



AESTHETICS CS-E5600
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What is Aesthetics 2: Art

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What is the role of aesthetics in my life?

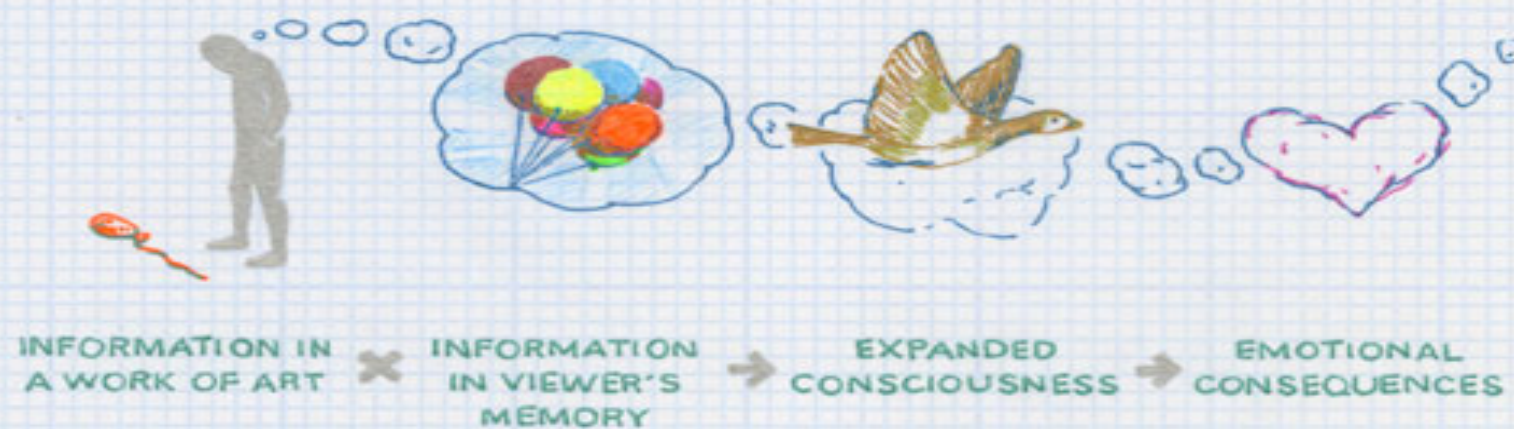
- Role of the senses: visual, multisensory
- Work, hobbies, interests
- Art, sport, tools (software, hardware)
- Personal life, everyday, human relations
- Role of emotions, reason, values
- Active/passive relation with the world
- What is beauty?
 - Manmade/human/non-human/nature?

Philosophy of Art

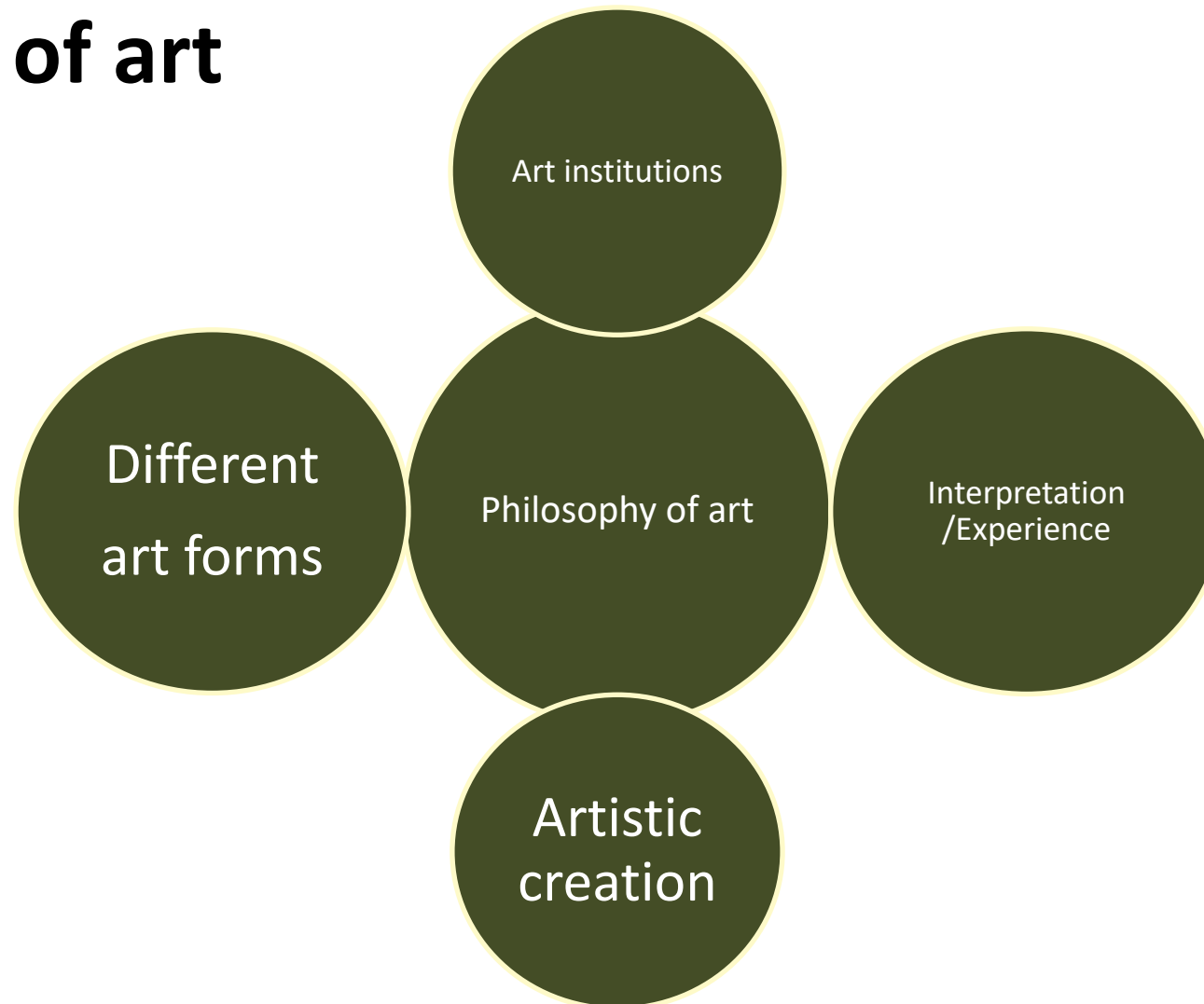
- What is art?
 - Can art be defined?
 - Different definitions
- What can we know about art?
 - Interpretation
 - Artistic intention



THE STRUCTURE of AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE



Different directions in philosophy of art



Examples of traditional questions in aesthetics (understood as philosophy of art)

Source Prof. David Clowney:

<https://www.rowan.edu/open/philosophy/clowney/Aesthetics/index.HTM>

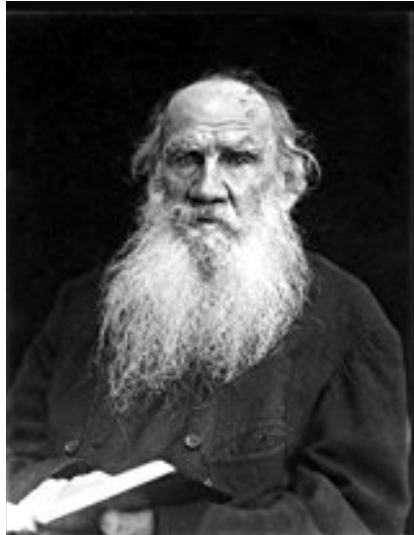
- [What is an aesthetic issue?](#)
- [Why think about art? Why not just experience it?](#)
- [What makes art different from nonart?](#)
- [Should we recognize a difference between fine art, commercial art, and craftwork?](#)
- [What do the arts have in common?](#)
- [Why does art matter?](#)
- [Are art and beauty essentially related?](#)
- What is a symbol?
- [How does art mean? How does the answer to this question differ with the different arts? \(e.g., painting, music, dance\).](#)
- What's the status of aesthetic standards? Do they simply express individual or cultural tastes? Is there something objective about them?
- What's the nature of aesthetic properties? Are they in any sense "objective"? Or are they simply "in the eye (or ear) of the beholder"?
- [How do the arts relate to spirituality and religion?](#)
- Is there a connection between morality and art?
- How do the arts communicate emotions? How central is emotional communication to the nature of art?
- How do the arts relate to economic power and class structure?
- How closely is artistic expression and meaning tied to culture? To cultural ideas and philosophy? To cultural "forms of life"?
- What's the nature of aesthetic intelligence, and how does it relate to other sorts of intelligence?
- Can animals be artists?
- Is there any special connection between art and gender, or between art and sex or the erotic?
- [How important is performance to art?](#)
- [Why aren't natural objects works of art? Or are they?](#)
- Do artists reveal? Interpret? Express? All of the above

What is art
but a way
of seeing?

-Saul Bellow

**ART IS NOT
WHAT YOU
SEE BUT
WHAT YOU
MAKE
OTHERS SEE
DEGAS**

**ART CHANGES
PEOPLE AND
PEOPLE CHANGE
THE WORLD**



Art is a human activity having for its purpose
the transmission to others of the highest and
best feelings to which men have risen.

(Leo Tolstoy)

**“ART IS ANYTHING
YOU CAN GET
AWAY WITH”**

Andy Warhol

What is art?

Can art be defined? Does art *need* a definition?

- No: art is too diverse
- No: a definition would constrict artistic practice
- Yes/no: family resemblance
- Yes: it gets defined anyway in various practices
- Yes: when looking for a definition we understand better what meaning and purpose art has in human life

Art always...

...is made intentionally by someone (human) or something (nonhuman).

...surpasses the sphere of everyday objects/actions.

...has (perceptual) properties that arouse aesthetic interest.

...has a history, belongs to a tradition.

+ art (or artlike activities) exists in every known human culture

Art *sometimes*...

...has other functions

- E.g. transmitting religious content



Caravaggio,
3 paintings of St. Matthew,
Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi
dei Francesi Church, Rome

Art *sometimes*...

...has other functions

- E.g. representation of ideologies



Eugène Delacroix,
Liberty Leading the People (1830)

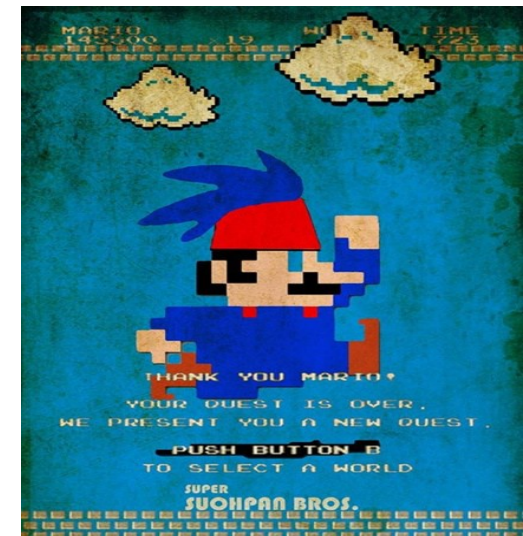
Art *sometimes*...

...has other functions

- E.g. promotion of tradition & cultural identity



Suohpanterror,
Propaganda posters



Suohpanterror

A FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

“It’s about the necessity of our collective liberation and survival. We either fight or we die. There is no ultimate victory, just perpetual struggle. Everything old shall be new again, and again: this is the eternal return of a sacred struggle.”



What is art? Definition attempts

1. Traditional definitions:

- Essentialist definitions: art has certain properties/qualities; "aesthetic core"

2. Contemporary definitions:

- Institutional/historical/cultural definitions

3. Functional definitions

- Art does something special

1. Traditional Definitions of Art

- Art is characterized by one type of property
- "Art is always:
 - 1) representational (mimetic) [Plato],
 - 2) expressive [Tolstoi] OR
 - 3) defined by certain formal properties"

→ Not applicable to all art

Johannes Vermeer:
View of Delft (c. 1660–61)



2. Institutional Definitions of Art

- Art is created by an artist in order to be presented to the artworld [Danto, Dickie]
 - Artworks necessarily have a relation to some set of earlier artworks (historical definition) [Levinson]
- What is "the artworld" then? Opens more questions...





NOT ART.

ART.



3. Functional Definitions of Art

- Art is defined by **what it does**, its function
- Art is something that produces e.g. aesthetic experiences, reflection, noble emotions

→ What about bad art?



Olafur Eliasson, *Your Rainbow Panorama* (2006–11)

Interpretation 1/2

- What does the artwork communicate? Does it have a message?
- Requires experience & some knowledge about the context (institutional, historical, physical)
- Intentionalism >< relativism
- Hermeneutics (Gadamer): general theory and methodology for interpretation based on textual interpretation but not limited to that

Interpretation 2/2

- Is there only one correct interpretation of an artwork?
 - Some more correct than others
 - How to distinguish “the right” interpretation?
- What are the interpreter’s (spectator, user, etc.) abilities for making the interpretation?
- To what extent does the artist’s intention define our experience/interpretation?

Phenomenology

- "Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions." (Smith 2013, 1)
- Smith, W. 2013. Phenomenology in Stanford Encyclopaedia for Philosophy, 1–43. Stanford: The Metaphysics Research Lab.

Hermeneutics

- How is understanding possible at all?
- How is understanding implemented practically?
- Interpretation as a reading (textual metaphors)

Artistic Intention 1/2

- The artist's intention \neq the meaning of the artwork ("intentional fallacy")
- Different from the artist's motives for making art
- Only one part of interpretation
- Not always possible to know, not very clear in the first place
- In some cases affects more how the work is to be interpreted (e.g. *roman à clef*)

Artistic Intention 2/2

- Imitationalism
 - Imitating reality as closely as possible
- Emotionalism
 - Expressivity & communication most important; transmitting emotions and ideologies
- Formalism
 - “Art for art’s sake”; artwork as an interesting/pleasant object

Next week's reading

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/15/timothy-morton-anthropocene-philosopher>



The long read

'A reckoning for our species': the philosopher prophet of the Anthropocene

▲ Tim Morton, ecologist and philosopher
Photograph: Max Burkhalter for the Guardian

Group task: Discussing art

- In groups of 4–5: choose one image of an artwork from MyCourses
- **Invent a name** for the artwork in it
- Write a **short description** of the artwork, speculate the following
 - Can you tell immediately it is art? Why/why not?
 - What could have been the artist's intention?
 - How do you experience the artwork (without any previous knowledge about it)? How does the photograph affect the experience?
- Start e.g. with the following: **What** is the artwork in the picture? What are its material, colour, scale, location, atmosphere etc.? What is the **art form**? When has it been madeof/for? What can we say about its origin/maker?



Literature

- [“The Definition of Art”](#) in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- Davies, Stephen, [*The Philosophy of Art*](#) (2006)
- Eldridge, Richard, [*An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*](#) (2003)
- Puolakka, Kalle, [*Relativism and Intentionalism in Interpretation: Davidson, Hermeneutics, and Pragmatism*](#) (2011)