

Philosophy and Psychology: Difference in Disturbing Art

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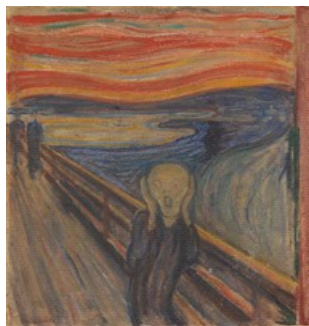
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Abstract

“Philosophy and Psychology: Differences on Disturbing Art” examines the differing viewpoints through which unsettling or disturbing artworks are understood within philosophical and psychological contexts. Disturbing art, frequently marked by themes of discomfort, fear, trauma, and moral ambiguity, challenges traditional aesthetic limits and elicits profound emotional and intellectual reactions.



Edvard Munch The Scream
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

The research employs an interdisciplinary methodology, exploring philosophical concepts related to aesthetics, ethics, and the essence of art in conjunction with psychological viewpoints that concentrate on perception, cognition, and emotional reactions. From a philosophical standpoint, disturbing art is scrutinized regarding its significance, intent, and its capacity to challenge societal norms and ethical values. Conversely, psychological examination prioritizes the viewer's internal experience, encompassing responses such as anxiety, empathy, curiosity, and subconscious interpretation. Additionally, the study delves into how individual variances such as cultural background,

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personal experiences, and mental conditions affect the interpretation of disturbing imagery. By analyzing selected artworks and theoretical texts, the research underscores the distinction between objective interpretation and subjective experience. The results indicate that while philosophy aims to comprehend disturbing art concerning its conceptual and ethical ramifications, psychology sheds light on the emotional and cognitive effects it has on observers. The dissertation concludes that an integrated philosophical and psychological viewpoint provides a more thorough understanding of disturbing art, highlighting its importance not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a mirror of human consciousness and societal intricacies.

Keywords

Interdisciplinary, ramifications, scrutinized, intellectual.

Introduction

Disturbing art isn't just about being "ugly" or poorly crafted; it's about creating a sense of unease, provoking discomfort, or stirring up those not-so-great feelings like fear, disgust, or anxiety. It raises some interesting questions. Philosophers often wonder: Is it okay to create art that disturbs us? Can something that's painful to look at still have artistic value? On the flip side, psychologists are curious about how our minds respond to these unsettling images. What makes us drawn to art that frightens or disturbs us. This project aims to shed light on these interconnected yet distinct ideas.

Historical Preview

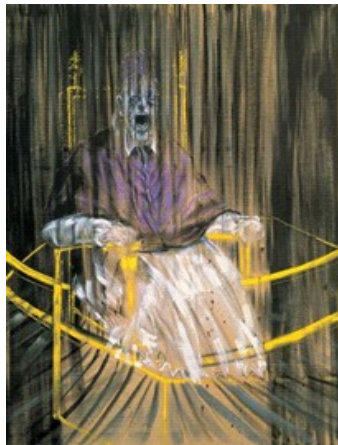
Historical survey of disturbing art: Religious and moral conceptions of suffering from the medieval period onward, European art frequently portrayed hell, torture, and martyrdom. Works such as Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* and Giotto's *Arena Chapel* frescoes of damnation render graphic, nightmarish scenes intended to warn viewers about sin and divine retribution. In these contexts, disturbing imagery served not as mere decoration but as didactic, moral, and spiritual instruments designed to evoke fear, contrition, or awe. These traditions illustrate that art has long been employed to visualize what is socially or theologically "forbidden" or "forbidden to see." The psychological effects of fear, aversion, and fascination were real, even when the primary objective was religious instruction rather than aesthetic pleasure.

Modernism and The Ascent of Abstract Unease

During the early to mid-twentieth century, artists increasingly disengaged from narrative lucidity in favor of abstraction and fragmentation. Movements such as Expressionism, Surrealism, and later Abstract Expressionism employed distorted forms, dismembered figures, and hallucinatory spaces to express interior anxiety, trauma, and existential dread. Works like Francis Bacon's *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944) and *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953)



Francisco bacon - The crucifixion 1944
<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/293>



Francisco Bacon - Pop innocent X 1954

<https://www.guardian-series.co.uk/news/3680626.exposing-a-tortured-soul/>
demonstrate how the human body can be rendered horrific without recourse to explicit realism. Disturbance thus arises not solely from religious doctrine but from style, color, and composition, inviting viewers into a psychological rather than a theological nightmare.

Contemporary photography and digital unease. Modern photographers continue to probe ethical and aesthetic boundaries through images depicting war, decay, violence, and bodily mutation. Photographs from conflict zones, crime scenes, or medically explicit contexts circulate in galleries and online, frequently lacking explicit consent narratives. Philosophers and psychologists now assess whether such images perform a revelatory, truthful function bearing witness to suffering or whether they risk converting trauma into spectacle. This tension lies at the heart of contemporary analyses of disturbing art.

Key Theoretical Perspective

Art that causes discomfort poses a significant philosophical, moral, and psychological conundrum. This question weighs most heavily in the balance of our valuing certain aesthetic forms of art, such as literature or film, revolting or horrifying in their content or depictions, against other types of art in which the discomfort is rarely if ever extreme. The challenge is to reconcile our impressions that those literary or cinematic works with scenes of domestic violence, murder, or suicide, or with stories of battered children, criminally victimized women, or indeed any other disturbing subject matter are obviously among the highest forms of art because of the moral, ethical, and aesthetic insights they render in the most visceral of ways. The history of philosophy offers a wealth of perspectives on the issue of the value of disturbing art. Philosophers like Arthur Schopenhauer, for instance, argue directly for the aesthetic value of works dominated by suffering.

Their moral objections to the subject matter, he suggests, give rise to a form of purposive negativity that can only be fully experienced in a suspension of the negative sentiments involved. In other words, such works are only fully appreciated in the ways that their conclusively decremented values indicate the kind of value regularly required of works of art. And what this means is that pain, suffering, and unhappiness can actually enhance the aesthetic experience that art undoubtedly provides. On the other extreme, however, one finds philosophers like Immanuel Kant who object to disturbing art on moral grounds, suggesting that such works ought to be banned because of the impact they have on the viewer's perceptual experience, one's own emotions, and memories. It is impossible to even engage in the full, free aesthetic engagement with a work of art that depicts disturbing content, the thought goes, without at the same time and in the same moment experiencing that artwork in exactly the same way as the content it depicts. Kantian ethics thus prohibits disturbing art. Contemporary psychology takes a somewhat different track from both Schopenhauer and Kant in pursuing positive psychological outcomes



from engaging in unsettling art. On a more complex neurochemical level, the strongest case for disturbing art is that engaging in these types of art rather than avoiding them offers an opportunity to reprocess one's own traumas. Support for these claims comes from neuroimaging studies that suggest that engaging in disturbing art causes activation of the viewer's amygdala. The amygdala is the part of the brain that processes traumatic memories.

Psychology interprets the disturbing art that evokes a sense of unease for a person in a different way. Art can serve as a stimulus that causes cognitive processes, which means that it is able to affect the processes in terms of perception, attention, memory, and understanding, thus forcing a person to think about some things for a long time. In addition, such art can also cause emotional processes, thus evoking the feeling of anxiety, disgust, aversion, and so on. That is why such disturbing art attracts attention through the emotional response. The relation of art to the conceptual side becomes apparent through this art in the form of moral statements and metaphysical statements.

Disturbing Art in Painting and Photography

Discomfort in art is a genre of reflection that takes in various genres from painting to photography. Artists work through paint or the lens to provoke audiences into an untamed unrest. They toy with squirming emotions or demonized events in hopes of stirring up the bad feeling welling up inside the viewer. The medium can be abrasive and questionable but discomforting art is not always a purely focused on 'bad'.



A lovingly cultivated ripened fruit can be pleasurable but the very act of plucking it from its home can quickly sour the experience into something toxic. There is ugliness in beauty, just as there is a manageable discontent in art.

Francis Bacon's screaming popes or the surreal nightmares of Zdzisław Beksiński. Painting in what many regard as works of genius to the art world but those in the afterlife may disagree. The familiar turned foreign and grotesque. Abstract expressionism's ambiguous shapes throw the mind into blind panic. Today there the

art community features many big names turning out increasingly unscheduled work. The larger result of discomfort in art focuses on one's own understanding of the pieces discussed. It presumes a constant ever-changing argument between the view, the subject, the piece and the artist in what makes us human.



Zdzisław Beksiński's surreal nightmares: Basinski's apocalyptic landscape 1929 to 2005

<https://www.sensesatlas.com/zdzislaw-beksinski-dystopian-surrealist-landscapes/>

Howling psychotic shapes can sure shake a few nerves and revile a wave of frightful spiders scuttling up the back into the hairline but can it wake up the very person it's condemning. It begs a lot of questions such as what does the scream look like and can it be painted. Seeing how it results in a staggering choice of interpretation on the viewer's part, the old stronghold for interpreting art as everything. How then does one picture human fragility and be told not to convince oneself it is an image of spiritual authority The theme of any expression in visual art or photography teeters upon the thrill of how far one can stretch the sanity of their fears standing against the threshold of their disrespected comfort zone.

Like any form of art, abstract art can evoke a variety of emotions through its visuals. Artists choose shapes, textures, colors, and patterns to construct their work, depending on which feelings and emotions they wish to transmit to the viewer. Even though abstract works are usually very different from reality, they can still

have a vast range of interpretations, interpretations that are not limited to positive feelings. This principle indicates that abstract shapes can also evoke fear or anxiety through some of their features. While many shapes can trigger emotional responses, those that are similar to the human body and other ambiguous shapes evoke low-level fear responses. On the same note, when patterns are disrupted, it creates perceptual tension. These reactions are perceptual responses that the human brain experiences because of its extensive history of processing stimuli. In other words, the human brain is predisposed to feel certain types of fear or anxiety in response to particular visual stimuli. The colors are also an important part of abstract artwork, as certain palettes create feelings of discomfort or illness and the faces of decay.

Is there perhaps more than that Here is what we will examine: meaning/value/moral status/function of art—philosophical aspects; cognitive processes/emotions/neural responses—psychological aspects. The common thread connecting these two domains is a shared commitment to address certain fundamental questions concerning the nature of disturbed art if we suppose its presence in contemporary art is a well-entrenched phenomenon. These questions are as follows:

Is disturbing art morally permissible Why is disturbing art attractive to some Why is disturbing art repulsive to others. However, these questions can be answered with two basic replies ‘YES’ and ‘NO’ respectively since they can be methodologically approached by means of conceptual analysis, psych measures of art that is tagged disturbing in the literary sense of the word and somatic measures of disturbance studying how the brain reacts to disturbing art. On one hand, the view has to be tractable to the viewer as an interpreter and moral agent since their cognitive processes cannot be neglected. Thus, merit has to be given to psychological aspects that are inherent in the concept of disturbing art. It has to be recognized that the artist, on the other hand, is the creator of meaning and the designer of stimuli throughout the creative process. The purpose of the artist is to evoke a mental state in the viewer, without which the artwork would be rendered ineffective. Thus, one-sided approaches concerning the philosophical or the psychological aspects are not sufficient to provide a satisfying account of disturbing art.

Conclusion

Disturbing art comes with a certain paradox. For something to be disturbing, it must, at least in some way, challenge beauty or morality. Discomfort does not suggest an absence of value, as it does not mean an absence of impact. Disturbing art can take many forms, but behold, the Beauty that Disturbs. Such art might be grotesque, portrayed in a primitive form. Oftentimes, disturbing art can act to open the mind’s processing of fear or trauma. Though it begs the question, is this the

purpose of unsettling pieces? Or is unsettling art simply the unprocessed facets of a bruise? The intersection between philosophy and psychology comes to converse. From the surrealist artists' visions to the starkness of modern abstraction, the spectrum of disturbing art is rich and abundant, yet it invites disappointment that ultimately it seems to suggest an entropic and directionless world. Perhaps this would suggest an implicit connection between beautiful art and conceptual clarity.

Art muddies the water, rather than making it clear, however, a philosophically guiding set of factors, rather than an obligatory hierarchy or dogma can lead to the divisibility of perceptual styles, emotional responses and interpretational principles (or some such). Thus, the spectrum develops whilst art still may have direction, just not within the frame of similar intention or creative precept. Here, psychological speculation recommends the lens of pure perceptual expression over that of cognitive expression or belief. Thus, the spectrum develops.

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