

Nick Zangwill

Reply to Rafael De Clercq on Art

Rafael De Clercq offers a challenging and insightful commentary. He airs three difficulties:

(A) My methodological aims were explanatory. I was quite easy-going about the target for explanation. De Clercq worries, however, that I may have been too easy-going. He worries about combing his hair, shaving, and everyday hygienic activities. I am happy to include some of these as art. The aesthetics of the everyday is important.¹ I cannot see that the considerations in play for a person who is wondering whether certain items of clothing 'fit' or 'go together' are radically different from those of someone taking artistic decisions in a standard art form. And if we think about hairstyles and facial grooming, there is a continuum from Dali's famous mustache to everyday trimming. As far as personal hygiene goes and the care of one's appearance, there is a question about what the goal of the activity is. Is it 'aesthetic' in a useful sense? In some cases it is reasonable to suppose that it is. In other cases not. Being 'presentable' or sexy, for example, can contrast with beauty. However, some grooming activities are aesthetically motivated and their upshot may count as little works of art – or I see no harm in saying so. In cases where we groom ourselves to enhance our beauty, I would shift the onus of proof, and ask, giving the extent of the aesthetics of everyday life, why such activities are not at least on a continuum with artworld art activities? Hairdressing, after all, is an art in a broad sense, and in many countries the art even goes under the name "aesthetic".

De Clercq offers me a way out with such cases. One need not have an aesthetic insight, in my sense, every time one combs one's hair. True. One might have an insight at some point, and then cultivate a habit of acting on it. But I also allow that another person has that insight. A fashion icon or style guru may generate this year's hair-style.² Fashion icons or style gurus

¹ See Yuriko Saito, *The Aesthetics of the Everyday* (Oxford University Press, 2007); and Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1983), chapter 15.

² See my discussion of the studio assistant, who I allow makes works of art without insight, but who aims to enact another's aesthetic insight and intention. Nick Zangwill, *Aesthetic Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42–46.

may promulgate aesthetic ideas in fashion magazines. And I may follow their advice when I comb my hair or wear a certain kind of clothes.

De Clercq also has a more theoretically motivated concern with extensional adequacy. He writes "...if the explanation provided is the same for art and a host of non-artistic activities, then it seems that little insight will be gained into the nature of the first." I don't quite agree. If artistic activities instantiate some more general activity, which we can understand in a certain way, then that is surely a step forward. Artwork activities fall into a more general class of aesthetic activities. Maybe we think that more needs to be said to explain artistic aesthetic activities. But an aesthetic explanation will nevertheless be part of the explanation of artistic activities.

(B) I define insight as an event of acquiring *knowledge*. That was because I wanted it to be non-accidental that the created thing has the aesthetic properties in virtue of the non-aesthetic properties. De Clercq urges that justified true belief is enough, and even that true belief may not be necessary. It is true that I ignored cases that fall short of knowledge in *Aesthetic Creation*, preferring to characterize a more standard kind of case where, as we might say, artists know what they are doing. I see other kinds of case as falling away from that standard kind of case. Cases where effects produced are quite different from those envisaged are possible, but they do not worry me much, although they are interesting. Suppose someone very inept tries to make an airplane but it turns out just like a shoe? It is not an airplane. But is it a shoe? I don't know! Should I know? Certainly though, I want to prioritize people's actual aims and intentions in explanation, rather than their beliefs about how to achieve those aims or their success in carrying out their intentions. For the rational explanation of action begins with people's aims and intentions.

It is true that if we add knowledge, justified true belief, or true belief to a person's goals and intentions, different actions will be explained. De Clercq might ask: why not take belief to be explanatorily basic? I think this is a fair point, and as far as psychological explanation (and justification) is concerned, belief is more explanatorily basic than knowledge, justified true belief, and true belief. But if worldly states, such as art objects and events, are to be explained, then we will need more than belief.

(C) Since the view is that artworks have essential aesthetic functions, artworks persist only if most of their aesthetic functions persist. I would now augment the passage quoted by De Clercq to say that persistence of aesthetic function *typically* depends on the persistence of intended aesthetic properties, but need not do so if other nonaesthetic properties come to realize the aesthetic function. De Clercq worries about the idea that *most* aesthetic properties must persist. For, how does one count properties?

What was motivating my "most" was a desire not to insist that absolutely *all* aesthetic functions are necessary for persistence, since there could surely

be minor changes through which the work persists. On the other hand, if *all* the aesthetic properties and functions differ, then the work of art has not survived. Something between “all” and “none” seemed to be needed, so I hit on “most” (not “some”, which seemed too little). But what does “most” mean if there are an infinite number of properties or functions. This is a good question.

Firstly, we can allow that some nonaesthetic *properties* are more important than others with respect to the persistence of aesthetic *functions*. So, the small blue patch in the upper right corner of a painting may be less important than being a depiction of a Dutch rural landscape in the overall aesthetic function of the work (and thus restoration should prioritize the latter if a choice has to be made).

Secondly, the same issue arises for the persistence of any artifact. Indeed, can we say that any pair of things has more in common than another pair of things? The whole idea of similarity is problematic if we cannot count properties or talk of a greater or lesser number of shared properties, especially if there are an infinite number of them. However, if anything is a more general problem, this is.