

# Identifying Factors Affecting Aesthetics with a Focus on Awareness and Visual Literacy

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## To Cite this Article

Farzaneh Alaghehmand, "Identifying Factors Affecting Aesthetics with a Focus on Awareness and Visual Literacy", *International Journal for Modern Trends in Science and Technology*, Vol. 04, Issue 09, September 2018, pp.-28-34.

## Article Info

Received on 26-July-2018, Revised on 23-Aug-2018, Accepted on 02-Sept-2018.

## ABSTRACT

*Aesthetics always focuses on understanding aesthetic features. In the twentieth century, Dewey introduced aesthetics into the educational system. By creating numerous works on art and experience, he attempted to return art and aesthetic experience to the context of normal life. The present research tries to clarify the aesthetic experience by focusing on awareness and aesthetic visual literacy and find its relation with education. This study uses the analytical method, in a way that after describing key concepts, the effect of visual literacy and awareness on aesthetics has been analyzed. The results showed that in the aesthetic experience, effective and artistic factors such as emotion, expression, and imagination along with awareness and visual literacy are considered as essential components of aesthetics, which results in the completion of experience, understanding the meaning and the value in individuals. This experience leads to the stimulation of sensitivity and sympathy among individuals and leads to the optimization and understanding the relation between the natural and social world and increases ethical conduct and judgments*

**KEYWORDS:** *Aesthetics, visual literary, wisdom*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The term aesthetics was first used by Alexander Baumgarten in the eighteenth century, to show the importance of aesthetic that is felt by the senses. Later, this term was used to refer to the beauty that is felt through senses. (zeltener, 1975). Those who inspired by Dewey's ideas about aesthetics, art and education promoted their work. Aestheticism, in the broad sense, is a theory of beauty in which both the natural and artistic features of beauty are discussed and as a branch of philosophy, it discusses the analysis of concepts and solutions that address issues and perceptions of beauty and involves aesthetic experience. Dewey (1980) introduces aesthetics as a full, supreme, productive experience which is along with a

passion for the basic needs and goals throughout the life. He believes that human needs to find himself, and this is conducted through aesthetics that has always been continued through the ordinary processes of life. According to Dewey's view, art is not just a wonderful and static sense, but as a dynamic equilibrium, it makes it possible to avoid daily routine and turbulent situations (Ansari, Maryam, 2013).

On the other hand, the importance of images and visual media in contemporary culture has gradually changed the meaning of literacy in the 21st century. Today's society is very intuitive, and the visual image is no longer a complementary to other forms of information. New digital technologies have made it possible for almost anyone to build and deliver visual media. However,

the widespread use of images and visual media does not necessarily mean that people are able to critically view, use, and create visual content. Individuals must acquire these essential skills in order to have a powerful presence in an intuitive-oriented society. Media literacy empowers people to fully participate in a visual culture.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF AESTHETICISM

In the extensive sense, aesthetic is a theory of beauty in which both the natural and artistic beauty are considered. As a branch of philosophy, aesthetics discusses the analysis of concepts and solutions that are related to aesthetic issues and perceiving it. The concept of aesthetics is included in the aesthetic experience. Dewey (1980) introduces aesthetics as a full, supreme, productive and enthusiastic experience of basic needs and goals throughout the life, and believes that humans need to re-know themselves and this is performed through aesthetics which continues through normal processing of life. In Dewey's view, art is not a great and static sense, but as a dynamic balance, it makes others avoid stereotype and turbulent situations. (Ansari, Maryam, 2013). Allameh Jafari is also one of the philosophers who emphasize on the importance of aesthetic in education and like Brody (1977-1996), believes that aesthetics should be introduced as part of basic education and its meaning should be explained more extensively than it seems (Nowrouzi, 2011). In fact, the concept of aesthetics, as the most fundamental idea in art, forms the ultimate of artistic education and the way of doing it (Mehr Mohammadi, 2014). Artistic education is a real transformation for a free and informed approach towards values. Kant does not regard beauty as an aimless end. Zeiss (1984) believes that the main goal of aesthetic education can be defined as learning through and about art. In other words, the main purpose of aesthetic education is to raise the individuals' artistic literacy. This means to acquaint people with art, explain and create aesthetic sense and promote artistic creativity (Nowrouzi, Reza, 2011). Eisner (1962) considers man as a creature that is shaped by his experiences. In other words, he believes that all knowledge is obtained from experience and all experiences originate from the five senses and fine arts are the richest way to appropriately understand the human experiences (Wesly, 1973).

In fact, the word aesthetic is originally Greek and means perception. Aesthetics in its broad sense studies the methods of feeling the

environment and the individual's position within it (Grutter, 2009). Mo'ein Dictionary defines beauty as "a beautiful state and quality," and writes: "beauty is the order and harmony that accompanies the magnificence and purity of the object, and stimulates the human's intellect, imagination, and the highest desires and creates enjoyment and expansions." Beauty is a relative issue" (Noghrekar, 2008). It is difficult to fully understand the concept of aesthetics, but it is possible to understand the factors affecting the perception of a pleasant environment.

George Santayana classifies aesthetics into three categories of sensual, formative and symbolic aesthetics. Sensual aesthetics analyses are highly mental and internal. Symbolic aesthetics deals with the pleasure that comes from the mental background of the people or the mentality that is made of the configuration and features of the environment. The subject of the formative aesthetics is the role and influence of shapes, proportions, rhythms, scale, complexity, colors, and other components of the human-built environment (Lang, 2009).

What is the purpose of beauty? Sigmund Freud believes that the aim of beauty is enjoying the art and in some way relieving emotions. From Theodore Adorno's point of view, the aesthetic behavior is the ability to understand something from things more than that they are. According to information theory which is trying to describe beauty in mathematical language, the sense of aesthetic is achieved when the mind succeeded in discovering a relative order in a series of apparently disordered and confusing motives.

There are many definitions for aesthetics, some philosophers such as Plato believed in the beauty of nature and the beauty of geometry, line, and circle. In contrast with Plato, some philosophers such as Plato believe that beauty is a spiritual matter which is originated from the soul. Aristotle gave an intuitive sense to beauty. In ancient Greece (Hellenistic philosophy) personal creativity becomes important, and the architect is a means of expressing mathematical aesthetics built on the basis of harmony, symmetry, and order. Peter Smith believes in three levels of aesthetic values: fashion; design styles in various cultural periods and basic aesthetic values. These three levels change over the time and due to the existing situation. According to Vitruvius (1 BC) and Andrea Palladio (1508-1580), beauty, along with efficiency and staticity, are one of the three factors that play roles in architecture and that make a

building to be admired. According to Vitruvius, beauty is perceived when a building has a pleasant façade and the symmetry of its components is correctly calculated. By symmetry, Vitruvius means something that in the current days it is referred to as fitness. From Kant's (1724-1802) point of view, beautiful, in general, is something that mixes our senses in a harmonious way.

There are obvious problems in understanding the concept of aesthetic experience. So with an analytical approach, this research first, studies some basic components of this experience:

### *2.1 Unity and coherence*

The first feature of the aesthetic experience is unity and coherence, which at the same time turns a disordered experience into an ordered one. In fact, what makes an experience to be an aesthetic experience is the transformation of stability and excitement in a way that ultimately it leads to a satisfying configuration (Dewey, 2007). According to Dewey, an experience that is appeared clearly, coherently and enthusiastically, in most cases is in accordance with a particular situation and has an aesthetic quality that leads to its unity. Dewey believes that the greatest enemy of aesthetics is absurdity and monotony. Therefore, the coherence and unity of an experience depend on an aesthetic, order and uniformity. Unity in design means to be united, which is the fundamental principle of visual organizing, and other principles used to serve the perfection of unity. If a component changes or displaced, the whole will be affected. The most important visual aspect of the unity is that the whole is dominant over the components. In order to achieve this, first, the whole should be considered. This way, all the components become an organization. If the components are not coordinated and seem apart from each other, the combination can be dispersed, and the unity of the components will be eliminated. The principle of unity is the general rule of aesthetics. From the artistic and aesthetic point of view, one can quote from Herbert Reed, in the book of the meaning of art, which says that art is an effort to create pleasurable images. These images satisfy our sense of beauty, and the sense of beauty is satisfied when we conceive a kind of unity or harmony which are resulted from the formal relation in our conceptions (Kim, 2009). Therefore, if an architectural structure demonstrates the sense of unity in its structure and concept, it can satisfy a part of the inner need of the soul of the individual to that building, and it

can aesthetically allocate an appropriate place to itself.

### *2.2 Qualitative self-awareness*

The interaction cycle always continuously moves with the environment and causes self-awareness of the human being. In fact, the excitement is the conscious indicator of a kind of breakdown between the internal and external factors, which in turn stimulates human's contemplation and leads to the individual's internal and qualitative self-awareness (Dewey, 2007). This feature is also referred to as "immediate quality" (Kim, 2009). In fact, the first relation between human and reality is revealed as a qualitative experience. Architecture is, in fact, the art and the technique of giving form to space and place, according to the world's requirements and based on the humans' historical view, imagine, self-awareness towards the universe and its origin (Mahvash, 2006).

### *2.3 Imagination*

According to Dewey, the aesthetic experience is imaginary. In his view, our entire conscious experience has a kind of imaginative quality. The reason is that the difference between the aesthetic experience and the ordinary experience lies in the relative domination of the imagination. In the aesthetic experience, immersion is dominant, i.e. "there is conscious coordination between the old and the new experience" (Dewey, 2007). The artistic works of these imaginations or concepts are embodied in the material, and this is the same fact that, according to Dewey, "is a special feature of all commercial, which is precisely and distinctly aesthetic." In fact, the work of art expands on the immediate and direct experience by expressing the concepts that originate from imagination. Imagination, as an important component of aesthetics, studies possible alternatives for applying in a selected field of ongoing activity and provides an opportunity for ideas to be sought.

Through aesthetics, the significance of imagination in the world's changes can be practically understood (Alexander, 1987). Indeed, in a selected field, imagination studies the probabilities and turns the into a work plan. Thus, imagination may lead individuals to work and make changes in the understanding of moral concepts that make unaffected and logical changes (Ansari, 2014).

### *2.4 Perception of beauty and subjective knowledge*

Aesthetics is a concept that many attempts have been taken to define it over time, but it seems that it is impossible to provide an absolute definition of beauty. In the Sogdian language, the word (Karsn) not only means beauty but also in itself has the concept of form. The word (asthetikos), which reflects the beautiful components of the world in Greek, also means the pleasure of seeing the works of art. (Ayvazian, 2003).

### 2.5 Emotion

Emotion is one of the important components that blend the ethical and the aesthetic experiences. In fact, human's innovation and social creativity are due to emotion.

### 2.6 Expression

In fact, the expression is not the immature release of emotion and internal energy but it is an internal reaction to the individual and environment interactions that, along with pleasures and desires, satisfy the needs and eliminates deficiencies. When an artist faces ethical factors or emotions, the environmental information and events in which he is located are stimulated, as a result, the artist feels impatience and excitement in his heart and mind. These emotions which are stimulated by the individual's apparent senses are so strong that, in a short time after their formation, they are required to be abandoned in a precise manner and release the internal pressures. In this case, the artist expresses his emotional content through the creation of an artwork (Dewey, 2007).

## III. AESTHETICS, ART, AND ETHIC

The application of aesthetic experience in education has been effective and its results are indicated in two aspects of emotionality and sympathy. The emotionality is the creation of an artistic balance between the two states of extremes of emotion which provide the ethical persons with an open mind which receives information. As in aesthetics, the improvement is the main objective of the aesthetic experience, empathy prepares the person to cooperate with others and remove the problems of the society. Finally, the people will be able to understand the behavior of others through interaction in accompany with a feeling of sympathy (Fathi, 2007). Walter Stace in the expression and description of art says:

"Instead of knowing what art is? It's better to see what art is not. For instance, art is different from ethics in that ethical is related to human's action, but

art is related to creation. Ethic includes the action itself, but art is the product and result of the action. Hence, the mind, emotions and the issues like these have importance in ethic as they are a part of the action itself. In art, just the good artistic work is important (Stace 1960). In fact, Stace believes that creating a good artistic work is enough.

Schiller encourages human to be ethical and rational through shaping his nature via aesthetic education. Furthermore, the individual's ability to enjoy beauty for the sake of beauty will be improved and he is led to ethical sensitivity (Salmani, 2012).

Dewey also believes that besides being an ethical performance, art is the messenger of human education. This way, human learns to use his emotions, eliminate prejudices and ultimately maximize the power of his perception. Aesthetic experience finally makes the human's experience coherent and ultimately improves it. This experience involves emotion, sympathy, and imagination that lead to the improvement of life and his ethical experience. Dewey believes that ethical imaginations direct the individual's attitude from a fixed solution to a number of solutions which are the interface between the ethical and aesthetic experiences (Ansari, Maryam, 2013).

### 3.1 Visual literacy

Visual literacy is a set of abilities that enable an individual to find, interpret, evaluate, use and create visual images and media in an effective way. Visual literacy skills equip the learner to understand and analyze the contextual, cultural, ethical, aesthetic and rational components when he is producing and using visual materials. A visually literate person is both a critic consumer of visual media and a qualified colleague for an institution which is made of a combination of knowledge and culture.

Considering the importance and the necessity of the ability to understand, perceive and create an image in producing a variety of educational materials, full familiarity with the characteristics and components of visual literacy just is possible through planned teaching. There is a lot of evidence that shows that today there is a return to the past, i.e. the return to use the image for communication. This backward movement is due to the fact that human beings want to communicate with each other in a more effective and direct way.

As the image of each object is the closest thing to its reality and is similar to our direct experience of objects, using it in accompany with the oral report helps our understanding (Dandis, 1989).

Undoubtedly, the images have deeper effects on motivating contemporary life. But the human culture that has so far been over come by speech and language gradually has turned to the image and imaging. Today, a large part of knowledge, information, and beliefs are acquired by seeing the images and their domination on us. The extent of the influence and penetration of images in today's society which takes place invarious ways is, in fact, a return to what is significantly important to the satisfaction and life of our eyes. If we show something to a newcomer to the city, his understanding of it will be far deeper than when we orally describe it to him.

The issue which should be considered is that many people do not have the knowledge to extrapolate the correct concepts from the image, are careless about images, while many sciences can only be understood from the image. The mentioned facts show the lack of teaching images to the students.

Many believe that visual literacy does not need to be taught, while this teaching is absolutely essential to verbal literacy. Perhaps due to this reason, this thought that if an individual has the ability to see, he is capable of understanding and creating any image since the transmission of the image of what is observed in nature does not require visual literacy has sometimes been caged (Aga Khani,2007).

Visual literacy, like verbal literacy, has its own alphabet, and in order to better and deeper understand it, we need to learn visual literacy skills, so obviously it will never be enough to rely solely on the natural power of sight.

In 1910,the Gestalt phenomenon was first flourished in Max Wertheimer's mind who was a Czech psychologist. He found that "Gestalt" or all perceived experience has a certain property - for instance, the movement that does not exist in its implementation. Gestalt expresses a method according to which the objects aregestalted i.e. "inserted and arranged" (Torrans, 1999). Caps, the author of the language of images, believes that Gestaltis a material, psychological or institutional totality which has characteristics whose single components do not have them (Case, 1989).

Understanding the meaning of the image is one of the most important human skills. This ability is developed by seeing. Furthermore, the bond

between visual experiences and the experiences of other senses makes the person's mental reserves richer in reading the effect and understanding the meaning of the image. Visual literacy refers to human's skill of understanding and translating the image. Of course, this understanding is generally conscious. Different types of visual representation of the image, the visual rules of understanding their function and meaning are studied in the field of visual knowledge.

In an interdisciplinary environment and in higher education, the person with visual literacy is able to:

- Determine the nature and amount of required visual materials find the required visual images and media in an efficient and effective way;
- Interpret and analyze the meaning of visual images and media;
- Assess the images and their sources;
- Use visual images and media in an effective way;
- Design and produce meaningful visual images and media.

### 3.2 Visual literacy and high education

Students in different fields of study face visual images through their courses. Although the students are expected to understand, use, and create images as their university activities, they are not always prepared to do this. Research-based work with images requires specific visual materials and skills, interpretation, analysis, and evaluation. The existence of these abilities is not certain and obvious as their implementation requires training, support, and integration with the curriculum.

It is worth noting that some standards of higher education and kindergarten up to the end of secondary school consider visual literacy as one of several key literacies which are required in order to be successful in the contemporary society. Many of the topics of trans-literacy, meta-literacy, and multidimensional literacy also consider visual literacy as an important literacy for today's learners. There is also a diverse range of texts on visual literacy and visual studies. However, standards that determine students' learning outcomes through interdisciplinary visual literacy in higher education are not set. The Standard of Visual Literacy for Higher Education refers to this vacancy in the relevant texts and provides tools for the instructors who are seeking to pursue visual literacy in students of different levels.

### 3.3 Visual and information literacy

The "Visual Literacy Standard" was developed in the framework of the "Standard of Information Literacy Capabilities for Higher Education" and aimed at completing the "Information Literacy Standard." The "Visual Literacy Standard" addresses some of the unique topics presented in visual materials. Images often act as information, but at the same time are aesthetic and creative objects that require other levels of interpretation and analysis. Finding visual materials in text-based environments requires specific types of research skills. The use, sharing, and re-production of visual materials also require special moral and legal considerations.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Aesthetics, as a branch of philosophy, refers to an experience that differs from other types of experiences and is an aesthetic experience which helps with understanding the aesthetic issues in life. The present study tries to identify the factors affecting aesthetics with a focus on visual awareness and visual literacy in an analytical way. The aesthetic experience is more than doing and understanding action, acting on the world and the act of the world upon us. It also requires an impending, coherent and evolutionary relation between these elements. In Dewey's view, art and ethics are inseparable. In fact, it is impossible to study Dewey's thoughts on ethics without understanding the aesthetic roles in the experience (Dewey, 2007).

Dewey's aesthetic components are unity and cohesion, qualitative self-awareness, emotion, expression, imagination, and visualization. Dewey's aesthetic is the interface between the experience of ethics and the experience of aesthetics which ultimately leads to sensitivity and sympathy and improves the individuals' awareness. This makes people act on the basis of empathetic morality in their social communication and respect their own and the others' interests. Sensitivity and sympathy are two human capabilities that are involved in moral imagery. Both of these moral attributes are the main components of moral imagery and make sure that imaginations are not turned into subjective wanderings, but be targeted.

In fact, moral perceptions direct people's attitudes from a constant solution to several solutions in the manifold of life, as long as the examination of all the ways is practically irrational.

The result of such mental predictions enables individuals to evaluate different scenarios so that they can best and the most appropriately decide and judge.

Researches have shown that the balance between words and images has created new forms of literacy. Visual literacy goes beyond traditional notions of reading and writing. Analyzing and reviewing researches show that visual literacy is necessary for understanding the principles of aesthetics. The findings show that the creation of images leads to greater discovery, understanding and awareness. If the aesthetic experience is properly understood and the conditions of implementing it are provided, it is considered as an effective way in education which results in the learners' satisfaction, improvement of visual knowledge, disorganized memorization of the memory, meaning creation, creativity, and innovation. In fact, this experience is a pleasant music of self-fulfilling, and the characteristic of John Dewey's philosophy of education.

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