

University of Birmingham
School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion

Taught Programmes Essay/Assignment
Cover Sheet 2018-2019

To be included as the first page of all work submitted for assessment

Module Title	Aesthetics Through History
Level	I
Student ID (SRN)	1828260
Essay/assignment title	1. Does the fact that a work of art is a fake or a forgery make a difference to its aesthetic value? Defend your answer.
Actual Word Count	1999

REMINDERS

1. Do NOT give your name on the assignment or in your file name; instead put your SRN on the top right hand corner of each page and include this cover sheet.
2. Assignments should be submitted electronically via the module section on Canvas by 12noon on the published deadline
3. A penalty of 5 marks will be imposed for each working day the assignment is late, until a grade of 0% is reached.
4. There is NO leeway beyond the published word limit for the assignment. An excess length penalty of 1 mark for every **100** words over the limit will be applied. Please note: the word length includes all references, but excludes the bibliography and this coversheet.
5. By submitting this assignment you are declaring that it is not plagiarized, but rather all your own work, and that all quotations from, allusions to and paraphrasing of the work of others have been appropriately cited and referenced.
6. It is your responsibility to ensure you upload the correct version of your essay to the correct assignment section on Canvas. Assignments should be submitted as Word or PDF documents only.

Reflection on Previous Feedback (Optional but Recommended)

In the academic year 2018-19 we are asking you to upload to Canvas alongside each of your summative assessments this individual Student Reflection on Feedback Sheet, which invites you to think about feedback you have had at earlier points on your course and how you have responded to it in your new piece of work. Thinking carefully about the feedback you have received previously can help to improve your performance. It is helpful for the marker to know what feedback you have had previously on similar pieces of work, and how you have tried to act on it. Knowing the range of different kinds of feedback you have had can also help us to use more those kinds that are most helpful to you.

Often the feedback with which our students work identify a range of opportunities for improvement across our assessment criteria: understanding the subject matter fully; analysis; argument; structure; referencing; grammar. Do use this sheet to identify any particular opportunities you have taken, or challenges you have addressed, so that your marker(s) can pay particular attention to these aspects of your work.

The extent to which you have improved on previous pieces of work will **NOT** affect your mark. Your work will be marked on the basis of its own merits as a piece of academic work, **NOT** on the basis of the answers you give in the

box below. However, your response will help us to understand more clearly what challenges you are dealing with, and what you have done to address them.

Don't forget that you can also seek help from the College Academic Writing Advisory Service and consult the Bank of Assessed Work to see sample essays.

What feedback have you received on earlier assessments, or while preparing this assessment?

How have you responded to that feedback in this assessment?

1. Does the fact that a work of art is a fake or a forgery make a difference to its aesthetic value? Defend your answer.
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The forging and faking of art comes with a natural intuition that in comparison to the original artwork it is mimicking, the forged or faked piece is less aesthetically valuable. This intuition is correct, and through the viewpoints of Lessing and Dutton I will demonstrate how the aesthetic experience is worse when evaluating forged and faked art in any genre. Lessing and Dutton ultimately contain opposing views; however Lessing contains some compatible ideas in supposed 'contextual' elements seen in art. I will begin by describing these compatible elements before showing where Lessing's 'sensory surface' caveat fails to justify his view. I will then describe how Dutton combines intuition, achievement and performance to determine that aesthetic value is affected by the context of the art (in this context; by being forged or faked).

Lessing attempts to discover what element of a forged work creates the intuition that it is less valuable by looking at contextual elements that can help define a piece of art. The largest factor he defined was the "originality and creativity", or

lack of, in art. He made the five following distinctions or 'senses' of originality (Lessing, 1965. P467 - 468):

- 1) A distinct different to any other artwork (originality)
- 2) Contains a 'superficial individuality' that allows the art work to be distinguishable from other art
- 3) A kind of 'imaginative novelty or spontaneity'
- 4) A 'profound' originality that only differs from distinction 3 in small degree
- 5) An artistic novelty and achievement in the totality of the work and/or school

These five distinctions are seen throughout 'original' pieces of art. For example, the (arguably) original Metal band 'Black Sabbath' display all five forms of this originality. The music they created was unlike any other music at that time (sense 1 & 3 & 4) due to the large leap they made in experimental sound, and have been hard to mimic ever since (sense 2). Finally, the jump in imagination and creation of a whole new genre of music demonstrates a large achievement for the band. This distinguishes them from other bands due to other bands usually building upon other inspirations and making small incremental steps forward to improve the overall quality of the art form itself. This is evident throughout history in many fields; from music to sport and academia. As a further example, the famous skateboarder Rodney Mullen invented many skateboard tricks that have now become traditional, standard moves in the genre of skateboarding competition. These significant increases in the area of their

focus (the totality of their work) demonstrate a significant and overwhelming achievement (sense 5). Lessing believes that forgeries and fakes lack the 5th sense due to their inability to show any achievement due to their imitation of what's already been created (Lessing, 1965. P468)

Dutton would agree with this view; however Lessing makes a caveat that changes his view drastically. Lessing states that the aesthetic value of a piece of art cannot change based on the context around it, for its aesthetic properties (colour, shape, sound etc) are the only factor that determines its value. If we were to imagine a forged painting that was perfectly identical to the Mona Lisa down to the last molecule, then the aesthetic properties would be the same and therefore the fact that one has been forged makes no difference to experience of 'seeing' the paintings. The contexts such as the age of the artist and the materials used in it don't apply to the 'essence of the art' (Lessing, 1965. P464). The aesthetics lie in the 'sensuous experience'. Therefore, Lessing believes these five distinctions must exist within the creativity of the artist, and not the artwork itself. The originality of the artist cannot be forged, which makes the forgeries perceived as less valuable as they fail to capture this originality (Lessing, 1965. P469)

Lessing uses the Vermeer and Han Van Meegeren example to demonstrate how "pure aesthetics cannot explain forgery" (Lessing, 1965. P641). Van Meegeren created a highly realistic forgery of a Vermeer painting (Lessing, 1965. P462), leading to many critics being tricked after calling Van Meegeren's artwork "the highest art". Van Meegeren believed he should be seen in the same light as

Vermeer or for critics to admit their biases for context, as Van Meegeren had created a piece of art viewed as better than many of Vermeer's works despite it being forged. To believe in only aesthetic value through the sensuous surface would mean that Van Meegeren had created a better piece of art due to its high praise. As a further example, Lessing would also argue that the smallest aesthetic improvements in the melody or overall sound quality of a recorded song heavily based off of Black Sabbath (such as the band Dio) would suggest a better song than the original, as the sensuous surface is the only core element of art that defines its true aesthetic value.

However, it may be argued that the small incremental improvements made on a genre of music do not compare to the large improvements of the originators, and the achievement of the band to make this jump is the significant factor that determines the aesthetic value of the music. This is closer to Dutton's view, in which he makes a counter object based upon the 'appearance theory' by Lessing.

Dutton starts by suggesting that there is an unsatisfactory and illogical aspect to removing all context from aesthetic value, and that the aesthetic experience must be affected by this context. Dutton uses the example of performance art to suggest that the lines can be blurred between context and visual properties, where a performer such as a dancer will be both the creative product and performer in their movement (Dutton, 1979. P305). The same could be said for live music performances where the band performs great technical feats to play songs. It also goes against our intuition to suggest that these performances are purely based on the sound they produce. For example, a singer who is miming

fails to 'achieve' as much as a singer who is capable of hitting the wrong note, and therefore the art degrades in quality for the audience once this trick is revealed. Equally, a guitarist who is able to play a high quality guitar solo while drunk achieves more in their ability to be precise despite being intoxicated, and may be praised more due to the technical proficiency despite the intoxication. The achievement in the performance adds to the overall quality and is defined through the techniques that are used. For example, the way a dancer moves with grace or the way a drummer keeps perfect rhythm. Therefore, in performance art, the art must be viewed as more than just the sensuous surface as the achievement of the performance is part of the context, and what is aesthetically evaluated, in the art form. This is vital to performance art, and therefore cannot be separated when evaluating within the aesthetic experience.

Lessing does make a distinction, pointing out that his theory of aesthetic value cannot apply to performance art as performance art cannot be forged while creative art can be forged (Lessing, 1965. P466). Lessing describes forgery as impossible to imitate through performance art as the performance of art contains a number of public techniques that are not owned by any individual, even through creating them. When skateboarder Tony Hawk first performed his famous '900' trick it is not in our intuition to describe someone else performing the 900 after him as a forgery of Tony Hawk. The originality belongs to Tony Hawk, however the 900 is as aesthetically equal to other skateboarders 900's. This distinction is vital to Lessing's argument, because if it can be disproven, then all forms of art can be forged and rely on more than just the visual elements of the 'end product' but the overall performance of the art. Examples such as the

miming singer already disprove this idea that performance art can't be 'faked', however Dutton further argues that all art is both performing and creative.

Dutton counters this by attacking Lessing's distinction between performance art and creative art. Dutton states that creative and performance arts exist together in all forms of art, and therefore all art contains a performance. He defines a performance as a human action with a goal that is evaluated (Dutton, 1979. P305). For example, a traditional dancer is performing dance techniques to move in a manner that is seen as graceful and effortless. This dance routine is then judged by the viewer. The creative outcome is shown within the routine and techniques through the performance. This can be viewed as a 'performance heavy' form of art, while on the other side of the spectrum a form of art like painting would be seen as more creative. However, according to Dutton painting is still a form of performance, as human agency and technique is still used to create an outcome that is evaluated. The performance is in the creation of the painting (the choices of colour, the overcoming of limitations to create an aesthetically pleasing painting etc) and the end product (the painting) is evaluated. The achievements and evaluation are seen through how the aesthetic properties were manufactured as well as the aesthetic properties themselves. Therefore, the element of performance is a direct feature of art and part of how aesthetically valuable an art form is. It is an intrinsic element of art (Dutton, 1979. P310), and therefore the understanding of this art (and its achievements) are essential to how we evaluate the aesthetic value of any art.

Through all of art being a performance, all of art must contain a degree of achievement and intention, as well as other relevant contexts. For example, the limitations of colours available to Vermeer would demonstrate the achievement of creating new vibrant colours in the artwork. These ideas all loop back to the five senses discussed by Lessing, yet through Dutton's interpretation of what defines art and the aesthetic experience we can see how it does directly affect the aesthetic value. Van Meegeren didn't contain the limitations that Vermeer did, and this purposeful misrepresentation of performance lowers the aesthetic value of the art. Van Meegeren's art does display originality in his aging techniques and deception; however his misrepresentation of his performance lowers the value compared to an original Vermeer. If Van Meegeren stated that his work was an attempt to re-emulate Vermeer as close as possible to original works, then his performances would have been seen as a great technical achievement instead.

This representation of achievement and performance is the main factor of what causes forgeries to be less aesthetically valuable (Dutton, 1979. P312). This also confirms other intuitions, such as art becoming more valuable when its true context is revealed. For example, a piece of art considered to be a forgery that turns out to be an original will go up in aesthetic value, as the achievement and performance help us understand the art and appreciate it fully. To have a false understanding of the performance and intention of a piece of art is to misunderstand the art itself, for a lot of achievement is lost when just focusing on the sensuous surface. This also ties into other intuitions, such as why we only see art made by humans to be 'art'. 'Art' procedurally generated by computers or by nature doesn't have the same intention or achievement as art by humans.

To conclude, Lessing's contextual concepts on originality are large factors that help define achievement and aesthetic value of art as performance; however the belief that these senses do not affect the sensuous surface of art is a misinterpretation of what art is itself. Dutton's rebuttal that all art is a performance and the achievement of a person's actions is a necessary element to art fits the natural intuitions we have regarding art and forgeries, and therefore the miss-representations of these performances in forgeries and fakes affects the aesthetic value of the artwork.

Bibliography:

Dutton, D. 1979, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*. (Volume 19, Issue 4). Oxford Academic, PP. 302 – 314 URL = <https://academic.oup.com/bjaesthetics/article-abstract/19/4/302/109889>, Accessed 29th January 2019

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