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Art and Pleasure: Reframing the Question

Thursday, February 22, 2018
5:00 pm, McCue Auditorium, LAB

Abstract

I'll argue, first, that an art object's aesthetic value (or merit) depends not just on its intrinsic properties, but on the *response* it evokes from a consumer who shares the producer's cultural background. My question is: what is the role of culture in relation to this response? I offer a new account of aesthetic pleasure that answers this question. On this account, aesthetic pleasure is not just a "feeling" or "sensation" that results from engaging with a work of art. It is rather a mental state that facilitates engagement with an artwork, and (in the long run) enables a consumer to *learn* how to maximize this kind of pleasure. This is where culture comes in. If you belong to a culture, you know how to engage pleasurably with an artwork that is produced so you can engage with it in just this way. The aesthetic value of an artwork is that it plays into such a culture-pleasure nexus.

