

2. THE PHILOSOPHY OF KANT AND *THE BOOTS OF VINCENT*

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Abstract: *This article aims to summarize the Kantian philosophy of visual aesthetics, realize the logical discrimination between plastic aesthetics and the philosophy of aesthetics, the distinction between art object and artwork, and the essentialization of the value significance of the artwork exemplified in a relevant case study: the painting "Boots" by Vincent Van Gogh.*

Key words: *Kantian philosophy of visual aesthetics, the philosophy of aesthetics, art object versus artwork, Vincent Van Gogh*

1. Introduction - The aesthetics of art

Aesthetics (etymologically, *aisthētikós*, which refers to sensory perception) examines the philosophy of aesthetic value, which is determined by critical judgments of artistic taste (Zangwill, 2019). According to Fechner (1876), aesthetics is an empirically comprehensive experiential perception that fundamentally depends on the characteristics of the subject experiencing the experience and the perceived properties of the object. Currently, psychologists and neuroscientists define the field of aesthetics more narrowly, considering the perception, creation, and evaluation of objects that evoke intense feeling (Chatterjee, 2011), at the physiological, phenomenological (experience), and behavioral levels, because aesthetic experience involves the combination of sensory and emotional reactions. This could explain the large variability among individual preferences for art images (Vessel et al., 2012).

The function and value of the aesthetics of art

The function of aesthetics is a critical reflection on art, culture, and nature (Riedel, 1999). The aesthetic value of a generic object, paradigmatically speaking, a work of art or a natural environment, is its capacity to have positive value (by inciting pleasure) or negative value (by inducing unpleasantness) when it is seen or experienced it aesthetically. In other words, the absolute aesthetic value of an object can be quantified by the number of subjects who prefer the object in question.

Art aesthetics versus art philosophy

A distinction must be made between the aesthetics of art and the philosophy of art. Aesthetics considers why people like some works of art and not others and how art can affect their moods and beliefs (Munro, 1986). The philosophy of art specifically studies how artists imagine, create, and execute works of art and how receptors use, enjoy, and have critical views of art. Both aesthetics and philosophy of art seek to answer the following questions: How exactly functions art, and what makes it valuable?

2. The philosophy of art in Kant's conception

If we are to establish what art is, I think the most eloquent definition is the one Kant gave (1790), which differentiates art from craft because art is a free game that assumes certain constraints intrinsic to the type of art conceived. In addition, art also

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differs from science because art is a practical ability that requires the knowledge of specific techniques, but “art is only that which, although perfectly known, cannot be immediately executed.” (Kant, 1790). Kant's aesthetic philosophy is structured in four theses.

The first thesis is called Functions of the Faculties of Judgment. It includes the three faculties of the soul: the faculty of knowledge (with the levels of sensitivity-intuitions with functions of knowledge of forms of content, intellect-judgments with normative functions; reason-ideas with constitutive functions), the faculty of pleasure/displeasure (it is a faculty of the soul based on the possibility of constructing judgments of taste, judgments of appreciation, essential in the horizon of art) and the faculty of wanting (autonomous, free, ready for action determined by motivation/inclination and purpose, the goal the ultimate of desire being the Sovereign Good—the synthesis between perfect morality governed by duty and total happiness).

The second thesis, called The Reflexive Aesthetic Judgment and the Aesthetic Judgment of Taste, is based on the faculty of pleasure/displeasure and constitutes, together with the faculty of knowledge and the faculty of wanting, components of the architecture of the human soul. Kant specifies that this type of aesthetic judgment works in a double register. On the one hand, is elaborate empirical concepts, systematized teleologically, technically, and subjectively based on the experience through art, representing reflexive aesthetic judgments. On the other hand, are conceived judgments relative to objects, elaborated as representations or phenomena in the faculty of knowledge at the level of sensitivity, depending on the pleasure/displeasure felt by the subject, representing aesthetic judgments of taste.

These judgments are not knowledge because they are not elaborated by the intellect but through the lens of the teleological principle. Reason, as a level of the faculty of knowledge, builds a perceptive scheme of the targeted object that belongs to the imagination. As a level of the faculty of knowledge, the intellect has its *a priori* forms, constituted in categories that complete the scheme of imagination, resulting in knowledge of transcendental subjectivity.

Pleasure represents precisely the concordance at the level of transcendental subjectivity between imaginary schemes and intellectual categories. The ratio between the faculty of wanting and pleasure/displeasure leads to an aesthetic judgment of taste. The relationship between the faculty of knowledge and pleasure/displeasure leads to a reflexive aesthetic judgment, which creates considerations for artistic conventions.

The third thesis, called the Judgment of Taste and the Beautiful, captures the idea that a judgment of taste can subjectively acquire a character of universality when the characteristics of the object in question become the cause of pleasure/displeasure. The object thus considered acquires the quality of being agreeable/beautiful/good, respectively sublime, and the faculty that judges the object in this way is taste, respectively the aesthetic reason. Pure aesthetic judgment is that which is not based on experience, but only on the *a priori* of finality and the agreement/disagreement of the various faculties of the soul. The pure aesthetic judgment of the sublime has to do with moral finality.

The cultivation of aesthetic taste must be based on the existence of some

objective principles so that based on deduction as an operation of the intellect, judgments of knowledge with necessary and universal validity can be obtained in different ways. The first way of make judgments is according to qualitative criteria (pleasant-interest of the senses, beautiful-disinterested, good - interest of reason) or according to the quantitative criteria (the pleasant-appreciated in particular, the beautiful-universally appreciated²¹⁴); in this case, the validity of these judgments of taste is not objective, because they are not based on the faculty of knowledge²¹⁵.

The second way to make judgements is according to the relations, considering that purpose is in relation to a being who conceives it, and the finality is in relation to the intended subject of the object; in this case, the beautiful is the purposeless finality, and the good is the purpose of our reasons²¹⁶ or to the modalities; in this case the *sensus communis* gives the judgment of taste universality, which is rightly subjective²¹⁷.

The fourth thesis entitled, Art and Genius, presents value judgments on the difference between Art and nature. It emphasizes that nature cannot produce Art because this would require rational reflection, a capacity that nature lacks. In Kant's understanding, we should call Art only what is produced by one's own free will, with a clear intention, based on reason, and focused on the observance of certain conditions related to the architecture of the human soul.

According to these conditionings, Kant distinguishes mechanical Art (an art of learning, not of genius) and aesthetic Art (based on pleasure/displeasure: agreeable-focused on senses or beautiful-focused on reflections). "*Pleasure presupposes culture and works to sensitize our spirit to ideas. Otherwise, by practicing amusement, we accentuate the self-discontent of the soul.*" (Kant, 1790).

Kant's conception of genius, under romantic influence, is the base of the post-Kantian theories about the artist (genius appears as the creator par excellence of the fine arts) and beyond. Kant claims that a certain proportion of imagination and intellect is apt to lead to expressing ideas in an original and exemplary product. Originality is the consequence of the fact that the creative act of genius does not follow predetermined rules and does not even know the rules of his spontaneous creation. The exemplarity represents the ability of the original product to become a model for other creators of genius or not.

3. The Art

Art has been defined as a vehicle for the expression or communication of emotions and ideas, as a medium for the personal exploration and appreciation of formal elements related to form and style, and as mimesis or representation (Levinson, 2003) or even, in an idealistic view, as an expression of the creator's emotions, so the work of art would essentially exist in his mind (Croce, 1902).

Art can connote a sense of trained skill or mastery of a medium. Art can also refer

²¹⁴ Definition of beautiful from the perspective of quantity: "Beautiful is what is universally pleasing without any conceptualization." (Kant, 1790, p. 112)

²¹⁵ The definition of beautiful from the perspective of the relation to the judgment of taste: "Beauty is the form of the finality of an object because we perceive it without the representation of a purpose." (Kant, 1790, p. 129)

²¹⁶The definition of beautiful from the modality perspective on the judgment of taste: "We call beautiful what is known without a conceptualization as an object of a necessary satisfaction." (Kant, 1790, p. 133)

²¹⁷ The definition of beautiful from the modality perspective on the judgment of taste: "We call beautiful what is known without a conceptualization as an object of a necessary satisfaction." (Kant, 1970, p. 133)

to the effective and efficient use of language to convey spontaneous, deep meanings. Art can be defined as an act of expressing feelings, thoughts, and observations.

Art object versus artwork

Heidegger (1950) distinguishes between the work of art and the object of art, noting that the work of art is essentially defined by his capacity to be active in a historical dimension; once the culture changes and the work is no longer able to actively engage culturally, it becomes a simple art object. Wollheim (1980), on the other hand, affirms that an object can be characterized as a work of art if this was the intention of its creator, regardless of its purpose or function (for example, Duchamp's "fountain"), obviously, on the assumption that no it is a mass product, that is, if there is no intentionality of its multiplication.

The artistic value of the artwork

A work of art's aesthetic value is reflected in its beauty, harmony, balance, and elegance. In that case, the artistic value of the work of art is the quintessence of the sum of aesthetic, cognitive, and historical values (Sauchelli, 2016). Moreover, artistic values include ethical, moral, behavioral, and psychological values (Stecker, 2019). Valorization of the work of art is polarized either as a cult value or as an exhibition value. The cult, ritualistic, sacred value of a work of art is primarily given by its inaccessibility, at any time, for reasons related to the rituals in which they are used, the exposed artifacts. In practice, the cult value of a religious artifact is diminished when it is excluded from the ritualic act but is increased in exhibition value, becoming art capable of creating emotions, thoughts, and experiences on the assumption that it is not a mechanical reproduction of the original object (Walter, 1935, p. 4). Photographing or filming does not create cult value because a critical attitude towards the artifact is privileged, thus losing its religious function (1935, p. 6).

The value of the work of art depends on the axiological scale proclaimed by the social system and implicitly on the artistic styles promoted and the existing cultural tastes to which the artists and their receptors adhere. By exhibiting the work of art in a gallery as a social and cultural practice, the aesthetic transfer from the private sphere to the public sphere is allowed, which leads to the increase of the social value of the work of art (Walter, 1935). On the other hand, the inherent contemporary political representations of the leader social class induced some transformations in art production, which can turn a work of art into a commercial product, which can metamorphose a modern means of expression into a mass artistic reproduction, with severe consequences which destroy cultural, aesthetic, historical value and politics of the work of art, through its dispossession of the original art object's authenticity (Berger, 1972).

Contemporary conceptions of the artistic quality of the work of art distinguish between three attitudes: a realistic reception, in which the quality of the work is perceived as an absolute value, independent of any human point of view; an objectivist reception, in which the quality of the work is perceived as an absolute value, but dependent on the general human experience; and a relativistic reception, in which the quality of the work is not perceived as an absolute value, but dependent on the background of the receiving individuals, in particular (Wollheim, 1980).

Modern art and technique must be understood from the perspective of the progressive development of the contemporary cultural context, in which matter,

space, and time have acquired new perceptive, conceptual, and pragmatic meanings, which makes all art techniques metamorphose, bringing astonishing changes in the very notion of art (Valéry, 1928). A work of art's aura derives from authenticity (uniqueness) and location (physical and cultural) (Walter, 1935, p.1).

The artistic value of the work of art resides, in large part, in the unmotivated purposes embedded in the artistic act, which are an integral part of being human (no other species creates art), transcend the individual, and do not fulfill a specific external purpose, being beyond utility, relying exclusively on the basic human instinct for harmony, balance, rhythm (Schiuma, 2011).

However, the fundamental feature of modern and contemporary art as an artistic value is artists' common, intentional, conscious goal to be privileged to have public recognition, independent of specific interdisciplinary characteristics such as cultural, social, moral, economic, ethnic, ethical, or political changes.

4. Case Study

As a work of Van Gogh, *The Boots* is definitely an artwork. On the one hand, its value is aesthetic because when you look at the picture, you feel a mixture of pleasure (positive value) and unpleasure (negative value). The pleasure is given by the sense of sight, which perceives the harmony of colors, the minuteness of details, and the finesse/subtlety of inducing the feeling of naturalness: the image of the targets/ergonomic mini-cleats on the sole, the flow of the laces on a shoe, the outline drawing of the boot model.

The unpleasure is given by the meta-image, the image created in the soul of the viewer who feels the discomfort, the painter's soul turmoil, suggested by a multitude of details, starting from the simple kneading of colors which indicates the floor; with the gloomy play of lights and shadows; up to the eye-catching details at the level of decrepitude, degeneration of the artist's boots; at the careless disorder that seems to be the result of profound hopelessness; the lack of visualization of the laces of the second pair of boots that can symbolize uniqueness, but also loneliness, sadness; the tongue hanging out of the boot in an abnormal position, indicating *The Boots* of Vincent as a work of Van Gogh is, on the other hand, loaded with artistic value because it clearly indicates a subjective event in the life of the artist who arrived home and feels the need to contemplate and even immortalize the image created by his abandoned boots in disorder, as he felt - abandoned and despoiled.

Also, the work symbolizes an objective, timeless, but authentic moment in universal human life, because the respective boots may belong to some peasant, contemporary with Gogh, as Heidegger (1995) considered. The artistic value is also given by the technique that the painter used in rendering the spatiality, through color, dense as a paste and intense for the first plan represented by the boots and the floor, respectively more diluted as a paste and in lighter tones for the second plan, represented of the wall painted in green, the color of the joy of living, in counterpoint with the shaded area where the light does not reach, colored in earth tones, colors of mourning.

The correspondence between the shades used on the boots' outer part and the walls' shaded area is a harmonious technical element that pleasantly impresses the viewer's retina. The use of complementary contrast (blue-orange), very intensely

rendered through the use of vibrant colors, as a dominant element is a technical element with an overwhelming effect on the viewer's soul, conveying the artist's intense inner turmoil.

5. Conclusions

Van Gogh's *Boots* are recontextualized through the creative act felt and performed by the painter, acquiring an additional denotative meaning, which further valorizes the painting. Van Gogh, an emerging artist of his era who broke out the patterns of normality in many ways, offering the whole life experience in his work, is again amazing through his creative force, which recontextualizes a banal element of daily life. This element is resemantized in his masterpiece, becoming a universal value interconnected to the noosphere (Eco, 1975).²¹⁸



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