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# Art education: a case of mistaken identity?

Alka Sehgal-Cuthbert

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## Abstract

This paper begins by identifying two fundamental problems in contemporary British and American secondary art curriculum: epistemological confusion and the absence of any aesthetic component. This paper proposes a reformulation of art as an aesthetic cultural accomplishment drawing on Kant's theory of the aesthetic and symbolic representation as discussed by Cassirer and Langer. This is followed by a comparative epistemological analysis of art with Social Realist models of scientific knowledge. A case is made for art as a unique form of knowledge, possessing both a subjective aesthetic basis and an objective basis in its expressive form. The final section of this paper discusses the implications of the proposed conceptualisation of art for the art curriculum, and proposes a model for art education in schools that has the potential to solve the problems identified at the beginning.

## Description of current confusion

In his analysis of the 2004 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) Art syllabus, Cunliffe finds several examples in the Assessment Objectives (AOs) and supporting documentation, where pupils are required to show evidence of contextual understanding in their artwork. Cunliffe rightly argues that this requirement confuses practical or procedural knowledge with

declarative or propositional knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Both cannot be assessed according to the same criteria in a single work (Cunliffe, 2005b). The assessment criteria in the syllabus and supporting documentation, such as teachers' guidance notes lack the consistent linguistic clarity and logical coherence appropriate to their status as official statements of curricular aims and evaluative criteria.

The AOs from AQA's 2004 specifications for the GCSE Art syllabus are present in current specifications of the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) and other British exam boards including the older Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts (OCR) 2012. Thus the AOs analysed in this paper can be taken as general, rather than atypical, features of British examinations in art for pupils at the end of secondary schooling. The AQA's introduction to the Assessment Objectives states that evidence for their attainment should be either demonstrable or measurable, which implies that there should be a close correspondence between course content, evaluative criteria and form of assessment. Such correspondence is not evident in the AOs in pages 1–4 of the *Teachers' Resource Bank, Interpreting Assessment Objectives*:

AO1 Develop their ideas through investigations informed by contextual and other sources demonstrating analytical and cultural understanding.

AO2 Refine their ideas through experimenting and selecting appropriate resources, media, materials, techniques and processes.

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<sup>1</sup> Cunliffe's use of these terms derive from Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (1949) which proposes a concept of knowledge whereby its different forms arise from the different rules required in their manifestation. This means that the main distinction between practical and intellectual knowledge does not lie in their different sources (i.e. the empirical world and the inner world of reasoning) as suggested in traditional epistemology, which Ryle criticises for its dualism. In *Curriculum Design and Epistemic Ascent* in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, vol. 47(1), (2013), Winch makes a helpful distinction between propositional knowledge, skills, techniques and inferential capability. In a practical subject such as art, skill is developed through a combination of techniques, propositional knowledge (both teachable) and experience of practice (not teachable). The first two are governed by different rules and criteria which mean that understanding of, for example, the social context of American abstract art, requires expression in linguistic form and its concomitant rules and procedures. This understanding, which is by definition conceptual, cannot be expressed through the rules and procedures required by the craft of painting where imagination and intuitive feeling play a larger role: these can be made manifest more clearly in artistic rather than linguistic forms (this is discussed more fully in the third section of this paper, Art and Knowledge).

AO3 Record ideas, observations and insights relevant to their intentions in visual and/or other forms.

AO4 Present a personal, informed and meaningful response demonstrating analytical and critical understanding, realising intentions and where appropriate, making connections between visual, written, oral or other elements.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst AO3 is reasonably clear, other significant confusions support Cunliffe's central criticism that the GCSE art syllabus and exam contains a fundamental confusion between different forms of knowledge. For example, AO1 implies a considerable study of art history alongside experience of looking at, and studying, a purposive selection of paintings. The term 'investigations' is left unspecified; it *could* refer to verbal or written commentary or essay; the logically appropriate forms of assessing such knowledge and understanding. But it is equally possible for 'investigations' to be understood as visual, in which case it is not clear how analytical and cultural understanding could be explicitly demonstrated or measured. This latter interpretation is made explicit on page 4 where teachers are advised that

Candidates' critical understanding could be embedded in the progress of their work as it develops. It might be evidenced visually in the relationship between preparatory studies and resolved outcomes. It could be evident in a completed piece of work.

The vague wording of AO1 risks encouraging the erroneous idea that producing pastiches of particular styles of art is the same as developing cultural understanding; and often this is done at the expense of pupils developing more autographic works based on a thorough grounding in appropriate skills (Cunliffe, 2005a, 2005b). AO1 and AO4 suggest that the examination and course content supports a predominantly socio-cultural approach to art but without requiring "assessment evidence that would logically flow from the socio-cultural emphasis". (Cunliffe, 2005a, p.201).

AO2's claim that ideas can be refined through experimental practice and selection of materials conflates mental process of thought with its physical manifestation; this misses the intellectual character of refining ideas. Thinking and doing need to be distinguished theoretically if each is to retain its specific characteristics, even if they are almost inseparable in practice. *Artistic articulation, or expression*, of ideas may be refined through the practical process of making art (Hickman and Kiss, 2013; Reid, [1929]), but

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<http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/subjects/AQA-4200-W-TRB-IAO.PDF>

ideas *per se* can only be refined by the activity of purposeful thinking in some form of internal or external dialogue based on concepts, reasoning, evaluation and judgement. The content of artistic practice is not explicated; the only further guidance is, “consideration might be given to the formal elements of art, craft and design such as line, shape, tone, texture, colour and form and how these might be most effectively used and explored”. The words “*consideration might be given*” (my emphasis) indicate that these essential components of art practice are understood as more or less optional extras.

AO4 requires analytical and critical understanding, which would be assessable in the form of either a written or verbal account based upon a combination of art appreciation, and the sociology and history of art. But AO4 only stipulates “a personal, informed and meaningful response”, which could apply to most assessment pieces and is thereby unhelpful guidance for assessors. In short, neither the conceptual nor the practical aspects of art are clearly understood or explained in these AOs.

Similar confusion exists in other places of AQA’s Art and Design documentation. For example, the section outlining course content of the AQA 2014 specification, states that pupils’ portfolio could include:

Critical and contextual work that could include visual and annotated journals, reviews, reflections and evaluations, documentation of a visit to a museum/gallery or experience of working with an artist in residence or in other work-related contexts.<sup>3</sup>

This suggests that an account of a gallery visit constitutes critical and contextual understanding. Whilst such work could provide contextual information relating to pupils’ artistic influences, it is hard to see how such documentation could be considered ‘critical’. Furthermore, educationally, this is a highly contestable idea as it assumes that deeper levels of knowledge and understanding will spontaneously emerge from everyday, experiential based knowledge. Significantly missing from the GCSE examination and syllabus is “The development of critical discrimination and aesthetic judgment-making, especially the capacity to locate these in their social, artistic and cultural contexts” (Harland quoted in Cunliffe, 2006, p.67).

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<sup>3</sup> <http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/subjects/AQA-4200-W-SP-14.PDF>, p.8

Such problems in the British secondary level art curriculum are similar to those in the corresponding American art curriculum (Barkan, 1962). The absence of aesthetics in the sociology of art is discussed by De la Fuente (2007), and in contemporary culture it is noted by the artist Grayson Perry who cites Marcel Duchamp's warning, "Aesthetic delectation is the danger to be avoided." Ruefully he remarks that making an aesthetic judgment today is often regarded as "buying into something politically incorrect, into sexism, into racism, colonialism, class privilege. It almost feels it's loaded, because where does our idea of beauty come from?"<sup>4</sup> The next section discusses this question in reference to Kant's *Critique of Judgement* ([1790]).

## The intrinsic worth of art and Kant's aesthetics

In *Critique of Judgement*, Kant ([1790]) insists that aesthetic feeling is utterly disinterested; that is to say that the feeling of delight is prompted by the apprehension of beauty alone. There is no invocation of morality, reason or sensual pleasure; in this way the beautiful is different to both the agreeable (that provides sensory gratification) and the good (which has an objective worth set upon it). Aesthetic feeling may invoke thoughts as well as feelings, but there is no causal chain of reasoning required. Aesthetic feeling is characterised by a lack of conceptual thinking because concepts are necessarily 'interested'; that is to say that they are the link between external aspects of phenomena and the internal experience of it (Kant, [1790]). Aesthetic feeling or the apprehension of beauty arises from the free play of all our cognitive faculties 'at rest'. Our intellectual reasoning, our emotional feelings and moral sentiments are not being consciously directed towards some external empirical or logical object or purpose. Rather than the outcome of using a process of logic or reasoning where mental faculties are focused or directed towards a particular purpose, object or wider goal, our recognition of beauty prompts imagination; and releasing perceptual and mental faculties from everyday focuses and contingencies (Cassirer, [1944] Eiser, 2002; Tallis, 2012).

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Grayson Perry's Reith Lectures: Who Decided What Makes Art Good? In <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/c37b1b6a-3017-11e3-9eec-00144feab7de.html#axzz2hhTN3Alz>

Applied to art, Kant's explication of the aesthetic does not mean there is no place for conceptual thinking. It is, for example, required in recognising the representational content of paintings, e.g. landscapes, a female figure, fruit in a bowl and so on. And to a greater or lesser degree, conceptual knowledge is required in recognising the genre of the work, its chronological and evaluative place in art history or where it stands in relation to an artist's development. But in experiencing an object as beautiful, it is the imagination rather than logical or propositional thought that is appealed to in order "to refer the presentation to the subject and his feeling of pleasure or displeasure" (Kant, 1790, §1 p.44). The imagination is free to spontaneously suggest undeveloped material (intuitions, feelings, moods), which is discarded by reason's use of concepts. Such material, when encountered imaginatively cannot add to scientific knowledge or knowledge in the humanities. But the aesthetic response in both the creation and appreciation of art can become the basis of a deeper recognition or understanding of subjectivity as the site of all experience and cognition (Cassirer, [1944]; Eisner, 2002).

The epistemological ambiguity of Kant's idea of the aesthetic has left it open to criticism. Its autonomy or disinterestedness is mistaken for a rejection of human characteristics; and its subjective basis mistakenly understood as synonymous with being unreal and therefore amounting to little more than "an expression of the common subjectivist-metaphysical assumption" that separates the arts from "the whole complexity of life" (Best, 1992, p.34). It is true that Kant's account of the aesthetic is based upon individual subjectivity; as is his account of morality in *Critique of Practical Reason* ([1788]); but both arise from his attempt to uphold a sphere of autonomy to subjectivity rather than uphold a subjectivist-metaphysical assumption *per se* (Michaelson, 1990). His theory of aesthetics (and morality) could be described as teleological in that an a priori faculty to recognise beauty is implied; but this is located within human powers rather than those of religion or nature. The profound humanism in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is evident in his following summary of the aesthetic:

Only by what man does heedless of enjoyment, in complete freedom, and independently of what he can passively procure from the hand of nature, does he give to his existence, as the real existence of a person, an absolute worth. Happiness, with all its plethora of pleasure, is far from being an unconditioned good (Kant, 1790, §4, p.5).

It is a clear affirmation of the intrinsic worth of being human resting in our ability to do things 'in complete freedom', irrespective of whatever external

goods may be achieved. In insisting on the disinterestedness of aesthetic feeling, and in debarring it from knowledge, it could be argued his aim was not to reduce the complexity of the human mind to reason alone but to argue for the capacity for aesthetic feeling as an intrinsic, human faculty.

Kant conceded that the autonomy of aesthetic feeling is reduced at the moment of judgement. An aesthetic judgment implies a demand for the assent of others, irrespective of whether a specific judgement achieves a complete consensus. The idea of judgement in aesthetics is regulative rather than stipulative, and involves practical acts of judgement making that in turn, require propositional knowledge, and hence places necessary limitations on the autonomy of aesthetic feeling.

Another criticism implied in Best's interpretation of Kant's aesthetic disinterestedness is that it is too focused on the isolated individual; as if there was no social context. However, it is precisely the 'disinterestedness' of aesthetic feeling – its independence of any individual's particular interest – that renders it imputable to everyone and thus it acquires subjective universality.<sup>5</sup> Unlike objective universality in science, art's subjective universality is not generalisable: it does not require a single judgement to be held by everyone, but presupposes common assent to the existence of a standard of beauty. Kant's idea of aesthetic judgement rests upon an implied community of judging persons whose acts uphold a common standard; rather than isolated individuals whose judgements have no purchase beyond their immediate circle. His relocation of the source of validation of art to human faculties instead of religious or cultural institutions introduced a new freedom for artists as well as a new element of uncertainty. Questions of artistic truth, how to achieve it in art and who was to legitimise its worth, had to be asked anew, and in this way Kant's *Critique of Judgment* influenced subsequent artistic endeavour (Doorly, 2013).

Kant's work was directed more towards developing his philosophy of mind rather than of art or education *per se* but his theory of the aesthetic has been influential on later philosophers, including Cassirer and Langer, who are discussed later. The next section considers art's place in the curriculum.

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<sup>5</sup> Kant's use of the term 'interest' is different to current meaning. He uses it to refer to the way a determinate concept connects external phenomena and inner will, direction of thought.

## Art's place in the curriculum

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century school knowledge has been primarily, although not exclusively, selected on the basis of its capacity to foster intellectual development. The intrinsic worth of a liberal subject based education has coexisted with other extrinsic values. For example, the application of scientific knowledge increases human control over the natural world, the humanities contribute to more accurate and nuanced understanding of societies in different places and times, and the arts contribute to a richer, more complex culture. The extrinsic values of education, have until recently, been understood as arising *indirectly*, through its primary roles of intellectual development and introduction to a public culture (Arendt, [1954]; Hirst, 1965; Oakeshott, 1971; Peters, 1965). Due largely to its powers of generalisation and application, scientific knowledge in Britain and America during late 19<sup>th</sup> century/early 20<sup>th</sup> century, became the most valued form of public knowledge. In this process the arts have been marginalised in education not least because they lack the epistemological characteristics that make science, and to a lesser extent, the humanities, more *immediately* useful and valuable (Cassirer, [1929]; Eisner, 2002.).<sup>6</sup>

There is an older philosophically distinction, going back to Plato ([420BC]), between knowledge and imagination. Where knowledge derived from reason has been closely associated with striving for truth, imagination's expressive power to evoke images and feeling immediately has aroused suspicion because of its potential to distract from, or corrupt, reason's search for truth. Consequently the visual arts in particular have lacked the status of other subjects (Nauta, 2004). However, some philosophers have questioned this understanding and lowly status of the imagination. Vico, for example, regarded science as less certain knowledge than the humanities because the basis of science is the natural world, which Vico wanted to uphold as God given and therefore essentially unknowable to man. His phrase 'verum factum' expressed the idea that knowledge in history and mathematics could be more reliable or truthful as they are based on human societies and institutions, or logical rules; they are derived from human and not God's design and therefore more knowable (Iheoma, 1993; Pompa, 1982). More

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<sup>6</sup> Although Polanyi claims the triumph of science due primarily to its role in industrialisation has also resulted in its instrumental valuation and one-sided development as it has become increasingly divorced from a broader humanistic endeavour (Polanyi, [1958]).

recent anthropological philosophy and sociology has argued that visual imagery of primitive societies had an important mythic function in creating meaning and order; functions which later were adopted by language, without which scientific knowledge could not have developed (Durkheim, [1915]; Cassirer, 1929): and in these accounts imagination is not so much defeated by reason as marginalised. However it remains important as a complement to the abstraction of scientific thought and in modern societies it has its fullest expression in the arts (Cassirer, 1929).

The application of scientific criteria and models within education has been criticised for undermining a humanistic conception of education where all forms of knowledge are valued for their intrinsic worth as well as their indirect contribution to the wider common good as discussed at the beginning of this section (Davis, 1999, 2013; Doddington and Hilton, 2007; Eisner, 2002; Scheffler, 1965; Standish, 2011). This is often attributed to Enlightenment rationality, but Kant clearly states the need for limits, “We do not enlarge but disfigure the sciences when we lose sight of their respective limits” (1787, p.11). Extrapolated to education, his caveat suggests two things: that epistemological boundaries are respected, and that the intrinsic character and worth of different forms of knowledge are respected. The earlier discussion of problems in the British and American art curriculum suggests that this is not the case.

Without a robust, and widely accepted, model of art education, which does justice to art’s intrinsic character and worth, attempts to promote art in the curriculum have to find external, often instrumental, justifications. Recent examples of powers imputed to art education are: improving mental health, self-confidence and life-skills (Roeger and Kim, 2013); or providing “students with the freedoms, abilities and agency to choose lives they have reason to value after graduation” (Maguire, Donovan, Mishook, De Gaillande and Garcia, 2012, p.369). These arguments are often used in relation to education for socio-economically disadvantaged groups in America and Britain. They are also used in contexts of countries where education systems are being developed to incorporate new economic and/or political imperatives. In South Africa and India, for example, a Romantic, Dewey inspired idea of art as individual expression, but located within a capabilities approach is being promoted. This is presented as oppositional to both explicit economic instrumentalism, and an unbridled individualism (CABE Report, 2005; Maguire *et al.*, 2012). Art’s main role in this conceptualisation is the promotion of personality attributes considered valuable for establishing a

sense of collective responsibility and social unity. Consequently such arguments could be understood as being socially, rather than economically, instrumental. As previously noted, it is possible for intrinsic and extrinsic values to coexist, but a necessary prerequisite is a prior existence of a clear appreciation, and strong affirmation, of art's intrinsic character and worth. If this were the case today, art's intrinsic aesthetic character would not be a source of embarrassment or regarded as something to be disavowed, as noted by Grayson Perry (see p.3).

## Art as a form of knowledge

The Social Realist account of knowledge is premised on Durkheim's, and Bernstein's fundamental classification of profane/everyday and sacred/academic knowledge (Durkheim, [1915]; Bernstein, 1975, 2000). The main distinction between the two forms of knowledge lies in the greater formal and conceptual abstraction of the latter. Concepts arising from everyday experience are 'worked upon' by scholars; they are shaped into a condensed language, and classified according to their inter relatedness; and thus form distinct areas of study or subjects. Such knowledge is derived from experience in the first instance (Oakeshott, [1933] 1966; Tallis, 1989), but through collective endeavour over time, and public scrutiny, it acquires a greater degree of precision, semantic stability and logical coherence than the more contingent, context based knowledge used in everyday life (Moore, 2000, 2009; Moore and Young, 2001; Muller, 2000, 2012; Muller and Young, 2007; Rata, 2012; Wheelahan, 2010; Young, 2008). School subjects derived from such knowledge becomes the basis from which teachers can help pupils think "beyond the present and particular" (Bailey, 2009).

In the Social Realist account, objectivity of knowledge arises from the sociality of its production in academic communities and wider public scrutiny.<sup>7</sup> Procedural objectivity creates knowledge characterised by the following:

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<sup>7</sup> See Gail Edwards Standpoint theory, realism and the search for objectivity in the sociology of education in *The British Journal of Sociology of Education*, (2014), for a critical appraisal of Social Realism's account of procedural objectivity, which she claims ignores the requirement for diversity in process of reasoning to attain objective knowledge. This criticism is based upon an idea of knowledge as the property and product of isolated individuals, which is the opposite of a Social Realist conception of knowledge.

- (a) Abstract form comprising of codified language
- (b) Conceptual complexity
- (c) Powers of generalisation
- (d) Progression
- (e) Criteria for evaluation

If art is to be considered a valid form of knowledge, it should have analogous characteristics. By drawing on theories of symbolic representation and aesthetic form, as explicated by Cassirer ([1929], [1944]) and Langer (1957) it is possible to construct such an account without reducing art's subjective and objective bases.

## Abstract form and language in art

Symbolic artistic forms arise in the artist's ability to create relations of opposing abstract nouns: light/dark; heavy/weightless; opacity/transparency or symmetry/asymmetry (Gombrich, 1984; Langer, 1957). In his discussion of problems of representation, Cassirer explains that although in reality the expressive and logical factors of signification are inseparable, their functions remain distinct and the one cannot be the causal source of the other (Cassirer, 1929). The almost inexhaustible range of possible responses evoked in the relationship between ostentive content and its expressive or aesthetic form mirrors our experience of our internal life. The fluctuating and ephemeral character of the structure of our subjectivity is given objective expression through art's aesthetic form (Cassirer, ([1929], [1944]); Langer, 1957), which comprises of:

a composition of tensions and resolutions, balance and unbalance, a precarious yet continuous unity. Life is a natural process of such tensions, balances, rhythms; it is these that we feel in quietness or emotion. As the pulse of our own living (Langer, 1957, p.8).

These expressive effects have often been imputed to the psychological states of either the artist or the beholder, which misses the vital mediation of artistic form embodied in the work itself. It is this mediation that allows the individual's feelings and epiphanies to be apprehended within a universal perspective whereby there is recognition of a world of feeling that we experience as intensely private, but which all are able to experience. The relational character of aesthetic form in a work of art creates a complexity that makes a single, simplistic response difficult. Instead there is the possibility for

reinterpretation, and the simultaneous presentation of contradictions that defy everyday reality or logical thought. Caravaggio's *The Beheading of St. John the Baptist* (1608), for example, evokes both horror and intimacy through obscuring a dramatic event in masses of dark space and shadow; the strength of the executioner is balanced by the vulnerable body of St. John; and both figures form a unity in their positioning even though logically, executioner and prisoner stand as opposites. The painting's composition evokes stillness but this is offset by a visual rhythm created by the figures in the foreground. It is the *formal* qualities of a work's visual 'grammar' that simultaneously evokes contradictory feelings of lived experience whilst inviting deeper and continued contemplation and interpretation. Great art, by virtue of its aesthetic form denies an overwhelmingly emotive reaction; this distinguishes Caravaggio's masterpiece from lesser works of the same biblical event. Instead of catharsis we are invited to 'feel at a distance' (Cassirer, 1944).

Aesthetic form, then, is not wholly a fixed, rule-determinable phenomenon. It arises in the relation between representational content and the extent to which the composition achieves a formal unity. In both its creation and appreciation aesthetic form *cannot be apprehended independently of the representational content* (which includes the content of abstract paintings), but in neither moment is it reducible to representational significance. Perhaps in relation to art, Kant's (1790) use of 'beauty' is best understood as an expression of the truth, or reality, of our subjectivity as opposed to truth and objectivity of the external world.

## Complexity and generalisation

The existence of aesthetic forms "presupposes an autonomous activity, carried out over time, which consists in the building up, in the modifying, in the decomposing, of things which we may think of as unities or structures" (Wollheim, 1968, p.140). In a similar vein, Cunliffe (2013), following Steiner (2001) describes the process of accretion as a combination of the artist's procedural and propositional knowledge from which an artist can develop organisational depth in creating art. This allows an artist to know what to do in the midst of creating and by implication to be open to possibilities suggested in the manipulation of materials. The term 'materials' in this context is not only the physical substratum of paint and canvas. It includes

aesthetic forms and grammar comprising of mass and volumes, shapes, colour and tones. Accretion also includes a supporting armature, which includes:

cultural paradigms, moral purpose, types of practices, duration and methods of training, the breadth and depth of the creative repertoire, the materials and methods available and used, and the preparation, revision, experimentation that shape the final product (Cunliffe in Addison and Burgess, 2012, p.180).

The starting point for this iterative process of artistic creation is the artist's initial aesthetic response to something seen, heard, touched, remembered or felt. Without such a generative catalyst the artist may achieve a high level of technical proficiency in his/her work, but it is likely to lack expressive power (Reid, [1928]).

The objective basis of art qua art is in the unique instantiation of artistic form created by the artist. This uniqueness limits art's powers of generalisation compared to science. The variable, secondary qualities of physical phenomena and the beliefs, values and feelings of scientists are reduced in scientific methods but play a necessary role in art (Cassirer, [1944]: Gombrich, 1984).<sup>8</sup> But this does not mean there is no capacity to generalise at all. The difference is that science is concerned with generalisation in the external world, and art in the internal world. For example, the complex and contradictory emotions evoked by Goya's painting of *The Third of May 1808* (1814) include terror, cruelty, pity, awe, and fascinated curiosity. These are feelings most of us will have experienced at some point as unique individuals in unique situations and relationships whether the terror of a child or morbid fascination of a bystander looking on upon a tragedy. Goya's painting, because of its expressive form, can draw the beholder's consciousness out from inner feelings – his/her *particular* emotional state – and into a wider world of universal emotions; here we can subject our aspects of our inner life to thought if we wish; and can gain a certain degree of 'mastery' over our interior world. So art can generalise but in a necessarily less stable and certain manner to other subjects. The extent to which this capability of art is made manifest in a particular work is one criterion by which we judge its quality and worth.

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In *The Method of the Social Sciences* (1903-1917) Weber stresses that the fact-value distinction in social sciences does not mean that beliefs and values are non-existent. He explains that they operate at the initial stages of selecting, and defining the nature of, the initial problem to be investigated. Subsequent work is then more fully subject to processes and rules which limit these subjective elements. Polanyi's account in *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post Critical Philosophy* (1973) suggests a similar distinction exists in the natural sciences.

## Progression

Knowledge in science increases breadth and depth of understanding of natural phenomena as developed through time. Simultaneously theoretical underpinnings of knowledge in science, and to a lesser extent the humanities, also develop through the subsumation of particular phenomena to general rules. For example, early astrology comprised of ordered symbolic systems involving codified beliefs and mathematical calculations yet it remained more akin to a systematised mythology in its personification of planets with powers to influence human life. As it developed theoretically, astrology became astronomy, and lost its mythical aspects. (Cassirer, 1956; Krois, 2009).

Development in art follows the principle of extension rather than subsumation. For example, Manet's artistic innovation was not only in extending the range of material suitable for artistic representation, but also in breaking *some* parts of established conventional artistic schema. Through this he managed to create fresh aesthetic forms that perfectly express his unique sensibility towards greater individual freedom offered by modern French society at that time (Nochlin, 1971). Such developments occur at particular historical moments when various social and cultural influences coalesce; and particular artists, through accretion, have been able to cultivate and create an artistic response to something new in society.

## Criteria for evaluation

In addition to judging the complexity of aesthetic form in art, as discussed in the previous section, socio-aesthetic knowledge is also helpful in making judgements of new artistic developments. For example, the preoccupation in 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde painting with depicting flat spaces has been both valued as expressing artistic liberation (Greenberg, 1961) and criticised for abandoning representation, historically an important function of art as part of broader humanistic culture (Steinberg 1953). Witkin (2009) argues that the concern with flat space in painting since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century expresses new aspects of social formation whereby the individual is denuded of subjective depth by an increasingly bureaucratic culture. The ensuing existential alienation is given powerful aesthetic expression in Rothko's colour field paintings for example.

However it could be argued that subsequent trends in art show an increasing concern either with technical innovation, or in extending range of representation alone. In this search for continual radically new expression in art, the artist, cut adrift from all artistic tradition becomes preoccupied with trying to be innovative for its own sake (Bell, 1972). The aesthetic component of art is forgotten and becomes an easy target for politically motivated criticism. The ensuing disregard for aesthetics form involves a loss of interpretative potential. (Steinberg, 1953). This is problematic because interpretation has an important role in making artistic meanings manifest and in judging. The widest possible range of public interpretation and judgement is required to ascertain the intrinsic worth of any artistic breakthrough precisely because it has the largest subjective based component of all the disciplines.<sup>9</sup> Interpretation in art is the main means of ascertaining its intrinsic worth and status – it is analogous to processes of verification in science and without it the intrinsic worth of art becomes less discernible. Arguably this describes the contemporary cultural landscape.

It has been argued that art complements scientific abstraction through its emphasis on that which is particular and unique through the creation of artistic forms, which have expressive potency. In this way art achieves a formal rather than procedural objectivity (Cassirer, [1944]); and in place of procedures of verification, art requires interpretation and judgement from the public, and artistic accretion from artists. Art's development occurs with shifts in understanding, extending the range of representation, interpretation and artistic symbolic language. In this respect art is an example a subject with a horizontal knowledge structure (Bernstein, 2000). The final section discusses the implications of this model of art for the curriculum.

## Implications for the curriculum

This paper began by highlighting epistemic problems within the secondary art curriculum in Britain, and by locating these challenges within a wider cultural

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<sup>9</sup> In Hierarchical Knowledge Structure and the Canon: a Preference for Judgements, in F. Christie and J. Martin (Eds), *Language, Knowledge and Pedagogy, Functional Linguistic and Sociological Perspectives* (2007), Moore makes a helpful distinction between private opinion, which is more contingent on the individual's preference, mood alone, and judgement which may have the same starting point, but is then subject to reasoning using public forms of knowledge, and stakes a public claim.

and historical context. I argue that these problems require a revisiting of first principles of art to establish its intrinsic worth; and a consideration of art as a form of knowledge, and that it is complementary to science and humanities in education. Art as symbolic representation, created through artistic accretion is distinguishable from a prevalent understanding of art (and by implication art education) as the direct, unmediated expression on the artist's inner psychological state alone capable of being directly understood by individuals with the appropriate sensibility. This concept of art affords little objectivity for art and reduces subjectivity to direct interpersonal relationships.

A model of art as an aesthetic object with subjective *and* objective basis is proposed which is capable of being introduced to pupils in a systematic and logically coherent way. The overall educational aim of art in schools is not to create future artists directly, but to encourage a culture where art is understood as having intrinsic worth. Its contribution to knowledge is that it can provide the basis for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of subjectivity, and strengthen faculties for imagination and interpretation. It is from such a model of art that a more coherent art curriculum could be derived. It would comprise of three main elements: explicit introduction to procedures, techniques of drawing, painting and sculpture; art history; and an introduction to contemplating, and articulating verbal and written responses to, a wide range of works of art.

The introduction to techniques and materials of art practice would require explicit practical instruction, propositional knowledge relating to the physical properties of materials and how they act in combination, and plenty of time for practice is required if pupils are to have an meaningful experience of the craft component of artistic accretion. The component of art history contributes to widening and deepening pupils' knowledge of art as a valued cultural form; and also introduces the idea of culture as a public phenomena, susceptible to change and development. In conjunction with the third component, purposive contemplation of exemplary works of art, it can help pupils make synoptic comparisons and articulate critical aesthetic judgments. As discussed in the first section, this is something lacking in most British and American art education.

The selection, sequencing and pacing of the third component could, I think, allow for a high level of individual teacher choice, as long as the selection included examples from established artistic canon as well as more recent examples where judgment may be less settled. Cunliffe's work suggests it is

quite possible to do this even at primary school level by drawing upon what he terms ‘semantic differentials’ to guide pupils attention, and develop percipience, when looking at art (Cunliffe, 1999). For this to be introduced meaningfully requires teachers whose own familiarity and knowledge of art is developed enough to be able to re-contextualise what they know at a level appropriate for their pupils. By using a carefully devised set of questions that elicit guided and graduated responses rather than directly asking pupils what they think about a work, it is possible to encourage them to use their inferential abilities through which all knowledge and experience is cognised internally (Winch, 2013). Questions could be constructed that require pupils to award a numerical grade on a scale (e.g. is this painting very realistic – 9, or not realistic at all – 0) in order to direct discussion and implicitly introduce appropriate vocabulary for discussing art. Specialised vocabulary could be more explicitly rehearsed through commentary/essay type work where pupils practice articulating their responses in verbal or written language.

There are implications for assessment criteria in this model of art education. Current GCSE criteria stress personal development. It has been argued that children, and teenagers, are capable of having a personal response to art, and it is important they have the opportunity to do so. But a personal response or development in art will be very difficult to ascertain, especially in younger pupils, because their ability to externalise responses artistically is likely to be limited by their level of technical mastery, their necessarily limited experience of life, linguistic ability as well as having limited exposure to opportunities for discussion in these areas. It is more important to ensure pupils are being systematically introduced to examples of great art, and its language and grammar in order to externalise their responses as fully as possible.<sup>10</sup> Whilst individual personal response, which arises from the subjective basis of art, cannot be directly taught, the criteria, vocabulary and procedures for *judging* art belong to art’s objective basis, and therefore these *can* be taught.<sup>11</sup> The task of the teacher is to introduce pupils to works of sufficient objective, formal depth and complexity that even if pupils have negative, or very weak, personal responses, there is enough interpretative scope in the work to justify its study to make informed, discriminating judgements and to give reasons for their responses *in reference to the work itself*. By refocusing on the objective

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<sup>10</sup> See previous section for discussion of language and grammar in art.

<sup>11</sup> This arises from the distinction between aesthetic feeling and judgement discussed in the second section.

and aesthetic forms of art, the pre-existing cultural capital of pupils has less influence on pupils' ability to progress in art at school, as implied in Bolton's empirical study (Bolton, 2009).

## Conclusion

Contemporary cultural trends, which strive for perpetual radical innovation and dismantling of classificatory boundaries between art and everyday life, are highly problematic for art.<sup>12</sup> Social realist critiques of knowledge in the curriculum identify a similar trend: an inability or unwillingness to recognise and affirm classificatory distinctions between academic and everyday knowledge. Wider effects can be seen in the increasing esoteric nature of contemporary art, the elision of art and entertainment, and in an increasing gulf between contemporary art and the public.

A mutually fruitful relationship between art and the public requires public *aesthetic* judgement by critics, art lovers, art educators and students of art, artists and curators rather than the more privatised agreements between cliques of the cultural elites that seems to determine what constitutes good art today; and who often sneer when the public fails to rally round their calls to 'defend the arts'.<sup>13</sup> Without a defence of art's intrinsic characteristics arguments for its inclusion in the curriculum can only be extrinsic (discussed in section 3) which in turn can only mean its instrumentalisation with the possible loss of the real value of art.

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Two recent examples that exemplify this trend are: the introduction of a joint Fine Art and History of Art Degree at the prestigious Goldsmith's Art College, where the 'history' begins at 1945; and the recent UK initiative Art Everywhere, which received support from the Art Fund to put up over 15,000 billboards with enlarged copies of artworks for two weeks.

<sup>13</sup>

See Alka Sehgal Cuthbert, *In Defence of the Public's Judgement* at <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/13722#.UmvhciSezfY>

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Alka Sehgal-Cuthbert  
Cambridge University

[alkasehgalcuthbert@googlemail.com](mailto:alkasehgalcuthbert@googlemail.com)