



THE EPISTEMIC LINKS BETWEEN AESTHETIC KNOWLEDGE AND EXTRA-AESTHETIC VALUES AND EXPERIENCES: IMPLICATIONS FOR AESTHETIC LEARNING CURRICULA AND RATIONAL PEDAGOGY

Dr. Ike P. Aghaosa
University of Benin
Faculty of Education
Department of Educational Foundation
NIGERIA
lkag2003@yahoo.com

Abstract

The paper explored the linkages between aesthetic education and extra-aesthetic-moral, religious and civic values in schools' and societies' education programs. Should aesthetic materials be used to facilitate the teaching of other subjects and non-aesthetic concepts, subjects and values; and conversely using non-aesthetic concepts, values and subjects to teach aesthetic knowledge? The paper relied essentially on the philosophical and historical methodologies of: logical, language and analogical deductions and inferences; and documents' inspection. It examined the basic concepts, issues and arguments involved in trying to fathom out the epistemic links between aesthetic learning experiences and other extra-aesthetic values in schools' and societies'. As observed, from the varied views and perceptions, the issue is not only complex, but also controversial in the field of aesthetic education. It is recommended that teachers and school administrators need to be conscious as well as cautious in their approaches towards this aspect of aesthetic learning programs and encounters.

Key Words: aesthetic knowledge, extra-aesthetic ideas, rational pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

The question of how aesthetic education should be linked with extra-aesthetic-moral, civic, religious values and vice-versa is a complex and one of the thorniest issues in the field of aesthetic education. This is because it raises a lot of arguments in its strides. First among these: is aesthetics a mode of knowing? What is the relationship between it and other modes of learning such as history, civics, religion, morals etc.? Any attempt to decipher the preceding questions would surely raise the controversial issue of the supervening and parasitic nature of other modes of learning on the aesthetic and vice-versa. Even within the aesthetic learning mode, it would be evident to any observer that the different arts that constitute aesthetic leaning are varied forms of other existing knowledge. These as could be found in the spatial, sound, morals and the super arts. This raises the crucial question: how should aesthetics and its constituents be categorized as a form of knowledge and knowing? Can artistic statements-visual, auditory, spatial etc. express knowledge truth about the world that can be said to be knowable? Can artistic statements be said to be equivalent to say scientific or mathematical statements and therefore some knowledge about the universe? These questions dovetail into the issue of other elements of knowledge –factual, emotional, mathematical etc. being enmeshed in aesthetics; but how do we sieve out these parasitic elements and be left solely with aesthetic knowledge?

These preceding issues arise essentially because of the way as observed by this writer in some other papers of how the aesthetic permeates almost all facets of human life and knowledge .(Aghaosa,2014) . They also raise questions about the purpose of aesthetic knowledge and knowing. Succinctly, what should be the epistemological agenda of aesthetic knowledge and learning? Which between literal and metaphorical interpretations of aesthetic symbols should be given prominence in aesthetic learning encounters? Which ever gets prominence it would definitely raise the issue of the futility of pursuing a universal aesthetic appeal and expressiveness in art learning. Another issue enmeshed in the forgoing arguments is that which presupposes



that aesthetic knowledge of the various arts are discernible in other learning disciplines such as engineering, religion, entertainment etc. How do the arts give and receive inspirations to and from other forms of knowledge? This question raises also other issues revolving on the maxim: should art be solely for art-sake; or art for symbolism?

So far these observed issues indicate that this is an interesting subject. It may also reveal by further analysis that they underpin many of the seemingly intractable issues concerned with schools' aesthetic learning curricula and pedagogical strategies. What should be emphasized in schools' aesthetic education programs? Given the multifarious issues which are heavily laden with diverse moral undertones, what should aesthetic learning imply to multiethnic societies like Nigeria? How should the various aspects of aesthetic learning be given fair consideration in school learning?

The problem of this paper therefore was to attempt to decipher what are aesthetic knowledge and extra-aesthetic knowledge, values and experiences. What are their linkages and implications for school learning? The purpose of this intellectual venture was to ascertain if there are linkages between aesthetic knowledge and extra-aesthetic values and experiences. This was to explore how these linkages could be properly harnessed to improve aesthetic learning curricula and transmitted to learners in pedagogically rational ways.

The significance of this paper would be derived from the extent it could help to clarify the basic concepts, issues and arguments involved in this seemingly controversial aspect of aesthetic education. It is very likely that insights gained from this exploration would go a long way in helping to improve curricula and pedagogical provisions for this area of learning. This would in the long run, be of immense benefits to learners as well as society.

Aesthetic Knowledge and Extra-aesthetic Values and Experiences.

To what extent should aesthetic education be linked to Extra-aesthetic- moral, religious and civic values? Should aesthetic materials be used to facilitate teaching of other subjects and vice-versa? This is a very complex and perhaps the thorniest issue in the field of aesthetic education. As posited in the various views of Hirst,(1973), Broudy(1975) and Reimer(1991), this issue raises the pertinent questions of modes of knowing and learning experiences: is aesthetics a mode of knowing and how? How does aesthetic knowledge relate to other modes of knowing and learning experiences etc? For Hirst(1973), art as in the case of morals, there is the fact that meaning is always parasitic or supervening on other forms of meaning. In his view, all the arts epistemologically, are arts of some other existing form of knowledge. The other inherently existing forms of knowledge identified by the writer are the knowledge of:

- (i) Spatial relations – as implicated in the visual arts like painting, drawing, sculpture, etc;
- (ii) Sound relation as seen in music, poetry, etc.
- (iii) Moral relationship, as posited in plays, literary prose fiction, 'faction' folklores etc; and
- (iv) the Super art which explores the relationships between the spatial, sound and moral enumerated above – Drama and film-making are identified as the super arts since they employ other arts collectively to achieve their respective goals(P.152).

While acknowledging the above stated, Hirst is quick to point out that art per se has its own peculiar knowledge. It is that the visual, auditory and tactile representational works of art can be seen as making artistic statements expressing truths that can properly be said to know.(P.152) It is however pointed out that some times, the arts and what they convey are often seen as mere symbolic expressions with the original or second hand statements. This view is noted as not always valid. This is because artistic knowledge or statement can be seen to be equivalent to scientific statements and knowledge. To buttress this view, Hirst(1973) informs that other elements of knowledge i.e. the extra-aesthetic as they often supervene the artistic knowledge are also discernible in other forms of knowledge. As illustratively elaborated by Hirst:

Just as elements of scientific knowledge may presuppose elements of mathematical knowledge, as moral knowledge presuppose scientific knowledge, so artistic knowledge may be possible on the basis of knowledge of other types. A novel may contain much truth about the physical world or of personal and social life (P.101).



From Hirst's view above, what can be surmised is that aesthetic knowledge is often interlocked with other forms of knowledge- factual or emotional? However the basic task is how aesthetic knowledge can be sieved out of other supervening forms of knowledge in any aesthetic epistemological analysis? This view is also implicit in Broudy's(1975) observation on the issue. In his view, the aesthetic and arts permeate almost all aspects of the human endeavour. This bothers on the questionable role of the arts in the other modes of human experience, e.g. the intellectual, moral, religious and social life. This can be easily discerned in the celebrative and **originative** functions of aesthetics in society. The celebrative function of art tends to focus on projecting those values highly cherished by society vividly in many art forms ranging from the plastic, auditory and ceremonies of various sorts. In the social **originative** function of art, emphasis is placed on deciphering the sources of the predominant aesthetic media in society and the criteria for evaluating them.(Pp.98-99) This issue raises the fundamental questions of aesthetic judgment, which also dovetails into the problem of expressiveness as an approach in the cultivation of aesthetic knowledge. For as noted by Broudy(1975) there should be some caution about the pursuit of universal aesthetic effects or qualities, e.g. cheerfulness, sadness, depression etc, most aesthetic messages (images) are often metaphors of human feelings. This brings the limitation of literal interpretation to contrived (arts) phenomena. Incidentally, it is because of the above that art or aesthetic objects -in Broudy's terminology, sensory images tend to have multi-levels of meaning(P.98) This is specifically on the crucial question of the possibility of students being able to discuss the perceptual aspects of aesthetic objects in isolation of their expressive qualities.(P.99) Like other writers on the issue, Broudy also poses these questions: what makes an object to be experienced aesthetically apart from its other appeals e.g. religious, historical, and technical?(P.99) It may be necessary to recall the discussion on aesthetics and Engineering design(Aghaosa,2013) – noted in professional aesthetics. This is why apart from practical technical consideration, the architectural and engineering designs and structures-buildings, ramps, jetties, bridges etc., the aesthetic appeals in terms of function and visual appeal are also taken into account. In another perspective, music especially those used in religious worships apart from the lyrics (if any) do sometimes convey some other extra-aesthetic qualities sometimes also different from the religious intentions e.g. veneration for the Almighty, do also act as a therapeutic balm for frayed human nerves. This is something perhaps not contemplated nor envisaged by the composer of the musical piece. This could explain why music is sometimes used to complement anaesthetics during some medical surgeries. The writer owes a lot of gratitude to Professor R.O.Ofoegbu, of the department of Surgery, School of Medicine, University of Benin, Benin City for this explanation. This is from an informal discussion with him about the soothing effects of solemn classical music on some patients.

The '*Midaka*' dance style and choreographic movement among the Urhobos and some other tribes of the Niger-Delta of Nigeria; the '*Igbabonelimin*' masquerade acrobatic dance among the Esans of Edo State; the '*Swange*' music and dance forms and theatre of the Tivs of Benue State; and other traditional forms of music and their accompanying dances apart from providing visual aesthetic satisfaction do also have kinaesthetic imports. These kinaesthetic imports do also afford participant-performers of these dances useful aerobic exercises. These also help explain why moon light games and entertainments were very popular in almost all Nigerian traditional societies. This particular issue is aptly portrayed in Achebe's '*Things Fall Apart*' and in many other African novels and play lets. In the current times, 'Ball-rooms' or 'Club-houses' (disco) 'festivals' and funeral dances are gradually replacing the traditional moon-lit entertainments. Proffering an explanation on this link between the aesthetic experience and other forms of human experiences, it is Broudy's(1975) contention that:

If we agree that if aesthetic experience is not merely idle contemplation of purely formal arrangements of sensory materials, there must be some aesthetic objects that do express what is humanly relevant. That they express human import represent a meaning or a value as embodied in an image is what makes art a resource for human experience that is not identical with history, science, mathematics, philosophy or religion(P.102).

For Reimer(1991), the issue centres on the tension between '**formalism**' and '**referentialism**'(P.9) with respect to music and music education. It is acknowledged that it brings into focus, the role of extra-artistic matters as important determinants of the aesthetic meaning derivable from works of art. Reimer's view apart, the issue recaps the earlier question: how is artistic knowledge inspired from aesthetic phenomena as well as other epistemological subjects and phenomena? Conversely too, how does artistic knowledge inspire other forms of knowledge and meaning? How could '**ICARUS**' a Greek mythological tale in which the character-Icarus a

human- successfully flew like a bird by attaching bird feathers on his arm and transforming them into wings- the inspiration to Leonardo Da Vinci's technical drawings that provided subsequent inspirations for modern day flights and the airplanes? Two other sub-issues – the principles of: Art for art-sake – as discernible in Kant's disinterested Pleasure in appreciation of the beautiful(Aghaosa,2013) and Suzanne Langer's Art as symbolism,(Hirst,1973) are perceived as derivatives of the main issue. Explaining the problem from the perspectives of absolutism (formalism) and '**referentialism**' in music Reimer (1991) notes that:

- (i) The 'absolutist' or '**formalistic**' view sees music as essentially concentrating on sound structures, significance etc. with no extra-musical link or connotation. In effect this is music for music sake or "art for art-sake" noted also as the 'purist's' view of any piece of music which should be viewed as only music(P.%); this is as opposed to
- (ii) The '**Referentialists**' view, which concentrates more or less exclusively on associative or representational content in works of art as being the essential factor in how they achieve meaning.

With respect to the absolutist view, it entails that every piece of musical compositions be appreciated essentially as the composer intends it. Tchaikovsky's "**Swan Lake Opera**" for example, should be seen only as the composer intended it to be. Any extra-aesthetic meaning alluded to this piece is either co-incident or not even relevant. But the human psyche tends to function in unpredictable ways. This is in the sense that different people may appreciate same or different musical composition(s) in divergent ways – some even polemically opposed to the original ideas and intention of the artist. This absolutist opposition is what **referentialism** in music advocates. This particular issue brings to focus the controversies generated by Fela Anikulapo Kuti's "**Zombie**". This afro-beat musical composition in terms of lyrics and sound structure was intended as a radical protest and satirical lampooning of the excesses of military regimentation in the Nigerian society then. 'Zombie' triggered a backlash on Fela Anikulapo Kuti's 'Kalukuta Republic' –music and dancing club- that was razed down by some commandeered irate soldiers. But ironically, as seen from some evidences of some soldiers at Justice Kalu Anya's(1977) Panel of Investigation on Kalakuta Crises; and this researcher's personal contacts with soldiers in their 'watering holes' in Lagos, Benin, and other Army formations then in Nigeria. "Zombie" was a very popular musical piece among soldiers who continually played it in their homes as well as in their alcohol drinking and hemp smoking joints essentially for listening pleasure. This observation is not intended to critique this piece of musical composition. An acquaintance of this writer has averred that most Africans are latently usually absorbed by the rhythms, not the lyrics of musical renditions. That this may be what is implicitly illustrated by **Zombie** and its varying reactions-in this case by the soldiers, ambivalent.

It is only to bring out the instructive nature of how music and some other aesthetic phenomena can and do elicit certain emotions and knowledge far removed from the intention of the composer. Reimer (1991) while acknowledging that part of the problem emanates from the view of art as symbolic knowledge – a pre-occupation of Suzanne Langer's theory, avers that it could explain why some non-formally trained artists sometimes tend to be more aptly expressive than their professionally (?) or formally trained counterparts. Expatiating on this view, Reimer declares:

... I have been much more heavily influenced to soften my absolutist bent by the rather persuasive set of arguments one confronts when dealing with thinkers whose home discipline, has not been music that is people trained in other arts. They tend, if I may be so bold as to generalize, to be much more suspicious of what they construe as "formalism" than those in music more easily seduced by "**referentialism**" but naturally quite convinced that neither can account as fully as is necessary for the range of meanings the arts can mediate.(P.8)

Explaining the need for this shift from the 'absolutist's' ground, Reimer continues:
I would argue that so called "extra-artistic matters can indeed be and often are important determinants of the aesthetic meaning available from works of arts, but that in every case a necessary transformation in their nature must take place in order for that meaning to qualify as aesthetic. That transformation of meaning and I mean the word in its literal sense as a change is formed "across" or "beyond" is caused by, and is a function of that quality or set of conditions which characterize arts as a genuine meaning domain(P.8).

It is further explained that the unique quality of aesthetics is based on its capacity to create intrinsically meaningful structures as well as able to transform whatsoever it chooses to incorporate, for example



normative symbols, moral precepts, political slogans, religious icons e.t.c in its working into aesthetically meaningful knowledge. Like Broudy,(1975) and also Hirst,(1973) Reimer holds that the aesthetic meaning if properly sieved and projected can be valid. That other extra-aesthetic meaning – intellectual, religious etc are parasitic or supervening on the aesthetic. In addition, these extra- aesthetic meaning can be tangential or co-incident. Explaining on this dimension, which it may be noted, has a strong affinity to Hirst's,(1973) Reimer states:

The transformation of meaning through formed interrelationships occurs particularly and necessarily with emotions I would argue. Emotional states or moods, like any other incorporated materials can influence aesthetic expressiveness, but such expressiveness always transmutes, through the structures into which it is cast, any representation of an emotion as it might exist in experiences outside art(P.7).

In concluding, Reimer holds that the *“beyondness”* or *“transcendence”* achieved by intrinsically meaningful form is the essential characteristic of the aesthetic (P.7). It is further explained that transcendence is achieved in all arts of all cultures at all times in history. Thus, each culture achieves it in ways unique to it. This can be appreciated in the following ways:

- (i) Western concert Halls music;
- (ii) Balinese group ritual dances; and
- (iii) African drums ensembles etc.

In essence, it is through the social context that art shapes and moulds, individuals and communal experiences into meaningful forms shareable by participants of that culture.

It is pertinent to note that the above assertions re-echo the institutional theory of art, which was noted in professional aesthetics. A crucially relevant point enunciated by Reimer (1991) worth stating here is the realization that art is not the property of any one particular culture such as that of Western Europe. This point it must be recalled, formed one of the bedrocks of the writer's advocacy for the *‘comprehensivesation’* of music or aesthetic education curricula in schools. Elaborating on the fall out of this, it is held:

This [realization] opened music education in the 1960s to all the music represented by our poly-cultural society. The long held, entrenched idea that music studied in schools should be *“school music”* began to be replaced by a far more liberal attitude towards what is musical. While a good deal of conservatism still remains in music education about this matter aesthetic education I think, has gone a long way towards helping music education become more comprehensive in what music it includes as well as more comprehensive in the ways it engages students with music (P.7).

There are elements of universalism in the above observations by Reimer. This can be seen as a logical outcome of globalization from the educational perspective. Taken to the level of nations, a country like Nigeria with a multiethnic composition and motley of cultures, the variety of aesthetic vehicles from this array of culture surely would pose serious but fruitful challenges for any comprehensive aesthetic curricula for formal school learning. Summarizing the essence of the above stated, it is Reimer's view that an essential characteristic of aesthetic education is the ability to enhance students' capacity to gain meaningful insights from culturally embedded expressive forms. As noted, almost everything in our world has such expressive potentials in yielding meaning that are aesthetically experienced (P.7).

It is also pertinent to remark that Reimer's observation in the preceding apart from re- echoing the Institutional Theory of arts and everyday objects as art object debate- noted earlier, can also be extrapolated on the educational status of *‘academic art’*(Aghaosa,2014) . This is as it affects other branches of aesthetic education for examples, painting, sculpture, poetry etc. It bothers on one of the haunches of this writer that much of the art – in all ramifications taught in aesthetic education programmes of public secondary schools particularly in Nigeria, tend to lay emphases on Western academic art. This is especially in content, form and styles. There is often, only salutary mention of other cultural aesthetic content and styles such as African, Asiatic art. This point it would be recalled is in the advocacy by Marchiano (2004) on the necessity for a robust view and application of aesthetics in present day scholarship of the field. This tendency to emphasize more on Western academic art at the expense of local traditional arts and crafts could perhaps be a principal factor for the apathy against this area of learning noticeable among some public secondary school students in Nigeria.



SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper explored and appraised the epistemological nexus of aesthetic education and extra-aesthetic values-moral, religious, etc.; and how they can facilitate teaching and learning in their respective modes of knowledge. It examined the basic concepts, issues and arguments in this aspect of aesthetic education.

The exploration apart from clarifying the basic concepts and issues was able to conclude that there are veritable links between aesthetic knowledge and extra-aesthetic experiences. That in spite of being a very complex issue, both modes of knowledge and knowing have epistemological elements that supervene and also parasitic on each other in most learning encounters.

To make aesthetic learning more interesting and relevant in Nigerian secondary schools, the following are recommended.

1. Aesthetic learning educators and facilitators should endeavour to analyze epistemological issues in aesthetic curricula and seek relevant pedagogical skills to impart them.
2. Insights about the epistemological elements that undergird both modes of learning should guide the selection of materials for aesthetic curricula. There should be emphases on **comprehensivisation** to accommodate as much as possible, most if not all aspects of aesthetic experiences
3. Aesthetic education teacher education programs should be geared to develop teachers with the varied skills available in their areas of specialization.

REFERENCES

- Aghaosa, P.I (2014) The Aesthetic Vehicles, Subjects, Spectator, Emotions and Mode *Academic Research International (AR Int)* 5 : 1, (2014) Website at <http://www.journals.savap.org.pk/vol.5n1.html>. 170-179.
- Broudy, H. S. (1975) The Aesthetic Dimension of Education. in *Educational Judgment – Papers in the Philosophy of Education*, Ed. J.E. Doyle. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.
- Da Vinci, L. Painting Madonna of the Rocks.
- Hirst, P.H.(1973) Knowledge and the Curriculum. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.
- Langer, S.K. Art as Symbolic Knowledge in .Hirst,P.H(1973) Knowledge and the Curriculum. London; Routledge and Keegan Paul.
- Kuti's, A.Music. *Zombie*.
- Marchiano, G. (2004) What to learn from Eastern Aesthetics *The Journal of Aesthetics Education*. 2(10), 1-7.
- Reimer, B. (1991) Essential and Nonessential Characteristics of Aesthetics Education. *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 25(3), 193-204.
- Tchaikovsky's-Music- *Swan-Lake Opera*.