

Three Underpinning Views of Aesthetic Education: Broudy, Tolstoy, and Dewey

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Aesthetics is a discipline of philosophy. The field of aesthetic education has been developed on the question of “what is good art” and how to cultivate students’ connoisseurship in and through art. The discussion between what might be called the “art-first” camp and the “experience-first” camp has been central to the development of the field. The former camp takes the position that aesthetic experience must be grounded on a proper understanding of art. This position is typically represented by the formalist theory of aesthetics espoused, for instance, by Eduard Hanslick and Igor Stravinsky. The experience-first position assumes that aesthetic experience springs out of everyday experiences including, but not limited to, the experience of artworks. John Dewey may fall into this camp.

The focus of the present paper is the works of Harry Broudy and Leo Tolstoy, whose views of art are aligned with the formalist theory of art. Although they provide substantially different views on art and do not simply belong to the formalist group, their ideas about art, when compared to that of John Dewey, might shed light on the underpinning of aesthetic education today. Both Broudy and Tolstoy regard art as an autonomous entity and see students as beholders/listeners rather than artists/performers. Their position legitimizes and appropriates the formulation of art appreciation curricula. Conversely, Dewey sees students as active players of social and cultural roles in creating meaning in their experiences. Dewey’s theory of experience promotes the transformative perception of the arts that allows students to renew their everyday experiences. Our decisions about the practice of aesthetic education vary depending on the philosophical position we take.

Broudy’s Position of Aesthetic Education as Value Education

Broudy’s position of aesthetic education is aligned with those of Plato, Aristotle, and Confucius that underscore the affinity of aesthetic appreciation and value judgment. Broudy acknowledges that the arts captures the moral, ethical, and intellectual aspects of life, and epitomizes human experiences of truth, goodness, and beauty. In the past, he believed people recognized the difference between music that was good musically and that which was good morally or intellectually. Idealizing this classical view, Broudy (1958) proclaims that “aesthetic experience had to be judged by its effects on the whole life of a person or a society as well as artistic standards alone” (p. 67). Thus, what is beautiful for Broudy is morally good and metaphysically true.

Acknowledging that value judgment is strongly influenced by aesthetic judgment (Broudy, 1972/1994), Broudy locates the arts within the humanities curriculum where other modes of human inquiries, such as literature, philosophy, and history are introduced and paralleled as a means to delve into the virtue and wisdom of human traditions. For Broudy, the humanities course, of which aesthetic education is a great part, is an approach to actualize value education (p. 57). Although he emphasizes that aesthetic education is not concerned with forcing a propaganda or molding students’ beliefs into any specific ideology, the value commitment, according to Broudy, should aim at facilitating students’ awareness of what values should be cherished over others.

This value commitment, what Broudy calls *enlightened cherishing*, is brought by cultural heritages that have been going through centuries of critical and deliberate examinations of the true, the good, and the beautiful (Broudy, 1972/1994). Broudy identifies “The sources for making cherishing more enlightened...are found in the total cultural heritage” (p. 59). Broudy thinks that cultural heritage not only includes the fruits of historical thoughts and feelings but also the tools for innovation. From the heritage “emerge the variations which form the matrix of progress” (p. 23). The heritage is “revolutionary as well as conservationist” (p. 18) and thus worthy of our love. Broudy believes

that imagination is the key to value commitment because the question of value standards is made real when people conceive of what might be. Here comes the importance of art appreciation because healthy art directly evokes people's imagination. Thus, for Broudy, aesthetic education should facilitate perception of aesthetic images and apprehension of artworks. The goal is geared toward the enhancement of value import and enlightenment of perception cherished through the arts.

Among all the forms of images, Broudy (1972/1994) places first priority on what he calls "value import image" (p. 23). Images with aesthetic/value import, Broudy believes, enhance and refresh the beholder's perception of aesthetic objects, whereas images without aesthetic/value import are provoked easily by popular art because they simply serve as a reminder of stereotyped images of the depicted reality itself. In contrast, aesthetic images with value import are metaphorical and educative.

Works of art, according to Broudy, play a major role in aesthetic education. This is because art, due to its metaphorical form, helps objectify the artist's imagination not available otherwise through our direct experience. Natural scenery, for example, could be an aesthetic image if it is given a form or transformed into an aesthetic object (a picture or a photograph) by an artist. But a literal portraiture of nature, for Broudy (1972/1994), is science (p. 41). Broudy explains:

Real life is not that orderly; the sounds of the street are not ordered as in a musical composition. There are perhaps many fine scenes in the world around us, but it takes the artist's eye to detect their pictorial possibilities....one may hesitate to speak of nature as the Great Artist. (p. 32)

For Broudy (1972/1994), the beautiful is made clear when it is crystallized and given form by artists, not ordinary people, because "the artist is the source of the original, the unusual, the fresh, the apt metaphor" (p. 37). Broudy pessimistically assumes that "the beholder may lack the genius to create the image or...to form an individual intuition of it" (p. 28).¹ Given limited resources and time for arts instruction in schools, Broudy denies the possibility that students may become artists with creative command of aesthetic images. As a result, Broudy's main concern falls into the cultivation of students' perceptive skills of aesthetic images through great works of art, a collection of specialists' wisdom and knowledge.

Opposed to the dominant performance-oriented curriculum in the arts, Broudy espouses a perceptual approach to aesthetic education consisting of three components: (1) sensory qualities, (2) formal properties, and (3) expressiveness of artwork. Each needs cultivation for a better perception. Broudy argues that aesthetic experience is a unified experience of these three components. On the first level, Broudy believes that sensitivity to a wide range of sensory qualities is the requisite for proper aesthetic perception. This includes perception of the variations of the sensory quality of an object, such as whiteness on a paper. This is similar to the discrimination of faint differences of wines through flavors. But the connoisseurship of aesthetic tasting needs further cultivation to evaluate the ages of wine. In the case of appreciating the arts, the connoisseur depends on formal properties of an object. Broudy believes that perceiving the sensory contents of an object is the requisite condition for an aesthetic experience because it heightens students' perception of formal and expressive properties of the object.

The second component of aesthetic perception is concerned with formal properties of artworks. Broudy explicates that formal properties of art are patterns such as unity, balance, rhythm, variation, and evolution. These properties in works of art are to be tested by finding common elements in various parts of artworks. Without recognizing the formal properties, Broudy (1972/1994) believes students cannot achieve an aesthetic experience with the object, especially when its understanding requires a systematic approach (p. 73). Highlighting the formal properties in the

¹ Broudy (1972/1994) goes on further to say,

It takes a novelist to imbue ordinary people's lives with drama. It takes a historian to discern the drama in social movements, and only long after the vents have occurred, for it takes time to sort out what had been crucial to the plot and what had been only incidental. While we are living through events, we do not know what will turn out to be significant. (p. 34)

course of study helps the process of aesthetic analysis to be systematic because it enables verbal guidance: with it, formal properties are to be identified, compared, and discussed, and it espouses the use of verbal communication in the study of art. Broudy likens appreciating complex works of art to understanding unfamiliar foreign languages.

The last dimension of aesthetic perception involves the expressive quality of artwork (e.g., sadness in a landscape or cheerfulness in a melody). If the artist is successful in portraying the aesthetic images, and if a student is able to perceive the sensory and formal contents of the work, then the expressive quality is to be communicated between them. Broudy (1972/1994) states, "There is no expressiveness without sensory materials formally arranged" (p. 76). Whereas sensory and formal properties are fairly public objects, expressiveness of artwork is phenomenologically understood because it is a matter of subjective experience. Broudy thus suggests that art teachers should not make the expressive dimension of an artwork a direct target of instruction but leave it open for students' interpretations and imaginations. Broudy insists "whether or not one perceives some expressiveness in the image is more important than that all observers agree on what the meaning is" (p. 77).

In sum, Broudy's perceptual approach to art, or "scanning" in his term, tends to take a linear process: it starts with analyzing the object, sensing and responding to its properties, followed by a series of reflections and discussion. The object must bear complex properties worthy of reflective investigation, such as classical artworks. Rock music, folk dance, and kinds of pop art are inappropriate for aesthetic education because, according to Broudy, the essence of these art forms is to be felt, moved, and enjoyed rather than perceived, responded, and reflected. Thus, Broudy promotes curriculum designing that revolves around appreciation of classical artworks. The study of art is located within the humanities course in the Broudyan view of curriculum because art serves as a medium to enlighten students' value judgments, as well as their aesthetic imagination.

Tolstoy's View of Good Art

Leo Tolstoy (1896/1969) formulates a theory of art that celebrates art as communication. Like Broudy, Tolstoy is concerned with the question of "what is good art?" The key component of Tolstoy's definition of art is the differentiation of art that is good for the life of humanity and art that is merely for pleasure and entertainment. For Tolstoy art is a means of sharing and communicating deep human feelings and emotions. Art begins "when one person with the object of joining another or others to himself in one and the same feeling, expresses that feeling by certain external indications" (pp. 121-122). If other people are infected by the same feelings through the artwork, that is true art. For Tolstoy, art is an act of unifying people joining together in the same feelings.

Tolstoy questions if all feelings are worthy of our attention. Tolstoy's answer is that only the highest feelings that humanity has attained deserve our study. Tolstoy (1896/1969) clarifies, "by art, in the limited sense of the word, we do not mean all human activity transmitting feelings, but only that part which we for some reason select from it and to which we attach special importance" (p. 125). Thus, in response to the question of "what is good art," Tolstoy answers that it is one that affords human communication of the highest feelings.

On the surface, Tolstoy does not seem to limit his view of art within the scope of classics or serious art. Indeed, he acknowledges that superior feelings can be shared in daily encounters with artwork: ranging "from cradle-song, jest, mimicry, the ornamentation of house, dress, and utensils, to church services" (Tolstoy, 1896/1969, p. 124). However, Tolstoy would devalue popular art, for it may direct the young to a certain disposition that seeks pleasure. Tolstoy believes even if popular art enables young people to share the feeling with the artist, that feeling would not appear as superior because the feelings flowing from the desire for enjoyment are limited as these feelings are repeatedly experienced and expressed. True art for Tolstoy should transmit fresh feelings not previously experienced to people. Tolstoy's depreciation of popular art becomes obvious when he expresses his worry about the power of art. Art is "so highly dangerous in its power to infect people against their wills, that mankind will lose far less by banishing all art than by tolerating each and every art" (p. 125). Here resides the reason why Tolstoy distinguishes good art from bad art.

But what are the highest feelings? Tolstoy (1896/1969) states, "There is nothing older and more hackneyed than enjoyment, and there is nothing fresher than the feelings springing from the religious consciousness of each age" (p. 150). For Tolstoy, religious perception generates highest feelings, and only on the basis of religious perception can fresh emotions arise. Tolstoy laments the impoverishment of subject matters of his time, which is epitomized by the matters of

“pride,” “sexual desire,” and “weariness of life” (p. 152). Any artwork capturing these subject matters, Tolstoy observes, cannot serve the wellbeing of individuals and of humanity.

Tolstoy shares with Broudy a similar view of art, that is, art for humanities. While Broudy emphasizes the cultivation of value import, Tolstoy underscores the communication of human feelings through the arts. Both Tolstoy and Broudy agree that humanity faces a constant crisis of moral subsidence. Thus, they believe that aesthetic experience should contribute to the development of humanity as it nurtures proper feelings. Broudy (1972/1994) remarks:

The quality of life is measured by the repertory of feeling which pervades it. Life is rich if the repertory of feelings is large and the discrimination among them fine. Life is coarse, brutish, and violent when the repertory is meager and undifferentiated. Aesthetic education’s role in enlightened cherishing is to enlarge and refine the repertory of feeling. (p. 58)

Taken together, Broudy’s and Tolstoy’s visions of art submit a certain position of aesthetic education. The aim of aesthetic education for them is to cultivate students’ enlightened cherishing of tradition and to screen out improper feelings from students’ minds. Art is viewed as a catalyst to facilitate this process.

Dewey’s View of Art, Expression, and an Experience

Broudy’s and Tolstoy’s formalization of aesthetic education is based on the dualistic distinction between art and nature, artwork and the non-art object, artist and beholder, specialist and student, product and process, form and content, and mind and body. These separations bring about the modernist approach that places great emphasis on the part of art appreciation over art production, perception/contemplation over embodiment of art, and skills of impression over those of expression. John Dewey opposes this dichotomy. Dewey (1934/1980) believes, “The oppositions of individual and universal, of subjective and objective, of freedom and order...have no place in the work of art” (p. 82). Dewey proclaims that in aesthetic experience there is no separation of subject and object but the unified total. Where this split between the subject and the object exists, artwork would end up being “artificial” or “artful” but not “artistic” (p. 63).

Dewey, unlike Plato, takes the position that art does not reveal the essence of things or higher levels of beauty. Dewey instead directs our attention to origins, conditions, and operations of experiences. Sources of aesthetic experiences for him are not necessarily confined within works of art. Dewey (1934/1980) states, “The trouble with existing [aesthetic] theories is that they start from a ready-made compartmentalization, or from a conception of art that ‘spiritualizes’ it out of connection with the objects of concrete experience” (p. 11). Dewey identifies that works of art are manifestations of the process of art making in which “antecedent subject matter is not instantaneously changed into the matter of a work of art in the mind of an artist. It is a developing process” (p. 111). Dewey proclaims that this developing process is necessary for students as artists. Rather than dealing exclusively with Van Gogh’s *Sunflower*, for example, Dewey encourages them to feel the soil, air, moisture, and smell in nature, or what he calls “germs and roots” in matters of experience that are the condition for the production of artworks. Dewey posits the tension between the organism (the students) and the environment (soil, clay, etc.) generates a desire to seek balance. “Equilibrium,” Dewey sees, “comes about not mechanically and inertly but out of, and because of tension” (p. 14). Thus, Dewey’s theory of education concerns itself primarily with preparing the environment in which the interaction and the tension between the students and the objects naturally occur.

Dewey argues that impulsion, or desire for equilibrium, is the beginning of expression. Impulsion is an unorganized, unordered inner movement of an organism. When it gains a form and order, it becomes an expression. Dewey (1934/1980) clearly distinguishes “expression” from discharging emotion. For him, a representation of an object already in existence is not an expression because an expression for Dewey is a result of “a prolonged interaction of something issuing from the self with objective conditions, a process in which both of them acquire a form and order they did not at first possess” (p. 65). In this line of thinking, the romantic notion of “self-expression” cannot set in, for the self is not regarded by Dewey as complete, autonomous, and self-contained in isolation awaiting to be expressed. The self is not external, either, to the things expressed: expression manifests an interaction of the self with the objects. He thus emphasizes the reciprocal process between the organism and the environment in the process of art making, as well

as the significance of embracing constraints of the environment for richer experiences and expressions. He argues,

Since the artist cares in a peculiar way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved, he does not shun moments of resistance and tension. He rather cultivates them, not for their own sake but because of their potentialities, bringing to living consciousness an experience that is unified and total. (p. 15)

Bare objects (such as bamboo or clay) do not easily allow human beings to do what they would like the objects to do. But when the resistance is overcome, a deep experience follows. Dewey observes that this is how artists create new forms of meanings around works of art.

Dewey (1934/1980) distinguishes *an* experience from ordinary experience. “There is experience, but so slack and discursive that it is not an experience” (p. 40). For Dewey, aesthetic experience is an intensified form of ordinary experience. Such experience is directed, organized, and self-sufficient, marked with the quality that highlights a dramatic structure of everyday experience. Unlike Broudy, Dewey believes that students themselves create a dramatic structure of experience: it is not merely given by others through an artwork. Such a structure has a beginning and progresses toward a fulfillment of consciousness. Dewey explicates that “experiencing like breathing is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings. Their succession is punctuated and made a rhythm by the existence of intervals, periods in which one phase is ceasing and the other is inchoate and preparing” (p. 56).

Dewey (1934/1980) holds that aesthetic experience as an experience is transformative because it propels “a recreation in which the present impulsion gets form and solidity while the old, the “stored,” material is literally revived, given new life and soul through having to meet a new situation” (p. 60). Such a transformative experience requires more than bare *recognition* of the world, which does not question and challenge but withdraw and surrender to previously formed images, schemes, and assumptions. It is a reconstructive act of *perception* that replaces bare recognition of old experiences. Dewey underscores the power of imagination that plays a significant role in transforming an experience.

When old and familiar things are made new in experience, there is imagination. When the new is created, the far and strange become the most natural inevitable things in the world. There is always some measure of adventure in the meeting of mind and universe, and this adventure is, in its measure, imagination. (p. 267)

The difference between aesthetic experience and ordinary experience is that imaginative elements prevail in the occurrence of aesthetic experience. In other words, aesthetic experience is an imaginative adventure, through which past experiences are transformed and modified with newly added meanings. Dewey reminds us that the meaning of an experience changes as we grow because the situational context of such experience also changes as time goes by.

In sum, Dewey regards aesthetic experience as springing out of everyday experience, not merely out of works of art. Artworks become art as a result of heightened experience. Rather than setting up a course of learning on a series of artworks, Dewey suggests to attend to the origins, conditions, and operations of aesthetic experiences. The environment in which the individual becomes engaged with the aesthetic object and the tension between the individual and the environment are the keys to Dewey’s vision of aesthetic education. He or she will weave layers of meanings on the aesthetic object by continuously revisiting it, staying with it for some time, and creating a new form of engagement with it. For Dewey, an expression is a result of overcoming the resistance of the environment. It is an act of giving form to an experience with special care, imagination, and even scientific understanding.

Discussion

Taken together, Broudy’s and Tolstoy’s visions of art reveal the modernist rendering of aesthetic experience that is made possible in specific conditions. For example, Broudy (1972/1994) almost exclusively postulates that aesthetic experience is achieved when (a) an artwork manifests its expressiveness through sensory and formal properties, and (b) sensible students can perceive aesthetic and value import of the artwork. In a similar but stricter way, Tolstoy (1896/1969) specifies the condition of aesthetic experience. For him, the aesthetic object itself cannot be art unless the artist is able to fulfill three conditions: (a) inflecting the object with feelings, (b) doing so with clarity, and (c) imbuing the artwork

with sincerity. Tolstoy states, “The absence of any one of these conditions excludes a work from the category of art and relegates it to that of art’s counterpart” (p. 230). In other words, as long as these three conditions are met, the receiver is to have an aesthetic experience automatically. For Broudy and Tolstoy, the condition of aesthetic experience should be fixed and unchangeable. In this line of thinking, educators are to tackle two ambivalent tasks: “One is to get the young to appreciate works of art that do not resonate with their life needs,” and “the other is to use serious art to age these life needs by imaginative means (Broudy, 1966, p. 18). In their vision of aesthetic education, a significant task is to determine “what works of art are chosen for the curriculum of aesthetic education” (Broudy, 1972/1994, p. 18). Students’ personal engagement with the artwork is put aside in these modernist approaches.

Both Broudy and Tolstoy see a one-to-one universal relationship between the experience of the perceiver and the intention of the composer. They also presuppose that aesthetic experience is gained only when this congruence is achieved. For them the contents of the experience (such as aesthetic images, feelings, and values) are to be transmitted in a linear manner, as if water runs down through a conduit. Each perceiver is considered to naturally possess a container in which water accumulates. The main concern of aesthetic education, for Broudy and Tolstoy, relates to the issue of controlling the condition of aesthetic transmission. Resistance and tension between the artist and the object, which is important to Dewey, is considered as harmful and detrimental to what they espouse as aesthetic experience (and thus should be eliminated). Indeed, Dewey’s assumption about the condition of aesthetic experience would appear too complex and ambiguous for Broudy and Tolstoy as it involves a subjective experience and transformation of self. Thus, Broudy feels as if “Dewey says many things about the conditions for having an experience, and it is not at all clear that they are consistent with each other” (p. 34).

Dewey’s model of experience promotes an organic interaction between the organism and the environment that brings about tension and disorder. Dewey finds a loose association between the experience of the perceiver and the intention of the creator, leaving the perceiver a variety of possibilities for multiple-meaning construction. Dewey questions the modernist attitude toward art by saying, “It is absurd to ask what an artist ‘really meant by his product: he himself would find different meanings in it at different days and hours and in different stages of his own development” (pp. 108-109). Great artwork can be universal only when “it can continuously inspire new personal realizations in experience” (p. 109), but not because there is a universal meaning in it. For Dewey, appreciation of artwork is a process of recreating and renewing meanings rather than simply reading artists’ intentions. Thus, no two people can have exactly the same experience. Dewey claims,

A new poem is created by every one who reads poetically—not that its *raw* material is original for, after all, we live in the same old world, but that every individual brings with him, when he exercises his individuality, a way of seeing and feeling that in its interaction with old material creates something new, something previously not existing in experience. (p. 106)

Unlike Broudy and Tolstoy, Dewey holds that works of art are still *raw* until we freshly renew and create meanings out of them. Even great artworks would be the same as rocks, soil, birds, and natural sounds, unless we find aesthetic quality in them. By the same token, a raw material can be an artwork depending on how we give form to and find meaning in it.

The danger of subscribing to Broudy’s and Tolstoy’s theories of art is that they specify the contents of aesthetic experience before each individual experiences it. They also suggest that once students receive the aesthetic contents of the work of art, they do not have to stay with it. Indeed, the current arts education curriculum is formulated on the this assumption: Students learn works of art one after another. They are hardly given opportunities to revisit previously learned artworks.

This issue still seems relevant to the current scene of arts education. Broudy’s and Tolstoy’s position of aesthetics is found in the principle of art appreciation courses in school. The national music curriculum in Japan constitutes two parts: expression and appreciation. The common components of the latter domain include perceiving (a) feelings of music, (b) rhythm, melody, and tempo of music, and (c) timbres of musical instruments. The underlying assumption of this specification is that (a) a given musical piece conveys certain feelings and bears intrinsic values in it; (b) understanding formal components of music (rhythm, melody, and tempo) and sensory aspects (tone colors

of instruments) will lead students to a better understanding of artworks; and (c) students may cultivate *joso* (moral-aesthetic sentiment) through music. In this curriculum, the progressive approach by Dewey may appear as disruptive to the eyes of arts educators due to their background in classical arts. They may fear, as Broudy and Tolstoy did, to deal with the potential power of art that allows the students to express their thoughts freely and exercise their imagination. Acknowledging that the experience of the arts generates multiple interpretations, arts educators need to make the students explore their subjective engagements with the arts while opening up a variety of possibilities for multiple-meaning construction. Rather than exclusively controlling the condition for the transmission of aesthetic contents, arts educators are expected to create the environment in which students' prolonged engagement with the arts emerges.

Admittedly, each aesthetic theory bears both strengths and limitations. The applicability of the theory depends on its compatibility with specific art forms. Broudy's theory is suitable to classical works of art; Tolstoy's theory is attuned to language art; Dewey's theory is aligned with contemporary art. Indeed, the Deweyan approach to aesthetic education is more widely accepted in the circle of visual art than in music. This is partly because Dewey's theorizing of aesthetics is "too delicate and subtle to do the kind of work music educators wanted aesthetic theory to do" (Bowman & Powell, 2007). Recognizing that none of the theories is perfect in itself, arts educators need to juxtapose multiple perspectives and engage in dialectic reflections on each theory in response to complex educational phenomena.

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