

Kantian Aesthetics and the Influence of Modern Technology on Art: An Inquiry towards Contemporary Art's Legitimacy and Cultural Implications in the 21st century

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Abstract: One of the biggest catalysts of change in the 21st century is the rise of technology's role in the lives of every person. This phenomenon led a cultural trend wherein cell phones were used as primary means of communication, which also resulted to widespread uses of computers in schools, workplace and home. The trend also extended to popular culture, caused by the astounding popularity of the internet. Given that, technology's influence created drastic changes, which reached extensive influence in the way we view and conceptualize art. This affected music, dancing and visual arts. The rise of unconventional art this past decade is so blatant that we can see it in techno music, photography and even in posts on the web created by self-proclaimed artists. These so called forms of art are very different from the art people knew in the past, which involves strict patterns of rhythmic compositions mastered by Mozart and Beethoven, and the canvass of paintings and sculptures made by Picasso, Michelangelo, Donatello and Da Vinci. The question that arises from this cultural trend is: Can we consider these works as legitimate art? This contemporary perspective of art will be examined using Kant's aesthetics, which talks about the four aspects of a judgment of taste, namely: quality, quantity, relation of the purpose and satisfaction of the object. Kant's theory of the artistic genius will also be taken into consideration to provide better understanding of who is the one that creates art and the quality of the artwork itself. This inquiry will show us how people today appreciate art and delve deeper into the current aesthetic experiences that has sprouted from our very culture. This also will serve as a standard to as to whether contemporary artists, specifically those from the 21st century, deserve to be called geniuses. Lastly, it would bring light to one's understanding of beauty and its quality, which will teach how to dichotomize the best from the continuous influx of works people assert as art. In the end, this inspection will provide us a rough, but enlightening sketch of the beauty and ugliness brought by our culture, from its upbringing or possible roots, to its effect on art.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, Genius and Judgment of Taste

Introduction

In this paper, I will critique the way art is understood and created in the 21st century through an inquiry towards its legitimacy, using Kantian Aesthetics as the sole criterion. The goal is to present, with utmost clarity and precision, the dichotomy between what may be considered art to what is not, while investigating one's culture in the process. To be successful in initiating this critique, three questions are needed to be answered to provide better understanding of the subject:

1. What is Aesthetics as a branch of philosophy?
2. What is the state of art in the 21st century?
3. What comprises art in relation to Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment¹?

Only when these questions are answered can we proceed in answering the question of how artworks in the past are deemed as art, and which artworks in the 21st century are legitimate.

A. Art and aesthetic experience

Aesthetics is concerned with the nature of art and the aesthetic experience that comes from artworks and nature. Its scope transcends art in itself because of the cultural implications found through the analysis of the upbringing of a specific artwork. This is for the reason that an artwork is always inspired by one's imagination which comprises the culmination of intuitions, which are rooted in one's environment or upbringing.

To further elaborate, aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that inquires into the nature of art: of who created it, of what makes art and how one appreciates art. This study of art is sensitive to the human experience that is inclusive of

one's feelings and emotions, particularly aesthetic experiences. This experience is primarily concerned with objects that elicit beauty towards the perceiver. These objects may vary from the nature or environment of a person, to cultural objects and artworks. Artworks that elicit beauty and stimulate aesthetic experiences provide context clues to one's period, of the cultural background of the artist who made it. Thus, despite its purpose solely for beauty's sake, its periphery brings light to the culture that brought that artwork into existence. For instance, Michelangelo's painting of God as a mural inside the Sistine Chapel reflects the great influence of Christianity in the medieval period. One can deduce from such painting the culture that has brought it into place-of society's appreciation of beauty which might be influenced by their environment, and the painter's perspective which will always be clouded by culture. Thus, art's periphery can be a method for uncovering cultural norms, traditions and trends in society, making it an alternative for understanding one's culture that can make it easier to diagnose its illnesses and beauty.

B. The transformation of art in the 21st century

Art and popular culture have already been in constant revolutionary shift and changes in the later part of the 20th century because of the Avant-garde movement. This movement, which were already influential during that time, promoted art that is unorthodox or unconventional. Yet, its culmination only began its peak in the 21st century because of the effect of globalization². Globalization is the phenomenon that promoted cultural diversity, which makes it a powerful mechanism that destroys cultural barriers.

Art in the past was creative yet formal. This is manifested by the works of Mozart and Bach with their symmetrical and rhythmic patterns found in their compositions. Artworks in the renaissance period also showed commonality with their style despite their creativity. Today, art is influenced by technology, specifically the World Wide Web. The internet sparked the creation of this new dimension wherein information is easily disseminated. This paved way to new unconventional artists who are influenced by the strong influence of commercialization initiated by Globalization's trade and commerce. We can see art being monopolized by the industry of popular culture and main stream media. Artists suddenly create art for the sake of popularity and audience's support. Their greatness today is measured by the number of their supporters, making Taylor Swift's repetitive genre of music and One Direction regarded as prominent and greatest today. Social media also influenced artworks. Ipad artists, shadow artists, multimedia arts and artistic posts in Instagram are just few of the examples of new breed of art that is quite questionable. People today even prefer looking at pictures on the web to view artworks rather than going to museums. The question is: how to dichotomize art from ordinary works?

C. Legitimacy and cultural implications of art

There are different theories regarding aesthetics. One may look at Hegel, Plato, Nietzsche, Zizek and Adorno's aesthetics. What differentiates Kant's aesthetics is how it encompasses the structure or criterion to as to who is the artist is and what is makes aesthetic experiences possible. Some criticisms against Kant are his formalist and subjective tendencies, and his lack of discussion to the meaning of artworks. Yet, these problems are mitigated because of the intent of this paper, which is to determine the

legitimacy of art in the 21st century. Kant's formalist tendencies in the Critique of the Power of Judgment even gave us a good criterion for the legitimization of art and artists. Thus, Kant's theory of Judgments of Taste and the Artistic Genius are quite useful in assessing the state of art in the 21st century.

Critique of 21st century art

A. The role of taste in aesthetic judgments

Aesthetic judgments according to Kant are a priori³. What is paradoxical in Kant's aesthetic theory in appreciating art is its subjectivity and objectivity. Despite his stance's seemingly contradictory characterization of one's perception of art, a clear and precise discussion of subjectivity and objectivity will bring light to Kant's theory, solving the issue of ambiguity in his use of language.

Aesthetic judgments are representations that are aesthetic according to Kant. By aesthetic he meant that it is an intuition that brings pleasure. One's aesthetic experience and the feeling of beauty are conditioned by the perceiver or the subject's capacity to feel pleasure in beauty in the process of perceiving an object and not an attribute of the object. It came from the perceiver who felt the pleasure of beauty in his experience. Thus, aesthetic judgment happens only when one experiences pleasure, which is highly subjective and conditioned by the taste of that individual. This makes the process of aesthetic judgment subjective because of the perceiver's role in judging an object as beautiful.

Aesthetic judgments are pleasures that do not come from concepts. Kant distinguished the good, agreeable and the beautiful in appreciation. The agreeable is an appreciation stimulated by pleasure from an object. This may

vary from intellectual pleasure from a book to sensible pleasure from sitting on a chair when tired. The problem here is the interest and purpose of the perceiver is based on personal interest that has been brought upon by the object. The good, on the other hand, is an appreciation that comes from an object's fulfilment of its essence or purpose. The subject or perceiver recalls a concept that provides essence and purpose on an object and affirms that the object fulfils it. For instance, a chair is appreciated as good because it fulfils the purpose of its chair-ness-that is to serve as an object to sit on. Kant emphasized the purposive but purposeless character of beauty that is elicited by an object towards a subject or perceiver. Aesthetic judgments come from intuition, which means that it should come from a particular experience and not from general representations, from which concepts are formed. That is why judging artworks should not focus on previous experiences of the straightness of lines or the colours used on a painting because all these judgments make one's appreciation of art based on concepts and not focused on the pleasure or feeling felt in perceiving the object.

Art is about your aesthetic experience of pleasure from beauty. There is singularity of experience when one encounters objects that elicit beauty. That means judging something as beautiful should not be influenced by other people's aesthetic judgments. There should be a personal experience of the object. For instance, someone who heard the music of Adele for the first time and experienced pleasure can be a form of aesthetic judgment, but other people who liked Adele only because she is famous is no longer aesthetic judgment. Aesthetic judgment is an experience of pleasure solely based on intuitions, supporting Kant's claim that it is subjective.

Now that the reason why aesthetic judgments are subjective is clarified, let us discuss why it is objective. Take note that these judgments come from the taste of an individual which made an experience pleasurable. Kant elaborated taste with its aspects. One aspect has already been discussed in the appreciation of the beautiful; this aspect is called the satisfaction of the object. One's taste should be stimulated by another aspect which is the disinterested interest. The usage of the term interest here meant one's desire of the existence of the object. For instance, if one appreciates an artwork depicting a nude woman because of lust, it is not beauty. The subject should forget the one's personal interests towards the object in judging it. It is an interest solely focused on the beauty experienced from the object with no purpose or the aspect of purposive without purpose of an object, which is another aspect of taste. This justified Kant's assertion that one's taste should also have the aspect of universality.

Aesthetic judgments are objective because of the universality of taste. It is so because your judgment of art, by virtue of disinterested interest, assumes that it is universal and applicable to all. This aspect of taste makes judgments something which other people "ought to do". The claim that judgments are universal is backed up by society's association of concepts as beautiful, which is a misunderstanding according to Kant. In the example *roses are beautiful*, people got used to the multitude of experiences of roses that elicit beauty upon them, it is not because the rose has the attribute of beauty. One should assume that everyone would feel the same thing when they perceive the object of pleasure. This objectivity in universality is conditioned by your own culture. This taste is the interplay of understanding and imagination that Kant called the harmonious free play-an aspect common to all because of its roots coming from man's

cognitive functions. Thus, aesthetic judgments are subjective but are conditioned by taste, which is objective.

Everyone should determine whether their experience is subjective, which does not come from concepts, and objective, because of taste's four aspects of disinterested interest, universality, purposeless and the satisfaction it brings to the subject. Just like Kant's duty in his practical reason, there is no certainty that it is absolutely right because of the possibility of bad taste. Today, people should be aware that aesthetic experience roots from the experience of pleasure, and not because of other people. The "mainstream" culture, which promotes the liking of an object because of the artist, deviates from beauty. This meant liking songs composed by One Direction and Taylor Swift just because they are the ones who wrote them. This is not aesthetic experience. The same thing goes with visual artworks- when you view that art, it should be pleasurable, not because it speaks the truth about politics or because you have personal biases towards the artist. Art is experienced when you feel the pleasure of beauty in the process of perceiving an artwork.

B. The artistic genius and the commercialization of art

The artistic genius is the one who created the artwork-that which instigated aesthetic experiences to other people. Yet, aesthetic experience is not exclusive to art. Nature can also be a source. What differentiates the aesthetic experiences stimulated by the geniuses' work from nature is its imitation of nature's beauty without being confined by the laws of nature. This meant that inspiration plays a huge role in creating art. For instance, the feeling of sadness a composer might experience in reality as beautiful inspired him to create music. Art is

an intentional product by the genius with no purpose but beauty.

The artistic Genius is the master of rules, who also can go beyond it. The genius knows technique and fine arts. The genius uses aesthetic pleasure and expands it to the world for everyone to experience. There are no absolute set of rules. Fine arts pursued as the product which should possess three traits: originality, exemplarity, innateness.

Originality comes from the difference or uniqueness created by the genius with the combination of technique and creativity. It is supposed to be different and not a mere imitation. For instance, the copying of old artworks or redrawing of past works does not make a person a genius. Exemplarity is a trait that makes artists worthy of imitation. This is why there are followers of Mozart, for instance. Even if the artist does not know, someone will idolize the genius. Innateness is the talent of the artist. This means the artist, to become a genius, should be favoured by nature. Not everyone can become a genius. But it does not stop there; one should cultivate or develop talent. A good example in the 21st century is Lady Gaga. She knows classical music. She had an inborn talent that she developed in growing up through taking music classes. Today, she cultivated that talent and created her own version of music. Not only that, but there are even people who aspires to be like her, just like people in Youtube who tries to sing like her. She might be a new or modern version of Kant's artistic genius.

The sad fact in the 21st century is the great influence of capitalism in one's opportunity to be known. It is now harder to be known because of the increasing number of people who aspire to be artists. Technology exacerbates the problem even more through the internet's

influence in media. Art's value suddenly is about entrepreneurship, of who buys who. Art nowadays are posted by anyone who feels like an artist in social media. It is now so easy to have some audience and proclaim oneself as an artistic genius. And the prominent artists that become successful are there because of connections and money. Most artists are influenced by capitalism that is why most try to accommodate the audience. This should not be the case because it deviates from the purpose of art. It should always be inspired by beauty. Yet, one cannot deny that the genius needs public support in order to be successful. This creates a dilemma to as to what extent of adaptation to one's culture is tolerable when creating art.

C. Culture's role in art and the legitimacy of 21st century art

Culture plays a huge role in art. For instance, the culture in the Renaissance period affected societal perception of art. The fact that people regard art back then as prestigious and expensive might be because of the prominent humanism during that time. Our culture today, which is instigated by globalization, led to technology and capitalism's great influence. People nowadays prefer easier access and money over aesthetics. For instance, instead of going to a museum, lots of people prefer to view art in their own computer. People can easily post their creation to the World Wide Web and proclaim themselves to be artists. Commercialization and the trend of mainstream confuse audiences of what makes a genius. These trends may degenerate the value of art today. Art should remain to be aesthetic. And the genius should possess originality, exemplarity and innateness. The challenge is for the audience to determine which is art and not. This is the situation of the 21st century, the great influence of Internet and Capitalism sparked by globalization.

One's judgment should not be interested of someone's similarity to other artists. Regarding a work as artistic should not be based on popularity or it being Mainstream. Awards should also not be the standard of beauty. People should judge art because of the pleasure of beauty. But one should be careful because that judgment should also be universal. It should be something that is communicable. Being in awe makes you judge an object that everyone should ought to appreciate it. People should be careful in regarding something as artistic-the pleasure that rooted from disinterested interest should be taken into consideration every time one would judge a work as artistic.

The artistic genius should have the knowledge of the past, or of a particular technique. It is okay to have art's process altered as long as the purpose is beauty inspired by nature. Techno music and mash-ups can be art as long as its purpose is solely beauty. Yet, backlashes might arise out of this newly developed technology. For instance, the frames in multimedia art and iPad made art harder to be special. One should always remember Kant's criterion for a genius. Originality, Innateness and Exemplarity should always be an attribute of the artist. Sometimes, artists sound the same because of auto tune but as long as uniqueness and talent that makes an artist worthy of idolizing is present, it can withstand change. The artistic genius should continue to sound original and at the same time possess something special, a kind of talent that would extend aesthetic experience to other people.

Concluding Remarks

21st century's art can be made possible through redefining how people understand aesthetic experiences and the artistic genius. People should be careful in asserting that they have

experienced something that is artistic. The disinterested interest, universality, purposive without purpose aspect and the satisfaction of the object should always be present. Only when these aspects are present in one's taste that one should regard something as a work of beauty. This is applicable to multimedia art or latest musicians like Adele and Lady Gaga. Every person should know this criterion. On the other hand, the artistic genius should possess originality, innateness and exemplarity. It is okay to avail technological advancements in creating art as long as the talent is still there and one's originality or uniqueness can still be enacted.

Looking into the future, this cultural trend might create something positive. Technology made the creation of art cheaper. There can now be low-priced artworks because of the inexistence of the need for canvass. This trend creates better competition because of people's means to view and create art wherever they are. This can take art to the next level. As long as people don't forget art's purpose in aesthetic experience, this change will bring fewer casualties to art. Yet, one should be careful because of the tendency to forget aesthetics for

the sake of the new age standard of progress—that which views economic development as absolutely good. The trend of putting primacy to economics can trump other values that could have been more important. This warning does not only pertain to art, one should be wary of its effects on education, the workplace, geopolitics and to the lives of every person.

¹ Kant's third critique, which attempts to expose human being's capacity to judge an object aesthetically, was translated differently. One of the latter versions, in contrast to the translation *Critique of Judgment*, was translated by Paul Guyer, one of the most acclaimed Kantians, as *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to remove confusion in Kant's usage of the term 'judgment'. In this critique, the judgment that Kant pertained to is one's capacity to intuit beauty, which makes its main topic Aesthetics and not Epistemology.

² See more: Deresiewicz, William. "The Death of the Artist—and the Birth of the Creative Entrepreneur." *The Atlantic*. December 28, 2014. Accessed March 12, 2015. <http://m.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/01/the-death-of-the-artist-and-the-birth-of-the-creative-entrepreneur/383497/>.

³ A priori are knowledge that comes from reason. There are two criterions for something to be a priori: it has to be universal and necessary. Which, in this case, is applied to aesthetic experience.

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