonize pluralities of views. Ultimately art shares with dialectical thinking this transformative impulse. An artist seeks to transform the way people see and interpret the world, and so to enrich their lives. That is what my life is about - creating new ways to perceive and to think of beauty.

I am deeply grateful to Nick Shannon for a splendid collaboration in our common belief that art can improve the quality of thinking and that qualified thinking must improve the creation of art!

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Barcelona
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Reference:

Hegel, G. W. F (1969). Science of logic. (A. V. Miller, Trans.). Amherst, NY: Humanity Press. (Original work published 1812).