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## Investigation of high and low art from the perspective of pragmatism philosophy



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## ABSTRACT

Categorization and groupings of concepts have always existed in history, and this has resulted in the emergence of binaries. In most categories of binaries, the first expressed case is more positive and more valuable than the second concept, e.g., day versus night. In this paper, high art versus low art and the philosophy of rationalism within the philosophy of pragmatism are studied. Society in general is composed of two elements: a majority and a minority. The minority group is considered educated and privileged. Fine art as well as rationalist approaches are deemed to belong to them. In contrast, the majority or the public does not benefit from such knowledge. Specifically, popular art and philosophy that is empiricist or pragmatic belongs to them. However, the question is whether this classification is based on social classes or humankind, irrespective of one's place in society. This is the question that this article attempts to answer.

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## 1. Introduction

The creation of major cities has caused aesthetic transformations in assessing the status and function of art. In fact, urbanization has created new kinds of art known as popular art.

From the perspective of sociology, there are two types of art in society: one is for the elite, and the other is popular art.

In terms of sociology, there are two different periods in the investigation of art. In the first period, attention to art and artistic issues were related to social issues. In fact, at the beginning of the creation of the science of sociology, the cultural and economic elites of society were separated. They were able to take advantage of both wants and basic necessities and could use their spare time producing artwork and other art, which were circulated among the small group of elites. This small group gave art standards, and if anyone wanted to join the elite, they would have to follow these standards in their artwork. The sociology of art defines the art of this period by the elite. Valuation entails the production and properties of art. In fact, it is true that only elites considered art, but other members of the art society were not deprived, because an

interest in art and beauty is innate in every human being. Therefore, people within their own culture produced artwork in their communities, and the issues were tied to their everyday life.

In the first period of society, community groups and public property were divided by boundaries. In contrast, in the contemporary era, the high level of well-being and economic development have caused a number of middle class and lower caste elite to reach the middle class. Public education has led to growth, and even lower middle-class families can benefit from the gift of literacy. Literacy has led to considerable progress. Those not named elites, lower middle classes and the producers and creators of works of art have joined this group. In the community, groups do not face boundaries because people are closer together in terms of social status, and most of the artists and public elites are located in the middle of these two extremes.

The argument in this article that fine art has always belonged to the elites and that low art has belonged to the group deemed to be of the commons will be examined from a pragmatic perspective.

## 2. High art and low art

In nineteenth century Europe, the economic problems caused a crisis in the arts, because artists had to sell their work on the market. However, in contrast to the direction of economic development, some created works that were more complex and

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incomprehensible to the public. Then, schools such as Impressionism and Cubism emerged. However, the formation of these schools was so rapid that it separated the arts from more people. Thus, the audience and artists had a severed relationship. The understanding of art was in crisis. However, people developed interests towards educational works, entertainment, newspaper stories, television programs, radio, photography and cinema. In contrast, those artists with Avant-Garde characteristics had little audience. They categorized the arts into two types, high and low, placing themselves at high status.

However, the fact is that fine art was so distant, and so much of people's lives could not play a role in it. In fact, art is considered by society to be a formative role in society. When society is not able to appreciate good art, it is certain that it will disappear, and the role of local developmental is to foster individual talents and insight.

Some scholars consider the idea of art as classified into two categories, high art and low art, due to enlightenment. This means that they consider only work that have aesthetic features as genuinely artistic. However, are there really structural differences between high art and low art? Is the distinction between high culture and low culture is revealed? Such distinctions call on more scheme-specific Marxist philosophers of the Frankfurt School, including Benjamin 2 and Adorno 3. Among the thinkers of the twentieth century, the mass art defenders are Susan Sontag 4 and Shusterman 5 and their opponents are Dwight McDonald 6, Greenberg 7 and Collingwood 8.

Enlightenment thinking has emphasized the autonomy of art and artists from external interests. That is, the original art cannot be derived from popular culture, because art is an original product of individual genius. Therefore, it is natural that artistic thinkers never consider satisfying the people, like the arts, educational or entertainment applications created under the names of low/mass/popular art. The inferiority of art depends on the social and not the individuality of the artist. Collingwood calls popular art an ironic mode of the "entertainment industry" that actually is not art but an illusion. More Marxist thinkers like Collingwood have denounced popular art. Dwight McDonald called it "mass art" instead of popular art, which implies the lowest amount of intelligence in the audience is needed to get the message of this artwork. The emergence of the masses in the higher social power is the reality of modern life, and the man who is in the masses does not constitute any criteria to distinguish himself from others. In contrast, people who carry large tasks and assignments on their shoulders feel they do not have any specific expectations and their life is the same (Ortega y Gasset, 2014, pp. 264–268).

Adorno treats art as an event that involves no confirmation and its value is breaking habits. Art in the treatment of Adorno does not reflect the confirmation of available faces; rather, it always speaks of forms of better understanding (Heidari, 2009, p. 78). Adorno's analysis uses criticisms and comments and philosophical works in the internal relations and relations between subjectivity and the social world to increase and expand the commodification of culture and art, which eventually leads to a culture industry. The main purpose of art for Adorno is to create a social-critical perspective; the goal of art should be free from social and political and economic ties (Fisher and Andrew, 2005, p. 533). In his view, the culture industry is the result of an alienated society. The involvement and transformation of cultural products are a step in the direction of bourgeois culture. The aim to promote political doctrines loses its authenticity. As one of the potential features, because art is a revolutionary product platform and entails social and cultural relations, it follows the passive stance of consumer awareness (Nozari and Ali, 2009, pp. 104–88).

However, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the mechanical reproduction of art made it possible for

much larger audiences to enjoy works of art. In fact, mechanical reproduction in the form of photography and cinema changed the reaction of the masses to art. Walter Benjamin took a different view than Adorno. He knew that art has the power and value to take steps leading to the masses. Benjamin stated that new forms of mass art, such as photography and film, could lead to awareness, because there is independence in the actor camera, eliminating the halo cast and critical distance, which can be seen as liberation (Fisher and Andrew, 2005, pp. 532–533).

Many thinkers of the 1960s came to support popular art, and aesthetic values were insignificant. However, in the meantime, some of the public's compassion was to interpret works of art. In this case, it is true that public art is lower than high art, but for those in society who had been deprived of the education necessary to understand high art, it is enjoyable and has cultural satisfaction. This view was criticized by Shusterman, because in the underlying subtext, it endorses the criticism of modernist thinkers.

In the 1980s, thinkers in the social approach distinguished folk art and high and popular art, to meet the desires and prejudices of popular art with the power of the people, which gives a special vision to society and formulates and creates certain social attitudes. Some thinkers (Claus Carroll 9, Stanley Cowell 10 and David Naotis 11) argued about the distinction between high art and popular art based on a social approach. Undoubtedly, there is no intrinsic feature in high art that reveals the distinction between the two. Carroll considers the distinction between fine art and popular art as the difference between social classes. He considers popular and mass art as having the same meaning. Some criticize work that reaches the mass production of popular art, especially now that all art is reproducible.

Popular art is perceived based on its value to the public. Thus, most of the representation of the aesthetic is based on the concept of community. The best way to assess these arts is in the works. Whereas the formal aspects of art are used to assess the fine arts, practices and potential end result should also be studied.

Indeed, this view is a lower vision, where public art is considered as operational and high art is distinct from life. Throughout history, many high arts were unlike tradition and were consistent with common beliefs and social revolution against the status quo. Therefore, high art in absolute terms cannot be separated from community.

### 2.1. The introduction of pragmatism

American pragmatism is a philosophy that came to the public's notice in the 1950s. In general, the philosophy of pragmatism made philosophical thought simple and accessible to everyone.

The term pragmatism is derived from the Greek word *pragma*, meaning action. The term was first introduced to philosophy in 1878 by Pierce, who stated that our beliefs are rules for action and to developed a concept that it is necessary only to determine that this concept is to create, how to work. This means that the behaviour is unique to us (James, 2012, p. 41). Pierce's aesthetic contribution is clearly through his semiotics, which had a considerable impact on the theories of the twentieth century (Shusterman, 2011, p. 347). In fact, Pierce established the principle of pragmatism. The principle of pragmatism is that all facts influence our actions. The pragmatism ahead of any conflict should consider the question of which is correct for any of the parties in any particular empirical reality. In this way, difference is created. In addition, if conflict makes no difference to this debate, it is unrealistic, and disputes of practice testing many conflicts in the history of philosophy become meaningless. The same approach can be called pragmatism, or empiricism, which is also radical, pragmatism with the abstract to the concrete and practice,

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