

Special Section

THE JOINT CONSTRUCTION OF PERSONAL MEANINGS IN THE ARTS

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One of the tenets of Personal Construct Theory maintains that there are always alternative constructions possible, alternative ways of making sense of events and experiences. This seems to go well with what an innovative artist attempts to achieve: seeing things in a different way from the conventional one.

Although some artists may maintain that they don't need a reader, a listener, a viewer or some other kind of respondent, that artistic endeavour is an aim in itself, most would acknowledge that they do not only create or recreate a piece of art just for themselves. Artistic creation then is a social process involving at least a creator and a receiver, sometimes also a performer as mediator – and even a critic as an interpreter. And, to use a term made popular through computer 'applications', as a 'user'. In a sense, all of them are creators in that they take a piece of the world and attach their own meaning to it.

During the last couple of years, a surprising number of people involved in personal construct psychology have 'come out' as artists. Others use personal construct theory to better understand what artists create. Still others use arts in their professional practice, with a background in personal construct theory. Over the last twenty or so years, a few articles have appeared that deal with the arts from a personal construct perspective, one of the earliest being by Don Bannister, himself a competent novelist, and even a journal dedicated to 'Constructive Criticism' (in the particular meaning familiar to 'constructivists'), although this was short-lived (Whitehead, 1991). Then in 2006 there was a book edited by Jörn Scheer and Kenneth Sewell, aptly titled 'Creative Construing' (Scheer & Sewell, 2006),

and after the *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* published a special issue on 'Construing in the Arts' in 2008, the present special section of *Personal Construct Theory & Practice* can be considered as the third installment of this recent development.

While some of the present authors have contributed to the earlier collections others are presenting their ideas on the arts for the first time. *Carmen Dell'Aversano* gives a deeply personal account of her own development as an artist and places it in the context of 'Faërie' tales as introduced by J. R. Tolkien, using personal construct theory to identify her own constructs with respect to her collage works (with colourful examples). For *Mary Frances* collages are constructivist art works *par excellence*, and she presents an enlightening poetic collage of cut-up texts (taken from an earlier essay by Viv Burr). *Spencer McWilliams* makes a distinction between 'taking' pictures and 'making' art by introducing the act of editing a photo to create an image that depends for its meaning on the viewer's response rather than representing reality or inherent meaning. The viewer can experience this her- or himself as the author has provided a number of beautiful (and again colourful) examples of his work. *Kenneth Sewell* considers creative writing (one of many artistic activities he is involved in) as a method to create sociality that he uses interactively with an audience as well as when sharing a written text. *Cintra Whitehead* describes in detail her experience as a choral singer and devotes her attention to the minute details that constitute the complex intra- and interpersonal processes finally resulting in a musical performance. *Devorah Kalekin-Fishman*

maintains that a concert is an event in which the construals and constructs of composers, performers, and audiences are interwoven, and illustrates the argument by an analysis of the performance in one concert of a 17th century cantata (by Bach) and a 20th century 'holy service' (by Bloch), including references to biographical details of the composers. *Ute Ohme* approaches diversity in music by analysing children's response to a wide variety of examples of 'world music', using a repertory grid procedure to detect the constructs the children use in their understanding of the music. Finally, two 'users' of artworks for therapeutic purposes describe their techniques: *Luis Botella* uses what a client 'makes of' certain favourite pop music tunes to better understand his constructions of relationships, and *Peggy Dalton* uses literary texts (such as poems by Woodworth or novels by Dickens or Drabble) to facilitate the development of alternative ways of dealing with what is troubling her clients.

The articles presented here demonstrate that taking a constructivist perspective on the arts can do justice to the complex processes that are involved when producers, mediators and consumers interact in what results in the joint creation of a multitude of works of art.

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Jörn Scheer, PhD, is Emeritus Professor of Medical Psychology at the University of Giessen, Germany. He has published extensively in

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