1 Introduction

- Today’s Focus: What is ART?
  1 The CONSTRUCTIVIST conception of art
    - Global VS Individual Constructivism
    - Moderate VS Radical Constructivism
  2 Defining and understanding TERMINOLOGY
  3 Descriptive VS Prescriptive Theories

1.1 Review: Three Conceptions of Art

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>H1: The AESTHETIC Conception of Art</th>
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Art can gain value from its interpretation in context, after its creation!

“This is a moderate approach.”

2 The Constructivist Conception of Art

- 1503≈1504: La Gioconda
  Painted in Florence

- 1860s:
  Critics begin to hail it a masterpiece, but it is unknown outside of the art world

- August 21, 1911:
  Stolen from the Louvre
  by an Italian patriot who tries to sell it to the Uffizi!

- 1913:
  Returned to the Louvre
  Vandalism attempts, copies, parodies, analysis by art historians ...

- The artistic value of La Gioconda/The Mona Lisa, increased after its creation
• David’s “Oath of the Horatii”, commissioned by Louis XVI

• Tonal contrast expressively glorifies the virtues of
  – LOYALTY
  – SACRIFICE, and
  – SOLIDARITY to
    (i) King Louis XVI (pre-revolution)
    (ii) the State (post-revolution)

• The **constructivist** approach assigns additional **artistic value** to the historical re-interpretation of this piece

• Marcel DuChamp’s “Fountain”

• “Everything is Awesome” - Ai Weiwei

  Lego and Toilet, 2015

→ According to the **constructivist** approach, Marcel DuChamp’s “Fountain” gains added **artistic value** from works like Weiwei’s “Everything is Awesome”

→ And Ai Weiwei’s “Everything is Awesome” gains added **artistic value** from works like Weiwei’s “LetGo Room”
2.1 Societal Constructivism VS Individual Constructivism

- **Last Week: Expression:**
  Inward-looking, aims to convey **inner reality**
  - Moods
  - Emotions
  - Attitudes

- **Q: Whose moods, emotions and attitudes?**

- According to the Expressive Conception of Art:
  - The **artist’s** moods, emotions and attitudes

- **Another Interpretation:**
  - The **viewer’s** moods, emotions and attitudes

**H3: The CONSTRUCTIVIST Paradigm of Art**

→ The value of art is correlated with
  (i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
  (ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
  (iii) the **GLOBAL/SOCIENTAL CONTEXT** in which it is perceived

- ...but what do we mean by **CONTEXT**?
- **Stecker 2010** describes a **SOCIETAL CONTEXT**
- but we could interpret this as a **INDIVIDUAL CONTEXT** too

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**H3: Traditional Constructivism**

→ The value of art is correlated with
  (i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
  (ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
  (iii) the **GLOBAL/SOCIENTAL CONTEXT** in which it is perceived

- Art can gain **value** from its interpretation
  by a **SOCIAL COMMUNITY**, after its creation.

**H3b: Individual Constructivism**

→ The value of art is correlated with
  (i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
  (ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
  (iii) the **INDIVIDUAL CONTEXT** in which it is perceived

- Art can gain **value** from its interpretation
  by an **INDIVIDUAL PERceiver**, after its creation.

  → An object can be personally meaningful for you,
  and be more artistically valuable because of that

- **Q: Is this compatible with Kant’s four criteria for an aesthetic judgement?**
  1 is **subjective** (a felt judgement, not an intellectual calculation)
  2 is **universal** (...not in the eye of the beholder) ×
  3 is **disinterested** (value independent of usefulness/benefit to perceiver)
  4 Engages imagination and intellect (in addition to the senses)
2.2 Moderate Constructivism VS Radical Constructivism

- The CONSTRUCTIVIST approaches we have been discussing are MODERATE approaches; there is also RADICAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

H3c: Radical Constructivism

→ The value of art is correlated with

(i) how aesthetically pleasing it is, and
(ii) its relationship to its historical context of creation
(iii) its relationship to the context in which it is perceived

- According to RADICAL CONSTRUCTIVISM, the only thing that matters is the value associated with the artwork’s relationship to the perceiver’s context

3 Case Study: An Analysis of Duret’s Chactas

Chactas en méditation sur la tombe d’Atala
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Montréal . Francisque-Joseph Duret, 1836

- Aesthetic Value
  - Compositionally, the sculpture is balanced, but with enough asymmetry so the pose appears natural, not stiff
  - The bronze material has a warm reddish hue and reflects light easily, so that variation in value/tone clearly shows weight/form
  - Representationally, it portrays a sitting man with an ideal form and features

- Contextual Value
  - The subject, Chactas, is the main character from the 18th century Chateaubriand novella “Atala,” a Romeo/Juliet story
  - Expressively, the slumped pose portrays the character’s sorrow
  - The tension in the feet can be interpreted as expressing the character’s pain
  - The pose (reminiscent of Rodin’s “Thinker”) also expresses the 16th/17th century concept of the heroic “noble savage” in tune with nature
  - The point of contemplation portrayed is a critical point in Chactas’ eventual conversion to Christianity
  - At the time in France, some viewed religion as crucial for social order and stability (pace the 18th c. Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau)

- Constructivist Value
  - The myth of the “noble savage” is now acknowledged as a harmful stereotype
  - This is because it denies the personhood of American Indians/First Nations People (since they are never portrayed with the complexities associated with real people)
  - The “noble savage in tune with nature” theme of Chactas en méditation gains an extra layer of complexity when viewed through modern eyes...
– Consider the controversial (lack of) coverage of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests:
  – The Sioux tribe were protesting a pipeline construction that could (and eventually did) contaminate their drinking water
  – The government responded to the protests violently, with pepper spray, dogs, arrests
  – Very little media coverage, despite the gravity of situation
  – The “noble savage in tune with nature” theme of Chactas en méditation can be interpreted as a symbol of the North American media’s reluctance to represent
    (i) American Indians/First Nations people as real people (with real human rights)
    (ii) Environmental issues as important issues
  – This re-interpretation adds complexity, and hence ARTISTIC VALUE to Chactas en Méditation

4 Descriptive VS Prescriptive Theories

- **DESCRIPTIVE THEORY:** is a framework for describing how things/people are
  
  eg., a decision theory can DESCRIBE HOW PEOPLE make decisions
  eg., a linguistic theory can DESCRIBE HOW PEOPLE speak
  eg., an aesthetic theory can DESCRIBE HOW PEOPLE judge things as art vs not-art, beautiful vs not-beautiful

- **PRESCRIPTIVE THEORY:** is a framework for guiding how things/people ought to be
  
  eg., a decision theory can be used to TELL PEOPLE HOW TO make decisions (to optimize benefit)
  eg., a linguistic theory can be used to TELL PEOPLE HOW TO speak (to be “formally correct”)
  eg., an aesthetic theory can be used to TELL PEOPLE HOW TO judge things as art vs not-art, beautiful vs not-beautiful

- For the purposes of this class, we are more interested in DESCRIPTIVE THEORY than PRESCRIPTIVE THEORY

### Weekly Instagram Assignment [OPTION 1, 2, 3]

1. Post an image/video of a work of art, and highlight its value as art...
   (i) ...with respect to the aesthetic conception of art (1/3)
   (ii) ...with respect to the contextualist paradigm of art (2/3)
   (iii) ...with respect to the constructivist paradigm of art (3/3)

2. Discuss your analyses in the comments - is it a SOCIETAL approach the constructivist approach, or an INDIVIDUAL/PERSONAL approach? (remember to identify with your student code!)

**References**