

Aesthetics essay



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Judgments of aesthetic value clearly rely on our ability to discriminate at a sensory level. Aesthetics examines our affective domain response to an object or phenomenon. Immanuel Kant, writing in 1790, observes of a man “ If he says that canary wine is agreeable he is quite content if someone else corrects his terms and reminds him to say instead: It is agreeable to me,” because “ Everyone has his own (sense of) taste”.

The case of “ beauty” is different from mere “ agreeableness” because, “ If he proclaims something to be beautiful, then he requires the same liking from others; he then judges not just for himself but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. ” Aesthetic judgments usually go beyond sensory discrimination. For David Hume, delicacy of taste is not merely “ the ability to detect all the ingredients in a composition”, but also our sensitivity “ to pains as well as pleasures, which escape the rest of mankind. (Essays Moral Political and Literary. Indianapolis, Literary Classics 5, 1987.)

Thus, the sensory discrimination is linked to capacity for pleasure. For Kant “ enjoyment” is the result when pleasure arises from sensation, but judging something to be “ beautiful” has a third requirement: sensation must give rise to pleasure by engaging our capacities of reflective contemplation. Judgments of beauty are sensory, emotional and intellectual all at once. Viewer interpretations of beauty possess two concepts of value: esthetics and taste. Aesthetics is the philosophical notion of beauty. Taste is a result of education and awareness of elite cultural values; therefore taste can be learned. Taste varies according to class, cultural background, and education. According to Kant, beauty is objective and universal; thus certain things are

beautiful to everyone. The contemporary view of beauty is not based on innate qualities, but rather on cultural specifics and individual interpretations. What factors are involved in an aesthetic judgment?

Judgments of aesthetic value seem often to involve many other kinds of issues as well. Responses such as disgust show that sensory detection is linked in instinctual ways to facial expressions, and even behaviors like the gag reflex. Yet disgust can often be a learned or cultural issue too; as Darwin pointed out, seeing a stripe of soup in a man's beard is disgusting even though neither soup nor beards are themselves disgusting. Aesthetic judgments may be linked to emotions or, like emotions, partially embodied in our physical reactions.

Seeing a sublime view of a landscape may give us a reaction of awe, which might manifest physically as an increased heart rate or widened eyes. These unconscious reactions may even be partly constitutive of what makes our judgment a judgment that the landscape is sublime. Likewise, aesthetic judgments may be culturally conditioned to some extent. Victorians in Britain often saw African sculpture as ugly, but just a few decades later, Edwardian audiences saw the same sculptures as being beautiful. The Abuse of Beauty, Evaluations of beauty may well be linked to desirability, perhaps even to sexual desirability.

Thus, judgments of aesthetic value can become linked to judgments of economic, political, or moral value. [7] We might judge a Lamborghini to be beautiful partly because it is desirable as a status symbol, or we might judge it to be repulsive partly because it signifies for us over-consumption and

offends our political or moral values. [8] “ Part and Parcel in Animal and Human Societies”. in *Studies in animal and human behavior*, vol. 2. pp. 115–195. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard UP, 1971 (originally pub. 1950).

Aesthetic judgments can often be very fine-grained and internally contradictory. Likewise aesthetic judgments seem often to be at least partly intellectual and interpretative. It is what a thing means or symbolizes for us that is often what we are judging. Modern aestheticians have asserted that will and desire were almost dormant in aesthetic experience, yet preference and choice have seemed important aesthetics to some 20th century thinkers. The point is already made by Hume, but see Mary Mothersill, “ Beauty and the Critic’s Judgment”, in *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, 2004.

Thus aesthetic judgments might be seen to be based on the senses, emotions, intellectual opinions, will, desires, culture, preferences, values, subconscious behavior, conscious decision, training, instinct, sociological institutions, or some complex combination of these, depending on exactly which theory one employs. Anthropology, especially the savanna hypothesis proposed by Gordon Orians and others, predicts that some of the positive aesthetics that people have are based on innate knowledge of productive human habitats.

It had been shown that people prefer and feel happier looking at trees with spreading forms much more than looking at trees with other forms, or non-tree objects;[citation needed] also Bright green colors, linked with healthy plants with good nutrient qualities, were more calming than other tree

colors, including less bright greens and oranges. Are different art forms beautiful, disgusting, or boring in the same way? A third major topic in the study of aesthetic judgments is how they are unified across art forms.

We can call a person, a house, a symphony, a fragrance, and a mathematical proof beautiful. What characteristics do they share which give them that status? What possible feature could a proof and a fragrance both share in virtue of which they both count as beautiful? What makes a painting beautiful is quite different from what makes music beautiful, which suggests that each art form has its own language for the judgement of aesthetics. [9] At the same time, there is seemingly quite a lack of words to express oneself accurately when making an aesthetic judgement.

An aesthetic judgement cannot be an empirical judgement. Therefore, due to impossibility for precision, there is confusion about what interpretations can be culturally negotiated. Due to imprecision in the standard English language, two completely different feelings experienced by two different people can be represented by an identical verbal expression. Wittgenstein stated this in his lectures on aesthetics and language games.

A collective identification of beauty, with willing participants in a given social spectrum, may be a socially negotiated phenomenon, discussed in a culture or context. Is there some underlying unity to aesthetic judgment and is there some way to articulate the similarities of a beautiful house, beautiful proof, and beautiful sunset? [10] Defining it requires a description of the entire phenomenon, as Wittgenstein argued in his lectures on aesthetics. Likewise there has been long debate on how perception of beauty in the natural

world, especially perception of the human form as beautiful, is supposed to relate to perceiving beauty in art or artefacts.

This goes back at least to Kant, with some echoes even in St. Bonaventure. [citation needed] Aesthetics and the philosophy of art Aesthetics is used by some as a synonym for the philosophy of art, while others insist on a distinction between these closely related fields. In practice aesthetic judgement refers to the sensory contemplation or appreciation of an object (not necessarily an art object), while artistic judgement refers to the recognition, appreciation or criticism of art or an art work.

What is “ art? ” How best to define the term “ art” is a subject of constant contention; many books and journal articles have been published arguing over even the basics of what we mean by the term “ art”. [11] Theodor Adorno claimed in 1969 “ It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident. ”[12][13] Artists, philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists and programmers all use the notion of art in their respective fields, and give it operational definitions that vary considerably.

Furthermore, it is clear that even the basic meaning of the term “ art” has changed several times over the centuries, and has continued to evolve during the 20th century as well. The main recent sense of the word “ art” is roughly as an abbreviation for creative art or “ fine art. ” Here we mean that skill is being used to express the artist’s creativity, or to engage the audience’s aesthetic sensibilities, or to draw the audience towards consideration of the “ finer” things.

Often, if the skill is being used in a functional object, people will consider it a craft instead of art, a suggestion which is highly disputed by many Contemporary Craft thinkers. Likewise, if the skill is being used in a commercial or industrial way it may be considered design instead of art, or contrariwise these may be defended as art forms, perhaps called applied art. Some thinkers, for instance, have argued that the difference between fine art and applied art has more to do with the actual function of the object than any clear definitional difference. [14] Art usually implies no function other than to convey or communicate an idea. Even as late as 1912 it was normal in the West to assume that all art aims at beauty, and thus that anything that wasn't trying to be beautiful couldn't count as art.

The cubists, dadaists, Stravinsky, and many later art movements struggled against this conception that beauty was central to the definition of art, with such success that, according to Danto, "Beauty had disappeared not only from the advanced art of the 1960's but from the advanced philosophy of art of that decade as well. [12] Perhaps some notion like "expression" (in Croce's theories) or "counter-environment" (in McLuhan's theory) can replace the previous role of beauty. Brian Massumi brought back "beauty" into consideration together with "expression". [15] Another concept, as important to the philosophy of art as "beauty," is that of the "sublime," elaborated upon in the twentieth century by the postmodern philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard. Perhaps (as in Kennick's theory) no definition of art is possible anymore. Perhaps art should be thought of as a cluster of related concepts in a Wittgensteinian fashion (as in Weitz or Beuys).

Another approach is to say that “ art” is basically a sociological category, that whatever art schools and museums and artists define as art is considered art regardless of formal definitions. This “ institutional definition of art” (see also Institutional Critique) has been championed by George Dickie. Most people did not consider the depiction of a Brillo Box or a store-bought urinal to be art until Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp (respectively) placed them in the context of art (i. e. , the art gallery), which then provided the association of these objects with the associations that define art.

Proceduralists often suggest that it is the process by which a work of art is created or viewed that makes it art, not any inherent feature of an object, or how well received it is by the institutions of the art world after its introduction to society at large. Whereas if exactly the same set of words was written by a journalist, intending them as shorthand notes to help him write a longer article later, these would not be a poem. Leo Tolstoy, on the other hand, claims that what makes something art or not is how it is experienced by its audience, not by the intention of its creator.

Functionalists like Monroe Beardsley argue that whether or not a piece counts as art depends on what function it plays in a particular context; the same Greek vase may play a non-artistic function in one context (carrying wine), and an artistic function in another context (helping us to appreciate the beauty of the human figure). ‘ See also: Classificatory disputes about art [edit] What should we judge when we judge art? Art can be difficult at the metaphysical and ontological levels as well as at the value theory level. When we see a performance of Hamlet, how many works of art are we experiencing, and which should we judge?

Perhaps there is only one relevant work of art, the whole performance, which many different people have contributed to, and which will exist briefly and then disappear. Perhaps the manuscript by Shakespeare is a distinct work of art from the play by the troupe, which is also distinct from the performance of the play by this troupe on this night, and all three can be judged, but are to be judged by different standards. Perhaps every person involved should be judged separately on his or her own merits, and each costume or line is its own work of art (with perhaps the director having the job of unifying them all).

Similar problems arise for music, film and even painting. Is one to judge the painting itself, the work of the painter, or perhaps the painting in its context of presentation by the museum workers? These problems have been made even more difficult by the rise of conceptual art since the 1960s. Warhol's famous Brillo Boxes are nearly indistinguishable from actual Brillo boxes at the time. It would be a mistake to praise Warhol for the design of his boxes (which were designed by Steve Harvey), yet the conceptual move of exhibiting these boxes as art in a museum together with other kinds of paintings is Warhol's.

Are we judging Warhol's concept? His execution of the concept in the medium? The curator's insight in letting Warhol display the boxes? The overall result? Our experience or interpretation of the result? Ontologically, how are we to think of the work of art? Is it a physical object? Several objects? A class of objects? A mental object? A fictional object? An abstract object? An event? Or simply an Act? What should art be like? Many goals

have been argued for art, and aestheticians often argue that some goal or another is superior in some way.

Clement Greenberg, for instance, argued in 1960 that each artistic medium should seek that which makes it unique among the possible mediums and then purify itself of anything other than expression of its own uniqueness as a form. [16] The Dadaist Tristan Tzara on the other hand saw the function of art in 1918 as the destruction of a mad social order. “ We must sweep and clean. Affirm the cleanliness of the individual after the state of madness, aggressive complete madness of a world abandoned to the hands of bandits. [17] Formal goals, creative goals, self-expression, political goals, spiritual goals, philosophical goals, and even more perceptual or aesthetic goals have all been popular pictures of what art should be like.

The value of art Tolstoy defined art, and not incidentally characterized its value, this way: “ Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them. ” The value of art, then, is one with the value of empathy.

Other possible views are these: Art can act as a means to some special kind of knowledge. Art may give insight into the human condition. Art relates to science and religion. Art serves as a tool of education, or indoctrination, or enculturation. Art makes us more moral. It uplifts us spiritually. Art is politics by other means. Art has the value of allowing catharsis. In any case, the value of art may determine the suitability of an art form. Do they differ

significantly in their values, or (if not) in their ability to achieve the unitary value of art?

But to approach the question of the value of art systematically, one ought to ask: for whom? For the artist? For the audience? For society at large, and/or for individuals beyond the audience? Is the “value” of art different in each of these different contexts? Working on the intended value of art tends to help define the relations between art and other acts. Art clearly does have spiritual goals in many contexts, but what exactly is the difference between religious art and religion per se? The truth is complex – Art is both useless in a functional sense and the most important human activity.

It has been said, that a Vogon Starship arriving at the earth and ordering its destruction would ask what use is humanity? The only justification humanity could give would be a Shakespeare play, a Rembrandt or a Bach concerto.

These are the things of value which define humanity itself. Aesthetic

universals The philosopher Denis Dutton identified seven universal

signatures in human aesthetics: 1. Expertise or virtuosity. Technical artistic skills are cultivated, recognized, and admired. 2. Nonutilitarian pleasure.

People enjoy art for art’s sake, and don’t demand that it keep them warm or put food on the table. 3. Style. Artistic objects and performances satisfy rules of composition that place them in a recognizable style.

4. Criticism. People make a point of judging, appreciating, and interpreting works of art. 5. Imitation. With a few important exceptions like music and abstract painting, works of art simulate experiences of the world. 6. Special focus. Art is set aside from ordinary life and made a dramatic focus of

experience. 7. Imagination. Artists and their audiences entertain hypothetical worlds in the theater of the imagination.

It might be objected, however, that there are rather too many exceptions to Dutton's categories. For example, the installations of the contemporary artist Thomas Hirschhorn deliberately eschew technical virtuosity. People can appreciate a Renaissance Madonna for aesthetic reasons, but such objects often had (and sometimes still have) specific devotional functions. 'Rules of composition' that might be read into Duchamp's *Fountain* or John Cage's *4'33"* do not locate the works in a recognizable style (or certainly not a style recognizable at the time of the works' realisation).

Moreover, some of Dutton's categories seem too broad: a physicist might entertain hypothetical worlds in his/her imagination in the course of formulating a theory. Increasingly, academics in both the sciences and the humanities are looking to evolutionary psychology and cognitive science in an effort to understand the connection between psychology and aesthetics. Aside from Dutton, others exploring this realm include Brian Boyd, Noel Carroll, Nancy Easterlin, David Evans, Jonathan Gottschall, Paul Hernadi, Bracha Ettinger, Patrick Hogan, Elaine Scarry, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Wendy Steiner, Robert Storey, Frederick Turner, and Mark Turner.

Criticism The philosophy of aesthetics has been criticized by some sociologists and writers about art and society. Raymond Williams argues that there is no unique aesthetic object but a continuum of cultural forms from ordinary speech to experiences that are signaled as art by a frame, institution or special event. Pierre Bourdieu also takes issue with Kant's

aesthetics and argues that it represents an experience that is the product of an elevated class habitus and scholarly leisure. [edit] History of aesthetics It has been suggested that this article or section be merged into History of aesthetics (pre-20th-century).

Bronze sculpture, thought to be either Poseidon or Zeus, National Archaeological Museum of Athens Ancient aesthetics We have examples of pre-historic art, but they are rare, and the context of their production and use is not very clear, so we can little more than guess at the aesthetic doctrines that guided their production and interpretation. Ancient art was largely, but not entirely, based on the seven great ancient civilizations: Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Persia, India and China.

Each of these centers of early civilization developed a unique and characteristic style in its art. Greece had the most influence on the development of aesthetics in the West. This period of Greek art saw a veneration of the human physical form and the development of corresponding skills to show musculature, poise, beauty and anatomically correct proportions. Furthermore, in many Western and Eastern cultures alike, traits such as body hair are rarely depicted in art that addresses physical beauty. More in contrast with this Greek-Western aesthetic taste is the genre of grotesque.

Greek philosophers initially felt that aesthetically appealing objects were beautiful in and of themselves. Plato felt that beautiful objects incorporated proportion, harmony, and unity among their parts. Similarly, in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle found that the universal elements of beauty were

order, symmetry, and definiteness. [edit] Islamic aesthetics Islamic art is not, properly speaking, an art pertaining to religion only. The term “Islamic” refers not only to the religion, but to any form of art created in an Islamic culture or in an Islamic context.

It would also be a mistake to assume that all Muslims are in agreement on the use of art in religious observance, the proper place of art in society, or the relation between secular art and the demands placed on the secular world to conform to religious precepts. Islamic art frequently adopts secular elements and elements that are frowned upon, if not forbidden, by some Islamic theologians. According to Islam, human works of art are inherently flawed compared to the work of God; thus, it is believed by many that to attempt to depict in a realistic form any animal or person is insolence to God.

This tendency has had the effect of narrowing the field of artistic possibility to such forms of art as Arabesque, mosaic, Islamic calligraphy, and Islamic architecture, as well as more generally any form of abstraction that can claim the status of non-representational art. The limited possibilities has been explored by artists as an outlet to artistic expression, and has been cultivated to become a positive style and tradition, emphasizing the decorative function of art, or its religious functions via non-representational forms such as Geometric patterns, floral patterns, and arabesques.

Human or animal depiction is generally forbidden altogether in Islamic cultures. Human portrayals can be found in early Islamic cultures with varying degrees of acceptance by religious authorities. Human representation for the purpose of worship that is uniformly considered

idolatry as forbidden in Sharia law. There are many depictions of Muhammad, Islam's chief prophet, in historical Islamic art. The calligraphic arts grew out an effort to devote oneself to the study of the Koran. By patiently transcribing each word of the text, the writer was made to contemplate the meaning of it.

As time passed, these calligraphic works began to be prized as works of art, growing increasingly elaborate in the illumination and stylizing of the text. These illuminations were applied to other works besides the Koran, and it became a respected art form in and of itself. [edit] Indian aesthetics Indian art evolved with an emphasis on inducing special spiritual or philosophical states in the audience, or with representing them symbolically. According to Kapila Vatsyayan, “ Classical Indian architecture, sculpture, painting, literature (kavya), music, and dancing evolved their wn rules conditioned by their respective media, but they shared with one another not only the underlying spiritual beliefs of the Indian religio-philosophic mind, but also the procedures by which the relationships of the symbol and the spiritual states were worked out in detail. ” Of particular concern to Indian drama and literature is the term *rasa* referring generally to the emotional flavors crafted into the work by the writer and relished by a ‘ sensitive spectator’ or *sah? daya*. Poets like Kalidasa were attentive to *rasa*, which blossomed into a fully developed aesthetic system.

Even in contemporary India the term *rasa* denoting “ flavor” is used colloquially to describe the aesthetic experiences in films; “ masala mix” describes popular Hindi cinema films which serve a balanced emotional meal, savored as *rasa* by the spectator. *Rasa* theory blossoms beginning

with the Sanskrit text Natyashastra (natya meaning “ drama” and shastra meaning “ science of”), a work attributed to Bharata Muni where the Gods declare that drama is the ‘ Fifth Veda’ because it is suitable for the degenerate age as the best form of religious instruction.

While the date of composition varies wildly among scholars, ranging from the era of Plato and Aristotle to the seventh century CE. The Natyashastra presents the aesthetic concepts of rasas and their associated bhavas in Chapters Six and Seven respectively, which appear to be independent of the work as a whole. Eight rasas and associated bhavas are named and their enjoyment is likened to savoring a meal: rasa is the enjoyment of flavors that arise from the proper preparation of ingredients and the quality of ingredients.

What rasa actually is, in a theoretical sense, is not discussed and given the Natyashastra’s pithy wording it is unlikely the exact understanding of the original author(s) will be known. The theory of the rasas develops significantly with the Kashmiri aesthetician Andandavardhana’s classic on poetics, the Dhvanyaloka which introduces the ninth rasa, shanta-rasa as a specifically religious feeling of peace (santa) which arises from its bhava, weariness of the pleasures of the world.

The primary purpose of this text is to refine the literary concept dhvani or poetic suggestion, by arguing for the existence of rasa-dhvani, primarily in forms of Sanskrit including a word, sentence or whole work “ suggests” a real-world emotional state or bhava, but thanks to aesthetic distance, the sensitive spectator relishes the rasa, the aesthetic flavor of tragedy, heroism

or romance. The 9th – 10th century master of the religious system known as “the nondual Shaivism of Kashmir” (or “Kashmir Shaivism”) and aesthetician, Abhinavagupta brought rasa theory to its pinnacle in his separate commentaries on the Dhvanyaloka, the Dhvanyaloka-locana (translated by Ingalls, Masson and Patwardhan, 1992) and the Abhinavabharati, his commentary on the Natyashastra, portions of which are translated by Gnoli and Masson and Patwardhan. Abhinavagupta offers for the first time a technical definition of rasa which is the universal bliss of the Self or Atman colored by the emotional tone of a drama.

Shanta-rasa functions as an equal member of the set of rasas but is simultaneously distinct being the most clear form of aesthetic bliss.

Abhinavagupta likens it to the string of a jeweled necklace; while it may not be the most appealing for most people, it is the string that gives form to the necklace, allowing the jewels of the other eight rasas to be relished.

Relishing the rasas and particularly shanta-rasa is hinted as being as-good-as but never-equal-to the bliss of Self-realization experienced by yogis. edit]

Chinese aesthetics Chinese art has a long history of varied styles and emphases.

In ancient times philosophers were already arguing about aesthetics.

Confucius emphasized the role of the arts and humanities (especially music and poetry) in broadening human nature and aiding “li” (etiquette, the rites) in bringing us back to what is essential about humanity. His opponent Mozi,

however, argued that music and fine arts were classist and wasteful,

benefiting the rich but not the common people. By the 4th century A. D.

artists were debating in writing over the proper goals of art as well. Gu Kaizhi

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has 3 surviving books on this theory of painting, for example, and it's not uncommon to find later artist/scholars who both create art and write about the creating of art. Religious and philosophical influence on art was common (and diverse) but never universal; it is easy to find art that largely ignores philosophy and religion in almost every Chinese time period. [edit] Sub-Saharan African aesthetics The Great Mosque's signature trio of minarets overlooks the central market of Djenne.

Unique Malian aesthetic Sub-Saharan African art existed in many forms and styles, and with fairly little influence from outside Africa. Most of it followed traditional forms and the aesthetic norms were handed down orally as well as written. Sculpture and performance art are prominent, and abstract and partially abstracted forms are valued, and were valued long before influence from the Western tradition began in earnest. The Nok culture is testimony to this. The mosque of Timbuktu shows that specific areas of Africa developed unique aesthetics. [edit] Western medieval aesthetics

Surviving medieval art is largely religious in focus, and typically was funded by the State, Orthodox or Roman Catholic church, powerful ecclesiastical individuals, or wealthy secular patrons. Often the pieces have an intended liturgical function, such as chalices or churches. Medieval Art Objects were made from rare and valuable materials, such as Gold and Lapis, the cost of which was often superior to the wages of the maker. Art and aesthetic philosophy was a continuation of ancient lines of thought, with the additional use of explicit theological categories.

St. Bonaventure's "Retracing the Arts to Theology" discusses the skills of the artisan as gifts given by God for the purpose of disclosing God to mankind via four "lights": the light of skill in mechanical arts which discloses the world of artifacts, as guided by the light of sense perception which discloses the world of natural forms, as guided by the light of philosophy which discloses the world of intellectual truth, as guided by the light of divine wisdom which discloses the world of saving truth.

Saint Thomas Aquinas' aesthetic theory is arguably more famous and influential among the medieval aesthetic theories, having been explicitly used in the writing of the famous writer James Joyce as well as many other influential 20th century authors. Thomas, as with many of the other medievals, never explicitly gives an account of "beauty" in itself, but the theory is reconstructed on the basis of disparate comments in a wide array of works.

His theory follows the classical model of Aristotle, but with explicit formulation of beauty as "pulchrum transcendentale" or convertible with being among the other "transcendentals" such as "truth" and "goodness." Umberto Eco's *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* identifies the three main characteristics of beautiful things in Aquinas' philosophy as: *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas*.

Aristotle identifies the first two characteristics, with the third being an "innovation" of Aquinas in the light of Platonic/neo-Platonic and Augustinian thought. In sum, medieval aesthetic, while not a unified system, presents a

unique view of beauty that deserves an in-depth treatment in the history of art.