The Arbitrariness of Aesthetic Judgment

Abstract:

Realists about aesthetic judgment believe something like the following: for an aesthetic judgment of be correct, it must respond to the *intrinsic* aesthetic properties possessed by the object in question (e.g., Meskin et al., 2013; Kieran 2010). However, Cutting’s (2003) empirical research on aesthetic judgment puts pressure on that position. His work indicates that unconscious considerations extrinsic to an artwork can underpin said judgements. This paper takes Cutting’s conclusion a step further: If philosophers grant that it’s possible to appreciate artwork on the basis of unconscious biases, then we never can be fully confident that our aesthetic judgment is undergirded by the intrinsic aesthetic properties of an artwork. Furthermore, if judgment on the basis of unconscious, external reasons cannot be ruled out, we cannot be confident that our aesthetic judgments are ‘correct’. I argue that Cutting’s research is just the tip of the iceberg regarding the extrinsic, unconscious factors that influence aesthetic judgment. Expectation bias formed via social influence and context greatly influence aesthetic judgments and are unavoidable: we inevitably form expectations based on all kinds of contextual cues independently of any actual exposure to the item in question. Such factors make it terribly difficult to be confident in our aesthetic judgments. Even if there are objective properties that mark out some items as aesthetically superior to others, we cannot be sure that our judgments are responding to those properties.

The majority of philosophers working within the field of aesthetics today seem to accept, at a minimum, that there are better and worse aesthetic judgments, and that some works are more valuable than others, implying that they accept *some* version of aesthetic realism.[[1]](#footnote-1) Realists about aesthetic judgment believe something like the following: for an aesthetic judgment of be correct, it must respond to the *actual* aesthetic properties possessed by the object in question. Judging an artwork on the basis of properties extraneous to the work in question will not result in a correct judgment.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Recent empirical work within philosophy of aesthetics, however, suggests that practically all aesthetic appreciators may be guilty of appreciating a work on the basis of extrinsic factors.[[3]](#footnote-3) As a result, philosophers have orchestrated a push-back against these empirical findings.[[4]](#footnote-4)

One of the more serious challenges to realism comes from James Cutting’s research on the so-called *mere exposure effect* and its relationship with the canonical status of artworks.[[5]](#footnote-5) Research has shown that individuals prefer items that they have been previously exposed to, even when they have no recollection of that exposure.[[6]](#footnote-6) Cutting’s thesis is that individuals prefer, say, Monet’s *Water Lilies*, not because it is an aesthetically great work, but because they have been repeatedly exposed to it over the course of their lives: canonical works are widely reproduced within a culture. In short, we appreciate canonical artworks because we have been trained to like them by our culture via the mere exposure effect.

However, Cutting never claims to be rejecting aesthetic realism. He states:

I assume that artworks within the canon deserve their position but also that many works on the fringes and even well outside are equally worthy and equally deserving of cultural reverence. Why are these not within the canon? I would claim that a major force in canon formation is historical accident, but I haven’t the space to defend such an idea here….[[7]](#footnote-7)

Cutting’s position is not that it is *completely* arbitrary which works end up being canonized or that there are no objective aesthetic values. Instead, he is saying that the fact that certain works ‘have stood the test of time’ and continue to be revered today may have more to do with the fact that they were canonized in the first place than with facts about their aesthetic value, whatever those may be. That is, his argument is that the test of time in itself cannot be taken as evidence of superior aesthetic value.

So, we can accept Cuttings findings and not conclude that realism is completely false; but if we do accept his claims concerning the maintenance of the artistic canon, we should begin to seriously question what exactly our aesthetic judgments are typically responding to. For even if Cutting is advocating for a kind of *minimal realism* on which there are objectively valuable aesthetic properties in some artworks, the thrust of his argument is that those valuable properties are often not responsible for a work’s appreciation and acclaim. That is, his argument implies that the cause of our aesthetic appreciation may have little to nothing to do with a works intrinsic aesthetic value.

The argument that will be offered in this paper is consistent with the possibility that something like minimal realism is true. Nonetheless, I aim to raise further doubts about our ability to make aesthetic judgments that are based on the intrinsic properties of the object in question. If we cannot be sure that our judgments are responding to said valuational properties, then we cannot have much confidence in the ‘correctness’ of our judgments. On this argument, for example, even if something like minimal realism is true, judgments such as ‘*The Maltese Falcon* deserves to be part of the movie canon and *There’s Something About Mary* does not’ cannot be made with any confidence, nor can they be known to be ‘correct’ or taken to be ‘truth-tracking’.

Drawing on empirical work from a variety of fields, I argue that it is difficult to determine why exactly we like some artwork, and what exactly about it that we like. On the surface, this may appear to be a somewhat uncontroversial claim. From a commonsense standpoint, people aren’t *necessarily* expected to defend and explain their aesthetic preferences with reasoned arguments. As evidence, consider the well-trodden Latin expression ‘De gustibus non est disputandum’. Recently, philosophical arguments have emerged in support of this commonsense position. Dominic Lopes surveyed empirical studies that suggest that when individuals are asked to explain or reason through their aesthetic choices, their resulting explanations are typically post hoc and inconsistent with their behavior.[[8]](#footnote-8) As a result, Lopes is skeptical of the role of critical reasoning in aesthetic appreciation; however, his conclusion is *not* that these failures of reasoning also indicate a failure to respond to the intrinsic aesthetic properties of an object. Instead he maintains that individuals simply have a hard time verbalizing why they appreciate the object in question.[[9]](#footnote-9) In spite of this inability, Lopes maintains that individuals still know what they like and why they like it.[[10]](#footnote-10) In the end, Lopes is not rejecting aesthetic realism and he is not suggesting that people fail to respond to the intrinsic aesthetic properties of an artwork, whatever those may be.

Contrasting my own position with Lopes’ may help clarify it. We might characterize the Lopes position in this way: people have reasons for preferring certain aesthetic objects, and those reasons are based in properties of the object in question, but people can’t, nor should they be expected to, explain those reasons.[[11]](#footnote-11) What I aim to cast doubt on is our ability to determine whether the intrinsic properties of the aesthetic object are actually responsible for or appreciation. Lopes may be right that people ‘know what they like’ in the sense that they can reliably enumerate or point to items that they take aesthetic pleasure in, but that in itself is not evidence that they are responding to the intrinsic aesthetic properties possessed by the item and not arbitrary extrinsic factors reliably associated with that item.

If philosophers of art and aesthetics grant that it is possible to appreciate an artwork for unconscious reasons caused by factors that are traceable to extrinsic properties and relations of the object in question, then we never can be fully confident that our appreciation is in fact primarily undergirded by the intrinsic aesthetic properties of the object in question; that is, people can know what they like without having a conscious understanding of what is actually causing them to like it. If such unconscious appreciation cannot confidently be ruled out, then we cannot be confident in the ‘correctness’ of our aesthetic judgements. Cutting’s research on the mere exposure effect is just the tip of the iceberg regarding the extrinsic factors that influence aesthetic judgment. Here I focus on expectation bias formed via social influence and context and how it greatly influences aesthetic judgment and is practically unavoidable: we inevitably form expectations based on all kinds of contextual cues *independently of any actual exposure to the item in question*. Even if there are objective properties that mark out some items as aesthetically superior to others, there is significant evidence that indicates that we cannot be sure that it is those properties that we are responding to in our judgments.

1. Cutting’s troubling conclusions for aesthetic realists

Cutting aims to examine the role of the mere exposure effect on aesthetic appreciation and the maintenance of the aesthetic canon. The mere exposure effect is the acquisition of non-conscious information, as well as the formation of attitudes and preferences, via repeated perceptual exposure to some object.[[12]](#footnote-12) The ‘mere’ in ‘mere exposure’ needs to be emphasized here. Individuals prefer items that they have been previously exposed to even when they have no recollection of that exposure.[[13]](#footnote-13) Furthermore, the mere exposure effect has little to do with the content or nature of the item the individual is exposed to, as the effect has been replicated in numerous studies using a variety of contents.[[14]](#footnote-14) Given the nature of the mere exposure effect, Cutting’s research question is this: are canonized art objects appreciated today because of their aesthetic value, or are they appreciated due to their high level of reproduction within our society as a result of said canonical status?[[15]](#footnote-15)

In support of his hypothesis that the artistic canon is maintained by mere exposure and not primarily via aesthetic value, Cutting culled through the Cornell University Library in order to determine how often certain art objects are reproduced. For the purposes of his study, Cutting focused on impressionist paintings. In essence, he used the Cornell library holdings as a proxy for wider cultural dissemination: the more often an impressionist painting appeared in a book in the Cornell library, the more likely it was to have been widely reproduced within our broader culture, and the more likely an individual would have been repeatedly exposed to it.[[16]](#footnote-16) Unsurprisingly, the artists who form the core of the impressionist canon have certain works that have been more frequently reproduced than others. For example, Monet’s *Women in Garden* has been much more frequently reproduced than his *Vétheuil Winter*.[[17]](#footnote-17)

In his first study, paired images from different collections of impressionist paintings were shown to undergraduates at Cornell University.[[18]](#footnote-18) He found that

paintings and pastels that reside in any museum…were recognized more often [than works in private collections] (3.3% vs 1.5%; p < .0001) and when paired directly [with works in private collections] they were preferred more often (61% vs 39%; p < .001). None of this, of course, is a surprise. Essentially, by definition, artworks in private collections cannot be in the canon. What drives all of this, at least statistically, would appear to be frequency of appearance.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Notice that, overall, very few of the 132 paintings used in the study were *consciously* *recognized* by study participants. Nonetheless, participants routinely preferred works found in museums, because, according to Cutting’s theory, such works were much more frequently reproduced and widely disseminated than works held in private collections.

Of course, all the works used in the study were by individuals now regarded as master painters. Therefore, we might conclude that this first study doesn’t prove much. Of a bunch of really good paintings, people prefer paintings they have seen before; this, by itself, does not threaten the realist position that there are correct and incorrect judgments regarding aesthetic quality. However, it is Cuttings next three studies that are of greater interest here.

Cutting performed a similar experiment with older adults. Unsurprisingly, older adults recognized more of the paintings than the Cornell undergraduates. Once again, preferences were related to the frequency with which images were reproduced in texts in the Cornell Library.[[20]](#footnote-20) Next, Cutting performed the same study with children, under the assumption that children will have had far less opportunity for exposure to the impressionist canon. If children showed the same preference patterns as college-aged students and older adults, then mere exposure cannot be primarily responsible for the preference pattern. However, if children were found to exhibit a preference pattern that is not correlated with reproduction rates, then this is strong evidence for the role of mere exposure in preference formation. Cutting’s findings support this latter conditional. Participants were aged 6, 7, 8, and 9 years old. These participants ‘showed no preference for the more frequent image of each pair—51.2% versus 48.8%’.[[21]](#footnote-21)

The previous studies conducted by Cutting relied on the art exposure that individuals consciously and unconsciously accumulate in their everyday lives over many years. If mere exposure is in fact mediating art preferences, then Cutting should be able to reshape student preferences through exposing them to certain artworks over the course of an academic term. As part of Cutting’s research project, he paired less frequently reproduced paintings with similar, more frequently reproduced paintings by the same artist. The result was 51 image-pairs. At the beginning of each class session, Cutting displayed either 12 or 13 images over 21 class meetings. Images that appeared less frequently in the Cornell library holdings were shown to the class 4 times; those that appeared more frequently were shown to the class once. Each image was presented by itself for about 2 seconds. On the 22nd and final class session, students were shown all 51 image-pairs and were asked to indicate which imaged they preferred. In this final study, there was no preference for the more frequently occurring images in the Cornell library holdings: the more frequently occuring images were only preferred 48% of the time. In effect, Cutting was able to form new impressionist painting preferences in his students via mere exposure. Cutting’s final conclusion is that canonical status is essentially self-fulfilling: once a work is canonized, it is so frequently reproduced in the culture that ‘tacitly and incrementally over time, this broadcast teaches the public to like the images, to prefer them, eventually to recognize them as part of the canon, and to want to see them again’.[[22]](#footnote-22)

1. The philosophical reception of Cutting’s work

The most significant treatment of Cutting’s findings come from Meskin et al. There they attempt to investigate whether preferences for canonical works really can be primarily attributed to mere exposure. Meskin et al. worry that Cutting’s research is down-playing the role of aesthetic quality. As noted, all of the works used in Cutting’s study were executed by the great artists of the impressionist era. It may be true that individuals prefer works that they have been repeatedly exposed to, but said works might be so widely reproduced *because* they have the greatest aesthetic value. As Meskin et al. state, ‘It is possible that both preferences and frequency of reproduction are driven by artistic value’.[[23]](#footnote-23)

On Meskin et al.’s view, it could be that repeated exposure is ‘merely facilitating appreciation’ of great works ‘as opposed to directly increasing liking’, and so ‘it should matter whether the exposed paintings are good or bad.’[[24]](#footnote-24) Their idea here is that mere exposure aids in the recognition of the ‘aesthetically good-making features’ of artwork.[[25]](#footnote-25) By repeatedly being exposed to a good work, we slowly come to see how good it really is. On their interpretation of the mere exposure effect, repeated exposure to ‘good works’ will increase liking; however, repeated exposure to ‘bad works’ will *increase disliking*. Meskin et al. set out to test their theory with their own experiment.

Meskin et al. exposed undergraduates to ‘good works’ and ‘bad works’ over the course of the semester in a similar fashion to Cutting’s final study described above. Meskin et al. used 60 landscape paintings for the experiment. 48 of the landscape paintings were by Thomas Kinkade and were considered to be ‘bad paintings’; the 12 ‘good paintings’ were by John Everett Millais, an English Pre-Raphaelite painter.[[26]](#footnote-26)

We should immediately worry that Meskin et al. have assumed the very thing that they were supposed to prove: they take themselves to know which works are the ‘bad paintings’ and which are the ‘good paintings’. Such an analysis should likely be determined by experimental trial: whatever paintings receive a below average rating during first exposure are ‘bad’, and whichever ones receive an above average rating during first exposure are ‘good’. But let’s put that worry aside for now; we shall return to it. Their most significant finding is surely the following: The control group, in which participants were only exposed to each painting one time, produced an overall liking score of 5.8 for Kinkade’s work on a 10-point Likert scale;[[27]](#footnote-27) however, the mean overall liking score for those who were repeatedly exposed to Kinkade’s works in the experimental condition was 4.92. The authors take this to show ‘that exposure decreased liking for these paintings, contrary to the increase typically produced by mere exposure’.[[28]](#footnote-28) Additionally, the mean liking score for the Millais works was slightly higher for the experimental group than the control group (5.67 versus 5.22). However, we must note that the positive trend for the Millais work was not statistically significant.[[29]](#footnote-29)

It is important to stress that in the experimental condition, although on average participants did not indicate a greater degree of liking for Kinkade works that they were repeatedly exposed to over Kinkade works that they were exposed to only a single time, *they also didn’t indicate a significantly greater degree of liking for the Millais paintings that they were repeatedly exposed to over those that that they had been exposed to only a single time*. We might consider this extremely surprising evidence against the mere exposure effect generally, but, again, the difference in ratings between the control group and the experimental group were not found to be statistically significant. Meskin et al. are forced to admit that they ‘did not find a significant interaction that conforms for a difference for good and bad art’.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The described data analysis evaluates the ratings given across all participants; but perhaps a more significant within participant effect could be found: did individual participants tend to rate the Kinkades that they were exposed to more frequently *lower* than those they were exposed to only once? A similar question was asked concerning the Millais. The results are surprising: for both the Kinkade and the Millais paintings, individuals liked the paintings that they had been exposed to only once more than those they had been exposed to 5 times over the course of the semester. Again, the finding regarding the Millais was not statistically significant.[[31]](#footnote-31) Additionally, in the control group, where participants were exposed to paintings from each artist only once for six seconds, the Kinkades received a significantly higher score on a Likert scale than the Millaises.[[32]](#footnote-32) So, based on the authors’ own study, their student viewers liked the Kinkades more than works by Millais, which is directly contrary to the assumption guiding the experiment. Despite these confounding results, the authors nonetheless conclude that repeated exposure produced a decrease in liking for the Kinkade paintings.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Ultimately, Meskin’s et al. own research is highly inconclusive: they weren’t even able to reproduce the usual result of mere exposure (i.e., an increase in liking for the object in question), a highly robust phenomenon, with the so-called ‘good artworks’ that they employed. The failure to reproduce the mere exposure effect with the ‘good artworks’ should lead us to question their whole experimental design.[[34]](#footnote-34) As we have seen, for the ‘bad artworks’ employed in the study, average participant ratings hovered right around the mid-point used in their rating scale even after repeated exposure: in short, participants also never came to *dislike* the so-called bad works in the study via the use of mere exposure, which Meskin et al. admit.[[35]](#footnote-35) There is no real sense in which Cutting’s findings regarding the mere exposure effect and art appreciation have been called into question by Meskin et al.

Let us now consider the analysis of Cutting’s findings by Bence Nanay. For Nanay, there is a token/type ambiguity here. In his estimation, all that Cutting has shown is that if we expose an individual repeatedly to a single painting, that individual will come to like that particular painting. However, Cutting has not shown that repeated exposure to, say, Monet paintings, will lead individuals to like or approve of impressionism *generally*. Only if it can be shown that repeated exposure creates preferences for styles or categories of work is aesthetic realism threatened.[[36]](#footnote-36) His thinking is something like this: if it can be shown that the liking of whole classes of artworks (like early impressionism) is rooted in mere exposure, then we should begin to worry that most aesthetic judgments are not ultimately based in a judgment of the quality of the work in question, but merely a product of whatever category of artwork one is repeatedly exposed to at a young age. However, coming to like a single work of art via mere exposure will not color our appraisal of some novel artwork, so aesthetic realism is not truly threatened.

Why think Nanay is right that we should only be concerned with preferences for categories of work being established via mere exposure? Cutting’s thesis is that the artistic canon is maintained by mere exposure, not that mere exposure to the artistic canon shapes all subsequent taste. Cutting’s main worry still stands: If individuals like canonical works merely because they have been exposed to them repeatedly, what can ‘passing the test of time’ tell us about the quality of an artwork? There is a reason that the *Mona Lisa* is the most visited painting in the world,[[37]](#footnote-37) and that reason is likely that the *Mona Lisa* is also the most reproduced painting in the world. People have essentially been told, via the sheer volume of reproduction, ‘This is a good and important work’. So, people flock to go see it. Nanay may be right that these same individuals have not, as a result, formed any preference for early sixteenth century portraiture, but it is not clear why that should matter. They value the very thing society told them to value via reproduction: the *Mona Lisa*.[[38]](#footnote-38)

If individuals appreciate artworks like the *Mona Lisa* primarily because they have been told by the larger culture that such works are good and that they should like them, then that is concerning. It indicates that the liking of the *Mona Lisa* is not rooted in its intrinsic qualities, which is exactly what Cutting aimed to establish! So, although I think Nanay makes an interesting point, he certainly hasn’t undermined the significance of Cutting’s findings.

Even if the reader is still skeptical of the role of the mere exposure effect in the formation of aesthetic judgments, there are other forces at work beyond mere exposure that impact aesthetic judgments, and much more profoundly. To think that mere exposure is the only aesthetically irrelevant fact shaping societal preferences is naïve at best and willfully ignorant at worst. Writing off Cutting’s research won’t solve the problem. There are numerous other aesthetically irrelevant factors that shape our aesthetic preferences when it comes to art objects. It is a discussion of one of these other biases that I turn to now.

1. You like it because you expected to like

There is significant research which indicates that when an individual judges that she likes or dislikes some object or event, that judgment is directly influenced by whether that individual *expected* to like or dislike the object or event. The point here is that we don’t even need to be *exposed* to an artwork to be predisposed to like or dislike it. When we consider the combined effects of expectation and mere exposure, we should quickly lose confidence in our ability to know *what* *exactly* our judgments are respondent to.

Before continuing the argument, a point of clarification. Expectations are critical for navigating the world. I am *not* saying ‘expectations are always bad and misleading’; this is clearly false. If I want a glass of water and am given vodka, I will surely regret taking a big, thirst-quenching swig: in such a case, my expectation drives my behavior in what would typically be a useful way. The claim is this: if a realist believes it is possible to make fine-grained distinctions between art objects, say ‘X is a masterpiece and Y is merely good’, then it is these kinds of claims I seek to undermine. I am not doubting our ability to make fairly coarse judgments, e.g., that a fresh, cold pilsner is better than the same pilsner that has been allowed to sit out for three hours, go flat and get warm; or that a still life executed by a trained artist is better than anything I could produce. Art critics and defenders of realism, presumably, do not take themselves to be primarily in the business of making these kinds of coarse-grained distinctions.

As evidence for this presumption, at least on the part of critics, consider the following passage from a ranking of Quentin Tarantino films:

[*Django Unchained*] is Tarantino’s most financially successful movie, and a lot of people love its rituals of retribution. But for all its pleasures, I think it’s too easy, too dead-center in Tarantino’s comfort zone. After the thrilling convolutions — narrative and moral — of *Pulp Fiction*, *Jackie Brown*, *Reservoir Dogs*, and even parts of *Kill Bill*, Tarantino has stopped challenging himself — or at least challenging himself in any way that matters to his growth as an artist.[[39]](#footnote-39)

It’s clear that this critic thinks that *Django Unchained* is a good movie; however, it’s just *not quite as good* as some of Tarantino’s other work. This is a very fine-grained distinction indeed; this isn’t *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* is better than my uncle’s home videos of his Hawaiian vacation. The question that Cutting is asking, and that I continue to pursue here via the consideration of expectation bias, is whether such distinctions can be known to be rooted in the valuational properties of the work.

A good deal of the research on expectation bias has focused on the relationship between expectations and the judgment of food and drink. In their research on the effect of server attractiveness on perceived quality of food, Lin et al. found that ‘the presence of physically attractive individuals can affect consumers’ expectations about their consumption experience which then influences taste perceptions’.[[40]](#footnote-40) There are two key points here to separate out. First, when food is served by an attractive individual, the customer expects the food to taste better. Second, because of those higher expectations set by server attractiveness, the food actually tastes better to the consumer. However, when food is served by an attractive server and it is perceived as being of very *poor* quality,[[41]](#footnote-41) said food is rated even lower in taste than it would be if it had been served by an unattractive server. That is, the attractiveness of the server raises expectations concerning the quality of the food, and because the food performed so poorly in comparison to said expectations, it is rated even lower in terms of quality than it otherwise would be.[[42]](#footnote-42) When expectations fail to be confirmed, there is

either an assimilation or contrast effect. If the discrepancy is minimal, consumers will make adjustments in the direction of assimilation so that the evaluations of their experience are more aligned with their expectations. However, expectations can become polarized when there is a large discrepancy between the actual and the expected experience.[[43]](#footnote-43)

In other words, if we are in a fancy restaurant being served by an attractive individual, we expect the food to be very good. As long as the food somewhat lives up to our expectations, because the surroundings shaped those expectations, we will in fact experience the food as very good. However, if the food in question is subpar in relation to the upscale environment, we will actually rate it as worse than if the *same* food had been served in say, a diner environment. The environment shapes our expectations, and our expectations shape our experience. Whether or not our expectations are met directly influences our perception of the item in question.

Such findings are not limited to food. There is significant research on expectations with regards to the experience of wine.[[44]](#footnote-44) These wine findings might strike the reader as more significant, as wine is widely taken to be an aesthetic object within the philosophical community.[[45]](#footnote-45) First, the appearance of a wine significantly influences its reception. When a white wine has been dyed red, study participants asked to characterize said wine almost exclusively chose red wine descriptors from a list of terms that contained typical red wine and white wine descriptors.[[46]](#footnote-46) Based on this study, Morrot et al. conclude that ‘The observed phenomenon is a real perceptual illusion. The subjects smell the wine, make the conscious act of odor determination and verbalize their olfactory perception by using odor descriptors. However, the sensory and cognitive processes were mostly based on the wine color’.[[47]](#footnote-47) So, although wine tasters go through the process of sniffing a wine in order to describe it, the wine-descriptors they choose are primarily based on the observed color; they perceived that the wine was red, so they expected it to taste like a red wine, and as a result of that expectation it did taste like a red wine. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, individuals appear have no idea what their wine judgments are actually based on.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Telling a wine drinker about the supposed quality of the wine they are about to drink also influences their expectations and the resulting experience. When a wine-drinker thinks that they are drinking a high-quality wine, they describe its taste accordingly. When they think they are drinking a low-quality wine, they also describe its taste accordingly. Brochet conducted a study in which the same wine was presented as a ‘great wine’ to one set of tasters and as a ‘table wine’ to another set of tasters.[[49]](#footnote-49) By supplying this information, the tasters formed certain expectations, and their resulting experience conformed exactly to those expectations. When told that the wine was a great wine, tasters described it as ‘complex’, ‘balanced’, and ‘agreeable’. Complexity, of course, is a marker of fine wine. When the same wine was presented as a table wine, it was described as ‘simple’, ‘unbalanced’, and containing ‘faults’.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Wansink, Payne, and North found similar results. Winsink et al. took a single wine and in one context presented it as a wine from California, and in another as a wine from North Dakota.[[51]](#footnote-51) Study participants first rated how tasty they *expected* the wine to be. They then actually tasted the wine and rated its level of tastiness. Last, they tasted the same companion cheese in both conditions and rated its level of tastiness. Unsurprisingly, when participants thought the wine was from California they expected it to taste better than when they thought it was from North Dakota (5.14 vs 2.76 on a 9-point scale). More importantly, when participants thought the wine was from California, they also *experienced* it as tasting better (5.18 vs. 3.68). Finally, and perhaps most surprisingly, when participants thought they were drinking California wine, the accompanying cheese tasted better to them than when they thought they were drinking wine from North Dakota (4.46 vs. 3.31).[[52]](#footnote-52) In this case, the belief that they were drinking what they perceived to be good wine (California wine) led the participants to enjoy the companion cheese to a greater degree. Similarly, the fact that other participants believed that they were drinking what they perceived to be bad wine led them to enjoy that same cheese to a lesser degree. All of the preceding judgments are being driven by expectation.

Most importantly, expectations also influence appreciation within an unquestionably aesthetic realm: music. In a study of music download behavior in what Salganik et al. call ‘an artificial cultural market’, knowing which songs were considered popular or unpopular by other participants played a decisive role in decision-making and song evaluation. Over 14,000 individuals were recruited to participate in the study from a teen-focused website. Participants viewed a list of songs from a group of unknown bands. They could listen to the songs, rate them, and then download as many of the songs as they wished. There were two study conditions: in one condition participants had no information on the behavior of other participants; in the second condition they could see how many times each song had been downloaded before clicking on it. The authors dubbed the second condition ‘the social influence condition’.[[53]](#footnote-53) As part of the study, there were 8 independent ‘influence worlds’. That is, participants were assigned to different ‘worlds’ that contained different participants and, as a result, different download counts for the various songs. Salganik et al. found that ‘all eight social influence worlds…exhibit greater inequality—meaning popular songs are more popular and unpopular songs are less popular than the world in which individuals make decisions independently’.[[54]](#footnote-54) Simply knowing which songs were considered popular or unpopular had a huge influence on what songs were even listened to and rated in each world.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Additionally, the role of social influence greatly increased the unpredictability of outcomes. Salganik et al. used the independent condition to determine song ‘quality’, as in the independent condition song ratings and the decision to download a song were not influenced by the behavior of peers. In the various social influence worlds, whether a song topped the charts was not correlated with songs deemed to be ‘high quality’ in the independent condition: different songs in each of the eight worlds would rise to the top of the charts as well as sink to the bottom:

Although, on average, quality is positively correlated with success, songs of any given quality can experience a wide range of outcomes. In general, the ‘best’ songs never do very badly, and the ‘worst’ songs never do extremely well, but almost any other result is possible.[[56]](#footnote-56)

In some sense, the findings of Salganik et al. support the minimal realism that is seemingly embraced by Cutting: for a song to gain traction it has to have some minimal level of quality; however, whether a song is a chart topper or a flop has more to do with chance cultural factors, in particular appreciation by others, than anything intrinsic to the artwork in question. These findings seem to cut against the ability of listeners to make fine-grained distinctions concerning quality: they know a stinker when they hear one, but there appears to be no ability to reliably distinguish between the great and the merely good.

Let us return to the idea that our perception essentially ‘adjusts’ to meet our expectations, as demonstrated by the research considered thus far. This adjustment fails to occur when there is too large a gap between expectation and actual experience. With this in mind, reconsider the *Mona Lisa*. According to a *New York Times* article, over ten million people passed through the Louvre in 2018 and a full 80% of them came exclusively to see the *Mona Lisa*.[[57]](#footnote-57) Based on Cutting’s research, this shouldn’t be surprising: as one of the most reproduced images of all time, individuals have formed a preference for it, and expect it to be amazing. If it wasn’t the best ever, it wouldn’t be so widely reproduced, right? Alas, the *Mona Lisa* cannot live up to such high expectations: according to a survey of British travelers, the *Mona Lisa* was voted the most disappointing tourist attraction in the world; 86% of British travelers believed that the painting was a ‘let down’.[[58]](#footnote-58) The *Mona Lisa* may well be a masterpiece or just another sixteenth century portrait, but the true verdict at this point in time may be epistemically unavailable: no painting could live up to such high expectations.

We form expectations about almost everything, and expectations deeply color our experience. This fact is only a negative one when juxtaposed with the claim that we can know aesthetic judgments to be correct or incorrect with any confidence. If an attractive waitress can lead to a greater appreciation of mediocre chicken wings (the foundation of success for the *Hooters* franchise), finding an artwork within a well-known gallery or famous museum very likely plays a similar role; perhaps an attractive security guard who happens to be standing near the painting can increase appreciation as well. Because the artwork is in a museum, or because it was by Picasso, it must be good. And when we expect an art object to be ‘good’, our perceptual faculties get their marching orders and, as a result, we do typically find such items to be ‘good’.

1. Objections

Much more evidence could be produced here. For example, consider how easily the movie *Sideways* sparked an aesthetic fad: a supposed wine expert within the movie praises Pinot Noir, and the praise of that fictional character led to a slight uptick in the sale of Pinot Noir in the United States, as well as a downtick in the sale of Merlot, which is disparaged in the movie.[[59]](#footnote-59) Here is one possible explanation: because a fictional character extensively praised Pinot Noir, wine drinkers expected Pinot Noir to taste better than Merlot, as a result it likely did taste better to them and they bought more of it. Or just take the behavior of our students: they almost invariably sit in the seat they choose on the first day of class for the rest of the semester. That very slight familiarity formed on the first day of class creates a preference.[[60]](#footnote-60) Numerous more examples could be offered about the arbitrariness of value that would only strengthen the argument on offer. But instead of producing additional evidence (some of which has been reviewed elsewhere),[[61]](#footnote-61) I will turn now to likely objections. I expect the following objections to be most pressing: (1) this research is on non-experts, and experts are able to set aside bias; (2) liking an object is not the same as aesthetically appreciating it; (3) the distorting effects of extrinsic considerations, such as the influence of mere exposure and the role of expectations, can be successfully mitigated.

*Experts are able to set aside their biases*

We might think something like the following: most of these experiments were performed on non-experts. Art experts, say curators, or gallery owners, or art historians, would be able to overcome the influence of mere exposure or expectation bias. So, these results don’t really establish anything either way.[[62]](#footnote-62)

First, there is good reason to think that experts will be even more susceptible to mere exposure and the influence of expectations, as they will be much more aware of what is considered ‘good’ by the relevant in-crowd, and they will have been exposed to a much greater degree to canonical works in their field than the average individual. Second, much of the wine research discussed involved students studying wine at the University of Bordeaux, and well-known wine writers have been known to routinely fall for various wine ‘tricks’, such as decanting a magnum and presenting it as two different wines.[[63]](#footnote-63) Third, ‘art experts’ have almost no ability to predict the success of art objects in their area of expertise. Yet if the aesthetic appraisals of experts are primarily based on the intrinsic properties of the objects, this is exactly what they should be able to do (i.e., this is what their expertise should consist of: recognition of superior qualities). That is, we might think the job of certain art experts (e.g., producers, publishers, editors) is to be able to determine the qualities of an art object that will make it a ‘hit’. Even if one were to protest that popularity is not a sign of quality, if what makes a cultural product like a song popular is in *some sense* dependent on its intrinsic valuational properties, then these hit-making propertiesshould be discernable by experts.[[64]](#footnote-64) Yet, by all accounts, it is indiscernible.

Consider the following: eight publishers rejected JK Rowling’s first Harry Potter book;[[65]](#footnote-65) Fox passed on the sitcom *Friends*, one of the most successful sitcoms of all time;[[66]](#footnote-66) and the Beatles had a hard time landing a record deal.[[67]](#footnote-67) Of course, there are examples on the other end as well: the sheer number of movies that never earn back their initial investment and the hundreds of albums produced and put out by major record labels that never gain any traction whatsoever in their respective genre. Among so called ‘experts’ there appears little ability to identify the properties that differentiate a flop from a hit among art objects intended for the main stream. It is observations such as these that drove the research project of Salganik et al. They state:

If [cultural] hits are different in some way [from artworks that experience limited popular success], why do experts have such difficulty in identifying these products ahead of time? ….That is, rather than assuming exogenous and stable preferences, as is common in rational choice models of human behavior and models of cultural markets [ ], our approach is more consistent with a great deal of recent work in experimental psychology suggesting that preferences are neither exogenous nor stable, but are in fact ‘constructed’….by psychological features of the decision context, such as framing, anchoring, and availability by a variety of features of the decision context itself.[[68]](#footnote-68)

In addition to the evidence just enumerated, I believe the argument concerning the susceptibility of experts may be best driven home through the consideration of a demonstrative anecdote:

Consider the case of the famous forgery of a Vermeer by Han van Meegeren. When van Meegeren’s work *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus* was viewed under the assumption it was a Vermeer, it was seen as a great masterpiece. Abraham Bredius, a Vermeer expert, praised it as ‘*the* masterpiece of Johannes Vermeer of Delft…. Expression, indeed, is the most marvelous quality of this unique picture’.[[69]](#footnote-69) In fact, even after van Meegeren’s forgeries were uncovered there were Vermeer experts who continued to doubt that *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus* was in fact a forgery.[[70]](#footnote-70) However, Werness, a contemporary art historian benefitting from significant hindsight, states, ‘it seems astonishing today that anyone could mistake it for a Vermeer…’.[[71]](#footnote-71)

What changed? What could Werness clearly see that earlier expects failed to recognize? I am not doubting that whether a painting was actually painted by Vermeer is a significant fact about it. But presumably not every Vermeer is equally good. So, art experts at the time, thinking it was a Vermeer, still could have thought it was just okay. ‘Not his best work’ they could have said, *even under the assumption that it was a Vermeer*. In fact, in an earlier exhibition of van Meegeren’s work under his own name, a reviewer wrote:

Whenever he [van Meegeren] set about to paint Christ, he could not avoid the notion of something highly noble and exceedingly grievous to be represented, with the result that his Christ figures are often insipid and sweet, sometimes miserably forsaken, always weak and powerless.[[72]](#footnote-72)

When critics believed they were viewing a lost Vermeer, they praised van Meegeren’s Christ as ‘magnificent’;[[73]](#footnote-73) when viewing a Christ that they knew to be a van Meegeren, they damned it as ‘insipid’. Whatever we want to say about van Meegeren’s ethics, the *Emmaus* is either technically well-executed or it isn’t; Christ’s expression is either marvelous or insipid. How could it be both? The answer seems clear: van Meegeren’s work was perceived as ‘magnificent’ precisely because it was perceived as a Vermeer. If a work is by Vermeer, we expect it to be good. If a work is a van Meegeren, we expect it to be bad. The trained perceptions of critics followed their expectations exactly. If there is a truth about the quality of the piece in question, it does not appear that trained critics are capable of accessing it.

*Liking is not aesthetic appreciation*

This objection is rather straightforward and goes like this: what these various experiments study is ‘liking’—researchers typically ask questions like ‘Which x do you prefer?’ or ‘How much do you like x?’, yet liking something is not the same as aesthetically appreciating it. Therefore, aesthetic realism and the validity of aesthetic judgment is not threatened by any of the empirical findings I’ve discussed.

Whether liking can be meaningfully separated from aesthetic appreciation is a long-standing issue within the field of aesthetics.[[74]](#footnote-74) Nonetheless, many writers are willing concede this particular point. First, as Meskin et al. admit in their survey of experimental work in aesthetics, the mere exposure effect does not only play a role in mere liking, as it ‘has been consistently shown to arise with respect to a range of measures, including normative measures of goodness’.[[75]](#footnote-75) Second, Bence Nenay, a critic of Cutting’s experimental work, admits that although study participants are merely forming first impressions of the works in question, there is surely a relationship between ‘the first glance impression’ and final aesthetic judgment.[[76]](#footnote-76) Third, in his survey of theories of aesthetic value, Lopes comes to the conclusion that philosophers have almost uniformly identified aesthetic value with pleasure.[[77]](#footnote-77) If we take Lopes’ claim at face value, at the very least philosophers have historically thought that liking or pleasure is a critical component of aesthetic appreciation. Therefore, we have little reason to believe that asking people about how much they ‘like’ some wine, or some painting, or some movie, is getting at something significantly different in *kind* from aesthetic appreciation.

*Confounding factors can be successfully mitigated*

Finally, we might think something like the following: Yes, it is true that aesthetically extrinsic factors influence our aesthetic appraisals. But knowing is half the battle. Now that we know about the influence of confounding factors like mere exposure and expectation bias, we can consciously try to combat them in our appraisals.

First, it is not at all clear how we could avoid the influence of mere exposure, because mere exposure happens unconsciously, we are exposed to art objects unknowingly from a young age, and if we really did want to try to assiduously avoid it as adults, we would have to go through much of life with our eyes closed and our ears plugged up. It is difficult to avoid unconscious influences, *for anyone*, precisely because they are unconscious. A similar point can be made concerning expectations: expectations are critical for navigating the world. We wouldn’t go to art museums if we didn’t expect to see significant artworks. We wouldn’t go to a fancy restaurant if we didn’t think the fanciness (for lack of a better word) implied high quality food. In short, we would hardly do any activity if we didn’t have expectations concerning that activity!

We can try to minimize the influence of expectations. We can blind ourselves to certain features of an object, such as how much a wine costs or what varietals were used to make it, or who painted a given work and the era in which it was painted. It is a normative question whether we should endeavor to do so. Many philosophers who focus on art and aesthetics hold that such knowledge is critical to a proper evaluation.[[78]](#footnote-78) I don’t doubt that it may make for a more satisfying total experience to view an artwork with contextual knowledge concerning its production. What I question is our ability to be cognizant of what exactly it is that we are responding to and appreciating when we view works with such knowledge in hand.

Expectations are not a bad thing. The goal should not be to overcome expectations, necessarily, but to acknowledge them. It is not clear, for example, what we could do to minimize the influence of expectations on our judgments beyond attempting to avoid forming them. Admitting that we cannot realistically eliminate them is the first step to realizing that many of our aesthetic judgments are likely based on unconscious, arbitrary factors.

1. Conclusion

It may be true that, *considered by itself*, we might think that expectation bias does not threaten aesthetic judgment. It may be true that, *considered by itself*, the mere exposure effect does not threaten aesthetic judgment. But we cannot consider these factors by themselves because they simultaneously and unavoidably influence our judgments, and there are numerous other irrelevant factors that we know of, and who knows how many other factors we don’t know of. Consider the fact that women musicians were more successful earning spots in orchestras once a screen was introduced to shield the gender of the person auditioning from the judging panel.[[79]](#footnote-79) I would say that we have a ‘death by a thousand cuts’ situation on our hands, but that expression seems to imply that all of the cuts are tiny. Some of the cuts in this case appear to be quite significant, and we have no idea how many additional blows are coming.

The argument here is not primarily focused on the claim ‘We cannot trust our senses’. The argument is instead: when we perceive a given aesthetic object, we cannot be sure what features of it and its context are triggering our affective states that ultimately give rise to approbation or disapprobation. Take the case of the orchestral auditions described above: before the introduction of the screen, the judges had no problem correctly perceiving that a woman was auditioning. However, they were likely wrong about what their aesthetic evaluations were really responding to. Factors such as expectation bias influence not only how we perceive a given object, but which features we attend to and which we ignore in our field of perception.

The value we put on objects in this world is in many cases influenced by factors that we are both not fully conscious of and cannot control. How many such factors are out there is an open question. Although I have primarily focused on how expectations shape perception, my argument is really about the fact that so many extraneous factors influence our judgments that it becomes nearly impossible to know what exactly it is that we are responding to and appreciating.

An individual making the following remark would not at all surprise us: “Oh, the wine is from Sonoma Valley? Then I will like it so much the better!” So then why should we be surprised by the following remark: “Oh, the painting is in MoMA? Then I will like it so much the better!” Although hardly anyone says the latter out loud, such sentiments, whether consciously or unconsciously, influence our judgments.

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1. For a discussion of aesthetic realism, anti-realism, and its variants, see Elisabeth Schellekens, ‘Aesthetic Properties’ in Anna Christina Ribeiro and Thomas Adajian (eds), *The Continuum Companion to Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2012), 84-97. The statement that most philosophers accept something like aesthetic realism appears in the following works: Aaron Meskin, Mark Phelan, Margaret Moore, and Matthew Kieran, ‘Mere Exposure to Bad Art,’ *BJA* 53 (2013), 139-164, at 139; Aaron Meskin, Jon Robson, Anna Ichino, Kris Goffin, and Annelies Monsere, ‘Philosophical Aesthetics and Cognitive Science’, *WIREs Cogn Sci* 9 (2018), 1-15 at 3; and Florian Cova, Amanda Garcia, and Shen-yi Liao, ‘Experimental Philosophy of Aesthetics’, *Philosophy Compass* 10/11 (2015), 927-939, at 931. David Bourget and David Chalmers, ‘What Do Philosophers Believe?’ *Philosophical Studies* 170, 465-500, have empirical data that supports the claim that philosophers are realists about aesthetic value. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See for example Matthew Kieran, ‘The Vice of Snobbery: Aesthetic Knowledge, Justification, and Virtue in Art Appreciation’, *Philosophical Quarterly* 60 (2010), 243-263; Meskin et al., ‘Mere Exposure to Bad Art’, 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a brief overview, see Meskin et al., ‘Philosophical Aesthetics and Cognitive Science’, and Cova et al., ‘Experimental Philosophy of Aesthetics’. See also Dominic McIver Lopes, ‘Feckless Reasons’, in Greg Currie, Matthew Kieran, Aaron Meskin, and Jon Robson (eds), *Aesthetics and the Sciences of the Mind* (Oxford: OUP, 2014) 22-37. Lopes is skeptical of the providing of reasons to justify an aesthetic judgment. He is less skeptical of the merit of the judgments themselves. His position will be discussed further subsequently. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Meskin et al., ‘Mere Exposure to Bad Art’; Bence Nanay, ‘Perceptual Learning, the Mere Exposure Effect and Aesthetic Anti-Realism’, *Leonardo* 50 (2017), 58-63. Lopes pushes back against Cutting’s argument as well, although he is sympathetic to empirical findings more generally. See ‘Feckless Reasons’ pg. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. James Cutting, ‘Gustave Caillebotte, French Impressionism, and Mere Exposure’, *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* 10 (2003), 319-343. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Robert Zajonc, ‘Attitudinal Effects of Mere Exposure’, *Journal of Psychology and Social Psychology* 9 (1968), 1-27; ‘Feeling and Thinking: Preferences Need No Inference’, *American Psychologist* 35 (1980), 151-175. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cutting, ‘Gustave Caillebotte, French Impressionism, and Mere Exposure’, 321. Cutting confirms that he is not advocating for anti-realism in a private correspondence with Meskin et al., ‘Mere Exposure to Bad Art’. However, Meskin et al. interpret his results as putting pressure on the idea that quality plays any role at all in canon formation, as it calls into question the role the judgments of quality play in general canon formation. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Lopes, ‘Feckless Reason’. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For example, towards the end of his article, Lopes states that subjects ‘are in some sense aware of the features of stimuli that speak in favour of one choice over another. However, this awareness is not the same as the kind of state that is either articulated verbally in making a report or mentally in preparation to making a report,’ ‘Feckless Reason’, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Zajonc, ‘Attitudinal Effects of Mere Exposure’; ‘Feeling and Thinking: Preferences Need No Inference’. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Zajonc, ‘Feeling and Thinking: Preferences Need No Inference’. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Zajonc ‘Feeling and Thinking: Preferences Need No Inference’ for a review of the confirmatory studies conducted up to that point in time; see also Robert Bornstein, ‘Exposure and Affect: Overview and Meta-analysis of Research, 1968-1987’, *Psychological Bulletin* 106 (1989), 265-289. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Cutting, ‘Gustave Caillebotte, French Impressionism, and Mere Exposure’, 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid, 324. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. One of Cutting’s research aims is to determine whether paintings from the Caillebotte collection of impressionist works somehow formed a ‘cream of the crop’ of impressionistic work, but that goal is not relevant to understanding this study, and in fact it ends up taking a backseat to his inquiry into the effects of mere exposure. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., 328-329. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 331. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., 332. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Meskin et al., ‘Mere Exposure to Bad Art’, 142. Meskin et al. seem to use “artistic value” and “aesthetic value” interchangeably. For example, they later say “philosophers standardly assume that, other things being equal, aesthetic judgment latches on to a work’s aesthetically appreciable qualities” (142). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid, 146 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. On the Likert scale used, a rating of 10 indicates strong agreement with the statement ‘I like it’ and a rating of ‘1’ indicates strong disagreement. Ibid, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid, 149 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid, 150 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid, 151; Meskin et al. blame their lack of results on the relatively small sample size that they made use of. This, if anything, suggests a flawed experimental design. Cutting made use of over 200 students who were more reliably exposed to the art objects. Meskin et al. would have been wise to follow suit. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid, 151-152 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid, 154 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See footnote 12 on the robustness of the mere exposure effect. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Nanay, ‘Perceptual Learning, the Mere Exposure Effect and Aesthetic Anti-Realism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See Jason Farago, ‘It’s time to take down the Mona Lisa’, *New York Times* (published online November 6, 2019) <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/06/arts/design/mona-lisa-louvre-overcrowding.html> for evidence that it is the most visited painting in the world. That the *Mona Lisa* is the most reproduced painting in the world is hard to prove, but seems highly probable. A quick Google search produces a great many suspect rankings, but the *Mona Lisa* is invariably listed in the top 5 of many such rankings. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. When Googling ‘the Mona Lisa’, Google tells you that people who search for the *Mona Lisa* also typically search for: *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, *The Last Supper*, *Birth of Venus*, *Starry Night*, and the *Pietà* (among others). This is quite a hodgepodge of works; but they do have one thing in common, they are all quite famous. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. David Edelstein, “All Ten Quentin Tarantino Films Ranked,” *Vulture* (published online July 25, 2019) <https://www.vulture.com/2015/08/every-quentin-tarantino-movie-ranked.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Lily Lin, JoAndrea Hoegg, and Karl Aquino, ‘When Beauty Backfires: The Effects of Server Attractiveness on Consumer Taste Perceptions’, *Journal of Retailing* 94 (2018), 296-311, at 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. That a food item is of *very poor* quality may well be the kind of coarse-grained judgment referred to above that cannot be overcome by expectation bias. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., 303. To conduct the study, the same female server altered her make-up, hair, and clothing for the attractive/unattractive condition (Lin et al., 302). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Wine experts attempt to make *extremely* fine-grained distinctions as evidenced by the point system commonly used in rating wines. See for example the system used by *Wine Spectator*: https://www.winespectator.com/articles/scoring-scale. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See Douglas Burnham & Ole Skilleås, ‘You’ll Never Drink Alone: Wine Tasting and Aesthetic Practice’, in F. Allhoff (ed), Wine and Philosophy: A Symposium on Thinking and Drinking (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 157–171; *The Aesthetics of Wine* (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2012); ‘Categories and Appreciation—A reply to Sackris’, *Journal of Value Inquiry* 48 (2014), 551–557; Jonathan Cohen, ‘In the Kingdom of the Blind: On the Limitations of Blind Tasting’, *The World of Fine Wine* 41 (2013), 74-81; Barry Smith, ‘The Objectivity of Tastes and Tasting’, in Barry Smith (ed), *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine* (OUP, 2007), 41-78; Cain Todd, *The Philosophy of Wine: A Case of Truth, Beauty and Intoxication* (Montreal: Queen’s University Press, 2011). For a dissenting view. see David Sackris, ‘Category Independent Aesthetic Experience: The Case of Wine’, *Journal of Value Inquiry* 47 (2013), 111-120; ‘What Jancis Robinson didn’t know may have helped her’, *Erkenntnis* 84 (2018), 805-822. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Gil Morrot, Frédéric Brochet and Denis Dubourdieu, ‘The Colors of Odors’, *Brain and Language* 79 (2001), 309–320, at 312-313. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid., 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See Sackris ‘Category Independent Aesthetic Experience: The Case of Wine’; ‘What Jancis Robinson didn’t know may have helped her’, and Burnham and Skilleås *The Aesthetics of Wine* for an extended discussion of these studies on wine tasting and their significance for aesthetic evaluations. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Frédéric Brochet, ‘Chemical Object Representation in the Field of Consciousness, *Grand Prix of the Academie Amorin* (2001) *<*http://static.stevereads.com/papers\_to\_read/brochet\_wine\_experiment.pdf> 1/3/2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid., 10. Describing a wine as containing ‘faults’ is a significant ding on a wine. A fault is considered to be defects such as cork taint, or the wine having been over exposed to air and having begun to turn to vinegar. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Brian Wansink, Collin Payne, and Jill North, ‘Fine as North Dakota Wine: Sensory Expectations and the Intake of Companion Foods’, *Psychology and Behavior* 90 (2007), 712-716. North Dakota is decidedly *not* known for making wine in the United States. If a person knows anything at all about wine in the United States, it is that California is the primary wine producing state within the country. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid., 713. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Matthew Salganik, Peter Dodds, Duncan Watts, ‘Experimental Study of Inequality and Unpredictability in an Artificial Cultural Market’, *Science* 311 (2006), 854-856, at 854. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., 855. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. This study was repeated with individuals from a range of demographic backgrounds and a similar result was obtained. The results of this study are not a function of it being performed on teenaged individuals. See Matthew Salganik and Duncan J. Watts, “Web-Based Experiments for the Study of Collective Social Dynamics in Cultural Markets, Topics in Cognitive Science 1 (2009), 439-468. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Farago, ‘It’s time to take down the Mona Lisa’. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Sarah Young, ‘Mona Lisa Voted the World’s “Most Disappointing” Tourist Attraction by Britons’, *Independent* (Published online April 2019) <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/mona-lisa-paris-louvre-travel-tourist-attraction-easyjet-instagram-a8887161.html> accessed 3 January 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Steven Cuellar, ‘The “Sideways” Effect: A Test for Changes in the Demand for Merlot and Pinot Noir Wines, *Wines and Vines* (published online October 2004) <https://winesvinesanalytics.com/features/article/61265/The-Sideways-Effect> accessed 3 January 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. For evidence that an item gains value in the eyes of an individual simply as a result of being chosen by that individual, see J.W. Brehm, ‘Postdecision Changes in the Desirability of Alternatives’, *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 52 (1956), 384 –389; L.C. Egan, L.R. Santos, and P. Bloom, ‘The Origins of Cognitive Dissonance: Evidence from Children and Monkeys’, *Psychological Science* 18 (2007), 978 –983. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See Cova (2015) and Meskin et al. (2018), [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Meskin et al., ‘Philosophical aesthetics and cognitive science’. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Jancis Robinson, a famous wine critic, admits to falling victim to this old ‘trick’; see *Confessions of a wine lover* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1997). Such a tactic is also discussed in Burnham and Skilleås’ *The Aesthetics of Wine*. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Kevin Melchionne, ‘On the Old Saw “I Know Nothing About Art but I know What I Like’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 68 (2010) assumes that film producers must have some *reason* for funding one film over another (pg. 132). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. John Lawless, The Interview: Nigel Newton: Is There Life after Harry Potter? You Bet Your Hogwarts There Is. Independent (published online July 3, 2005) <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/nigel-newton-is-there-life-after-harry-you-can-bet-your-hogwarts-there-is-296317.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Bill Carter, *Desperate Networks* (New York: Doubleday, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ray Coleman, *Brian Epstein: The Man who made the Beatles* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. ‘Web-Based Experiments’, 442. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Hope Werness, ‘Han van Meegeren Fecit’, in Denis Dutton (ed), *The Forger’s Art: Forgery and the Philosophy of Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 1-57 at 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. See Werness, ‘Han van Meegeren Fecit’, 45; and Alfred Lessing, ‘What is Wrong with a Forgery?’, in Denis Dutton (ed), *The Forger’s Art: Forgery and the Philosophy of Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 58-76, at 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Werness, ‘Han van Meegeren Fecit’, 29. Robson, ‘Aesthetic Testimony and the Test of Time’, discusses the van Meegeran forgery as an instance of an echo chamber in the artworld, and it may well be: because some famous art critics thought it was a Vermeer, other critics fell in line with the beliefs of the opinion leaders. However, I think it is also an example of expectations driving perceptions: if it is a Vermeer, it has to be good. If it’s a van Meegeren, who no one has ever heard of, it cannot possibly be all that good. My thanks to Robson for bringing this example to my attention. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Werness, ‘Han van Meegeren Fecit’, 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Ibid., 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. See for example Patricia Herzog, ‘Akrasia and Aesthetic Judgment’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58 (2007) 37-49; Anita Silvers, ‘Aesthetic “akrasia”: Disliking good art’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 (1972), 227-234. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. ‘Philosophical aesthetics and cognitive science’, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. ‘Perceptual Learning, the Mere Exposure Effect and Aesthetic Anti-Realism’, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Dominic McIver Lopes, *Being for Beauty: Aesthetic Agency and Value* (OUP, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. See for example Kendall Walton, ‘Categories of art’, *The Philosophical Review* 79 (1970), 334-367. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Meskin et al., ‘Philosophical Aesthetics and Cognitive Science’, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)