

The Role of the Art World in Enhancing the Philosophical Perspective of Others

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ABSTRACT

This paper begins with an important question, which is not new: what should be included in the art circle or considered as art, and what should be left outside this circle? To answer this question, I focus first on various definitions of art given by certain theorists, such as Hume (1757), Bell (1913), Weitz (1956), and Dickie (2006). I compare these theorists' arguments about the definition of art. Through their theories, I discuss the evaluation of artworks depending on whether the judgment is subjective, relating to its evaluation within the art world, or objective, relating to the artwork itself. Then I highlight the notion of criticism and the differences between subjective criticism and objective criticism. Finally, I emphasize the important role of critics in understanding the philosophical perspective, appreciating artwork, and enhancing the academic performance for others. In this paper, I argue that the evaluation of artwork should depend on subjective judgment – that of the art world – more than objective judgment – focusing on the artistic values of the art object – and that requires the critic to evaluate the artwork objectively.

Keywords: Art world, Criticism, Objective, Subjective.

Introduction

In the Dallas Museum of Art, I paused, silent and pensive, for a few minutes in front of one of Shiraga's paintings, and this question popped into my mind: "Is this art or not?" As I wandered through the galleries, I heard discussions, comments, and questions about whether these works were art or not. Some people, for instance, said that art is easy; everybody can draw without any effort, or perhaps the artist had let his kid pour buckets of colors on the canvas. Others said it is difficult to understand the meaning of artwork. This is reasonable; there are many questions about what to include in the art circle or consider as art and what should be left outside this circle.

This question is not new; many studies and inquiries have investigated the meaning of calling something "art." Some theorists have found varying definitions of art, for example, Hume (1757), who asserted that everybody has a different taste; Bell (1913), who confirmed that an object must have a particular characteristic if it is art; Weitz (1956), who disagreed with Bell, arguing that it is not necessary for there to be a definition of art; and Dickie (2006), who determined that some people or institutions have the authority to nominate a piece of art as art or not.

In the first section of this paper, I compare the definitions of art from the theories of Hume (1757), Bell (1913), Weitz (1956), and Dickie (2006), who are considered foundational to esthetic philosophy. Through their theories, I discuss the evaluation of artwork depending on whether the judgment is objective, relating to the artwork itself; or subjective, relating to its evaluation within the art world. The art world includes institutions, such as museums and galleries, and individuals who are inside the art circle or work in the art field, such as artists, curators, critics, and collectors.

In the second section, I define art criticism; then I clarify the differences between subjective criticism and objective criticism. Next, I demonstrate the significant role of the art world, which should be objective in its critiques and judgment, for enhancing our aesthetic experience. Professional critics, for instance, have certain knowledge and specific criteria as a basis for teaching others – such as art educators, art teachers, and art students – how to critique and judge artwork.

In this paper, I argue that the evaluation of artwork depends on subjective judgment – which comes from the art world - more than on objective judgment – which is based on the artistic values of the art object. Subjective judgment requires a critic to evaluate the artwork objectively in order to help others to understand the philosophical perspective, appreciate artwork, and improve their academic performance.

The Nature of Art

Definitions of Art from Hume (1757), Bell (1913), Weitz (1956), and Dickie (2006)

Debates have been ongoing about the philosophy of art, specification of the nature of art, and the thorny inquiry “What is art?” In this section, I compare the ideas of the theorists Hume (1757), Bell (1913), Weitz (1956), and Dickie (2006), who have considered the definition of art.

Hume (1757) asserted that everybody has different taste, and all judgment of taste is valid and purely subjective. Individuals from the art world can nominate a work of art as art, focusing on objective properties that trigger pleasing sensations in us. Critics and artists, who are from the art world, have the aesthetic experience to critique and judge the art object; they can also support others—such as art educators, art teachers, and art students—by enhancing their knowledge. Individuals from the art world can help others to make aesthetic and critical judgments about art.

Bell’s theory was that the art object ought to have particular characteristics – necessary and sufficient features – called its “Significant Form” (1913). Having a significant form, the object gives the viewer an aesthetic emotion, which can allow him or her to experience ecstasy. From this perspective, we cannot consider all objects as artwork because they do not all have a significant form that gives the viewer the aesthetic experience of ecstasy. Bell (1913) argued that even if the object has a significant form, not everyone will have this experience or an identical emotional reaction. Members of a particular group, such as critics, may have particularly sensitive taste and clear thinking, and only they can have this experience and teach others about their experience and how they came to achieve it.

Weitz (1956), however, argued that there are no necessary or sufficient conditions to define art; indeed, he saw the exercise of doing so as difficult or even impossible. According to Weitz (1956), “Art, as the logic of the concept shows, has no set of necessary and sufficient properties, hence a theory of it is logically impossible and not merely factually difficult” (p. 28). Weitz (1956) asserted that individuals find themselves uncomfortable or unsatisfied if confronted with a definition of art, and this will limit their creativity and achievements. Weitz (1956) argued that it is not necessary for there to be a definition of art because making a definition leads to the creation of a complicated connection of similarities that interfere and crisscross. He described artistic objects as having a family resemblance or being part of a family

tree –there are no real similarities among these objects, but they still share something in common.

Dickie’s theory of defining art takes a wider view than Bell’s theory does but is narrower than Weitz’s theory. Dickie (2006) agreed that a work of art has necessary and sufficient conditions. The art world – institutions and people who work with or in these institutions – has the authority to nominate a piece of work as art or not. Dickie (2006) wrote:

A work of art in the classificatory sense is an artifact, a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the art world). (p. 168)

Defining art with Dickie’s theory becomes more institutional than it is with Bell’s theory, which depends on the role of individuals who work with art institutions. Therefore, both Dickie’s theory and Bell’s theory rely on institutions to define art.

Forming a New Definition of Art

By comparing these theories, I now seek to form a new definition of art. Hume (1757), Bell (1913), and Dickie (2006) have each formulated a definition of art. Bell’s theory relies on necessary and sufficient features of the artwork, while Hume’s and Dickie’s theories relate to how the art world nominates and considers such a work as art. This means that for Hume (1757) and Dickie (2006), the condition for defining the object comes from outside the object, while in Bell’s theory it comes from the object itself.

Hume (1757) asserted that every individual has different taste and that all judgment of taste is valid and purely subjective, but there are objective properties that trigger pleasant sensations in us. I contend that this idea is related to Dickie’s theory, which states that the object does not need to have a significant form; also, the art world, in its institutions and people, has the power to nominate a piece of work as art and determine its objective features. Bell (1913) agrees with Hume (1757) as well with regard to critics or other groups whose members have sensitive taste and clear thinking. Critics have an aesthetic experience; they can support others and enhance their knowledge. Critics can help others, such as art educators, art teachers, and art students, to make aesthetic and critical judgments.

A deeper look into Dickie’s theory suggests the object does not need to have specific objective features or a “Significant Form” to attract the viewer and evoke an aesthetic experience. Dickie’s theory clearly depends on the acceptance of the object by the art

world, which determines specific features and standards of the artwork. We can understand the main role of the art world in Dickie's theory as carried out by people who have the authority to form the concepts and standards for art and to nominate a work as a piece of art or not. This means the aesthetic judgment depends on the perspective of individuals (subjects) rather than on the artistic features of the artwork (the object).

From a critical viewpoint, even though Bell's theory depends on the object itself and its specific objective features, indeed, the art world, such as artists and critics, puts out a set of these features as a basis for judging whether the work is art or not. Bell (1913) confirmed that a particular group, those who are part of the art world, has clear thinking and sensitive taste. Furthermore, he argued that because of their experience, they can support others by enhancing their learning. Therefore, I find there is a conflict in Bell's theory because it depends on a subjective and an objective perspective at the same time. His theory clearly relies also on a subjective perspective which is related to the art world, as does Dickie's theory.

On the other hand, Weitz (1956) considered the definition of art unnecessary and believed that everyone who was outside the art world could be in the art circle. My critique of Weitz (1956) is that he did not have a definition of art. I believe the term "art" loses its significance when it lacks a definition. Then everything can be art, and everyone can participate in art, causing art to lose its meaning and taste. Weitz's theory also depends on the subjective perspective of being inside or outside the art world rather than the objective perspective on the artwork itself. Also, through the use of Weitz's theory, the similarity concept can create some of the equality between the beautiful and the ugly and/or the good and the bad, indicating there is no perfection between different objects.

Public Debates about the Definition of Art

To support my argument that the evaluation of artworks is more related to subjective judgment (made by critics and artist) than to objective judgment (focusing on the art object itself - its features), I now explore the dispute over Tilted Arc. In 1985, the issue came up of whether to relocate Richard Serra's Tilted Arc, a sculpture commissioned by the federal government for the plaza of the Jacob Javits Federal Building in lower Manhattan.

In the chapter Critical Judgment of Fuzzle about Art, Battin, Fisher, Moore, and Silvers (1989) posed this question: "should a very large, obtrusive sculpture be moved, or remain at the site for which it was originally commissioned?" A real debate

occurred between supporters and opponents of the arc over whether it was a work of art or not, and thus whether to keep the arc where it was or move it from the plaza. The aesthetic judgment of Tilted Arc depended on the subjective view of individuals rather than an objective view of the arc itself: all the speakers assessed and judged the arc based on their perspectives and opinions.

Battin et al. (1989) observed,

Differences about how to judge a particular work of art are typically occasioned by disagreements about the definition of art, whether aesthetic value is objective or subjective, what we can learn from art, the nature of creativity, and the relative importance of aesthetic values versus other values. (p. 180)

In fact, the arc or any piece of artwork is stable and consistent, but opinions and perspectives of members of the art world are variable and choppy. Individuals can ignore one work while acknowledging others, depending on their own standards and personal conceptions. In the next section, I will define criticism and focus on the meanings of the terms subjective criticism and objective criticism. Then, through a discussion of Hume's theory, I will explain certain conditions that critics should meet in order to evaluate an artwork objectively.

The Role of the Critic

What Does Criticism Mean?

Ali (1998) defined criticism as “a science that . . . requires a deep knowledge of art, heritage, culture, goals and philosophy of society” (p. 154). He pointed out that art criticism helps individuals to read artworks and train others on how to taste and enjoy them. Ali (1998) stated, “Art criticism is the path of proper artistic vision based on objectivity, understanding, and study. The culture of the critic must be at the highest level, even when it emanates from the artist himself” (p. 155). In addition, Barrett (1994) defined art criticism as “responding to, interpreting meaning, and making critical judgments about specific works of art;” also, he argued the role of art critics is to “help viewers perceive, interpret, and judge artworks” (para. 1). Moreover, Gemtou (2010) clarified that art criticism is a mental activity concerned with the studying, understanding, and interpretation of works of art; he described the interest of the art critic: “the art critic is interested in contemporary art, which he analyzes and interprets with the aim of evaluating it critically” (p. 2). Having highlighted the definition of art criticism, I now distinguish between subjective criticism and objective criticism.

Subjective Criticism and Objective Criticism

Kalifa (2013) elaborated on many points in his article, which focused on subjective criticism and objective criticism. He said that by using these specific concepts or methods to assess a piece of art, individuals will taste the aesthetic value of the art object, which is the starting point of the critique process. Indeed, individuals such as critics and artists can critique the art object; then they evaluate this object depending on their taste vis-a-vis this work. Kalifa (2013) confirmed that taste is not enough to assess the artwork objectively without any bias or prejudice on the part of the individual; this fact leads to subjective judgment by the artist or critic.

Human nature, with its changing whims and desires, strongly affects the objective evaluation of a work of art unless individuals provide concrete reasons and strong evidence for their judgment of the work, which makes this aesthetical judgment rely on objective criticism, as Kalifa (2013) demonstrated in his article. Therefore, critics should ground their aesthetical judgment in the objective perspective, which depends on evidence and justifications of interpretation regarding the goodness and badness of a work of art. Battin et al. (1989) mentioned that Hume (1757) wrote, “some critics can direct other people’s attention to the valuable (or defective) aspects of any works” (p. 194). In addition, the fact that the evaluation of artworks is related to the judgment of individuals from the art world more than it is related to the judgment of the object itself emphasizes the effective role of the art world which approves or ignores a piece of artwork. Therefore, members of the art world must possess certain characteristics in order to make an objective aesthetic judgment; I will deal with this point in detail in the next part of this study.

The Role of the Art World in Enhancing Our Aesthetic Experience

According to Hume (1757), evaluation of the art object can differ depending on a variety of perspectives that involve several elements. The main standard, however, is whether the object is good or bad. Thus, Hume (1757) confirmed that individuals from the art world, such as critics and artists, who can determine the standards of taste and teach others, should have five characteristics and should know the standards for evaluating a piece of artwork. These five characteristics are delicacy, practice, comparisons, prejudice, and good sense.

Hume (1757) contends, “One obvious cause, why many feel not the proper sentiment of beauty, is the want of that delicacy of imagination, which is requisite to convey a sensibility of those finer emotions” (p. 141). Individuals should have a delicacy, which means someone has a skilled outlook and deep knowledge of the estimating of

objects or things. This ability may be inherited in some families whose members are famous for their subtle insight.

In spite of this fact, faculty can gain skills or acquire features by more practice and exercise. Hume (1757) explained that:

But though there be naturally a wide difference in point of delicacy between one person and another, nothing tends further to increase and improve this talent, than practice in a particular art, and the frequent survey or contemplation of a particular species of beauty. (p. 143)

Hence, to improve that certain talent or faculty, individuals should practice in order to have extensive experience.

This experience may require a long time to make the individuals wise as experts in their field. “It is impossible to continue in the practice of contemplating any order of beauty, without being frequently obliged to form comparisons between the several species and degrees of excellence, and estimating their proportion to each other” (Hume, 1757, p. 144). When individuals have wide knowledge and extensive experience, they will compare different theories, concepts, and studies. They will have the ability to judge and criticize the materials; then they will decide on the best choice.

Hume (1757) mentioned, “But to enable a critic the more fully to execute this undertaking, he must preserve his mind free from all prejudice, and allow nothing to enter into his consideration, but the very object which is submitted to his examination” (p. 144). The individual’s decision should not rely on bias or be related to discrimination, whether this influence would affect her or his judgment in a positive or negative way.

The judgment of taste should not be affected by external circumstances or factors; rather, it should be pure and fair. Hume (1757) confirmed,

It is well known, that in all questions, submitted to the understanding, prejudice is destructive of sound judgment, and perverts all operations of the intellectual faculties: It is no less contrary to good taste; nor has it less influence to corrupt our sentiment of beauty. It belongs to good sense to check its influence in both cases. (p. 145)

Individuals from the art world, such as critics and artists, can convey their knowledge or experiences to others, and they have the ability to translate their experiences and ideas to support their followers in the same fields or, in general, to benefit the public.

Through identifying the five characteristics required of individuals who are from the art world, we can understand how they have the important features enabling them to become wise people with a sharp perspective and clear thinking. Individuals should have deep knowledge and extensive experiences arising from continuous exercise. Furthermore, they will have the ability to judge artwork or compare different pieces of artwork without prejudice, which makes their judgment objective, so that later they will have good taste. To clarify, all five characteristics are needed as a condition for individuals from the art world to make aesthetical judgements of artworks objectively. Therefore, regarding the previous discussion, I want to emphasize again the point that the evaluation of a piece of art depends on individuals such as critics, artists, and art educators, who have the power to nominate an art object as such, or reject it.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the evaluation of artwork relies on subjective judgment – that of individuals and institutions from the art world - rather than objective judgment – relating to the artistic values of the art objects, which requires evaluating the artwork objectively and impartially. Also, I emphasized the important role of members of the art world – institutions and individuals - to understand philosophical perspectives, appreciate artwork, and enhance students' academic performance.

In the first section, I explored the work of these theorists: Hume (1757), Bell (1913), Weitz (1956), and Dickie (2006). I agreed with Hume (1757), who asserted that everyone has different taste. While all judgment of taste is purely subjective, people or institutions from the art world can evaluate a work of art objectively. I also agreed with Dickie (2006) because he formulated a definition of art, and he confirmed the role of the art world, which has the authority to identify the art object. On the other hand, I disagreed with Bell (1913) even though he proposed a definition of art, and he recommended consulting critics; however, his theory features two sides that are in conflict: subjective judgment, depending on the art world, and objective judgment, depending on the artwork itself. I also did not agree with Weitz (1956) because he did not present a definition of art.

In the second section, I highlighted the distinction between subjective criticism and objective criticism, and I pointed out the role of certain individuals, such as critics and artists, who have unique traits and special features enabling them to teach and support others. Clearly, the art world's members and institutions can help others to evaluate

and appreciate artworks, obtain a philosophical perspective, and enhance their academic performance by understanding the philosophical theories of aesthetics, studying the nature of art, and recognizing the role of the art world in these pursuits.

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