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Breaking the Rules of Art

Philosophy of Language

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Abstract: Art and language are similar forms of expression that are guided by rules. In Kripke's "On Rules and Private Language" he asserts that Wittgenstein holds the view that language is necessarily social. In this paper, I show the similarities between art and language and that they are necessarily social. I interact with Nathan Oesch in "Music and Language in Social Interaction: Synchrony, Antiphony, and Functional Origins" to show how music is social because it requires rule-following under a community consensus. In this paper, I explore Kripke's theory of rule-following and ask the question, is there space for evolution in art if growth requires breaking rules? I conclude that ultimately a community defines if a rule can be broken, therefore there is space within Kripke's theory.

In this paper I will explore the relationship between language and art. First, I assert that these forms of expression are similar because they are rule-guided activities. Next, I examine Kripke's view of language in accordance with Wittgenstein. I argue that both art and language are necessarily social by exploring thought experiments introduced by both Kripke and Wittgenstein. Next, I interact with Nathan Oesch in "Music and Language in Social Interaction: Synchrony, Antiphony, and Functional Origins" to show how music requires rule-following. I address that both language and art are evolving over time and that in order for change to happen, rule-breaking is necessary. I conclude that there is space within Kripke's theory of rule-following for rules to be broken because ultimately a community defines if a rule can be broken, therefore creating a new rule.

For the purpose of this paper, I will define art broadly as instrumental music, painting, and dance in order to distinguish between art that does not traditionally use language and art that does, like poetry and rap. Just like language, art is an activity that is guided by historically evolving rules. Music, painting, and dance do not use words; however, they are a representation of human thoughts. I argue that art is necessarily social in accordance with Kripke's view of language.

Kripke, a distinguished American philosopher, made influential contributions about rule following in the fields of both language and mathematics. However, these contributions about rule following are also relevant in art. Therefore, I will begin this paper by exploring Kripke's views of rule following in conversation with Wittgenstein's view of language. According to Kripke, Wittgenstein holds the view that language is necessarily social. This opposes the idea of cartesian privacy, that if the mind is private then thought is inaccessible to anyone else. However, Kripke asserts that Wittgenstein's view of language is that it is necessarily social

because of the rules that language users follow. In order to understand a language, one needs to learn the rules.

Kripke reaches this conclusion through a mathematical thought experiment. In this thought experiment, there exists two numbers that, for the purpose of this example, you have never added together before. Kripke uses the example that '68 + 57 = 125'.[1] We know that this is correct, however a skeptic argues that the answer should actually be '5'.[2]

> "The skeptic claims (or feigns to claim) that I am now misinterpreting my own previous usage. By, "plus" he says, I *always meant* quus; now, under the influence of some insane frenzy, or a bout of LSD, I have come to misinterpret my own previous stage."[3]

The function of quus, which we mistook for plus, would make the 68+57 actually equal to 5. While this skeptical response may seem far-fetched, if the skeptic was correct, we would be faced with a problem. Therefore, Kripke approaches the conclusion that language is necessarily social and it needs a community to be verified because it "does not allow us to speak of a single individual, considered by himself and in isolation, as ever meaning anything."[4] Kripke's theory of community consensus is that someone means 'plus' instead of 'quus' if they use 'plus' in the same way that other members of their community use it and if the speaker is trusted by their community and "the community accepts him as a rule follower."[5] A rule needs to be followed by more than one person, more than one time, otherwise it is not a rule. Therefore, because language is made up of a series of rules and rules cannot be followed privately, then language must be social.[6]

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[1] Martinich, 526.
[2] Martinich, 526.
[3] Martinich, 526.
[4] Martinich, 532.
[5] Martinich, 533.
[6] Wittgenstein, section 199.

Whether we are exploring artistic or linguistic forms of expression, both forms need to follow meaningful rules outside of the private mind. Wittgenstein suggests in his thought experiment, Beetle in a Box, that a word should not be separated from the sensation that it describes.[7] From this, art should not be separated from the emotion behind it.

Humans listen to music through their air pods while they go for a run, dance alone in their rooms, or hum to themselves in private. Similarly, language can be confined to the pages of a diary. Symbols and words can be used to express sensations that only the writer can identify.[8] For example, the writer may use the word "stig" to express when they are in pain. While it is a private code to the writer, the sensation that the symbol or word refers to is something that everyone can understand, it is not unique to the writer. However, we can only communicate sensations or thoughts that we have language for. The writer of the diary would not be able to express their feelings without language, therefore while the contents of the diary may be private without explanation, this is not an accurate example of private language.[9] Both language and music are "typically something shared, something social."[10] Once we learn the rules, we can share music and language with our community.

Imagine that there is a group of people who are each holding a box. Each person looks in their box and says that it holds a beetle. However, they cannot look inside each other's boxes so they do not know what the others refer to as 'beetle'. One person could call 'nothing' a 'beetle' another person could call a toy car a 'beetle', and yet another person could call a small insect a 'beetle'. Wittgenstein concludes that the grammar around sensations and even private objects is

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[7] Wittgenstein, section 293.
[8] Wittgenstein, section 258.
[9] Wittgenstein, section 261.
[10] Schulkin.

irrelevant, unless the grammar represents a connection between the how a sensation is expressed and the sensation itself. [11]

The shared meaning of the word 'beetle' is extraneous because you cannot look inside anyone else's box. When someone says that they have a beetle in their box, if you cannot see what they are referring to, you define the word 'beetle' as you know it and not as the other person defines it. This relates to pain, because we can never feel someone else's pain. However, everyone feels pain, therefore it is logical to accept the notion that that person feels pain. But, you cannot understand the degree of pain they feel. Therefore, you cannot compare pain and you cannot compare unseen beetles because you cannot be inside the other person's mind and understand what they really mean when they use those words. Wittgenstein believes that pain is something that is tied to language and the way that we talk about it. Beetle is not referring to a specific thing, it is referring to A thing in A box. Similarly, when we express pain with words we are referring to A sensation of pain and not directly to the pain that we are feeling.

If we did not have external language to express our feeling we would not be able to communicate with each other and this applies to art as well. A work of art should not be separated from the intention or emotion behind it. If art is used to represent our feelings and thoughts, it would be useless to try to see into someone else's "box", or to see what the artist really means by their art. Similarly, to language, the social aspect of art comes from being able to understand and appreciate someone else's thoughts without being able to see into their mind. It is not as if a specific type of art corresponds to an emotion or a thought, but humans can use art as a medium to hurdle the private barrier of our minds and to understand what others want to communicate.

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[11] Wittgenstein, section 293.

While a composer might experience the emotion before they put it to music, I argue that music cannot be separated from the emotion. Often, the experience that art evokes is emotional. Just like, the word 'pain' cannot be separated from the sensation. As in classical music, as I mentioned before, tempo, loudness, and key are all used to represent the meaning behind the music and the music cannot be listened to without evoking the emotion behind it.

One might counter this argument with the fact that many listeners dislike classical music and it does not evoke any feeling for them. The music is completely separate from anything besides the sound of it. The same applies to paintings. Many people wander through art museums and look at the paintings, but solely for the aesthetics purposes of the art. The paintings evoke nothing besides an eye-catching shape or bright color.

A few years ago, I visited the Salvador Dali museum in St. Petersburg, Florida. While my family was waiting for our tour guide, I strolled around the space looking at the art. I must note that rarely do I take a guided tour around a museum. The art was very extravagant with warped clocks and spindly-legged elephants. However, this art evoked nothing for me. Once the tour started, we stopped in front of a massive painting title, "The Hallucinogenic Toreador." The tour guide exposed the details of the painting to me, including the hidden faces in the bodies of women. If at first glance, the painting did not mean anything for me, it was not because I could not access it, but because I did not speak the "language" of Salvador Dali. I could not play the language game of Surrealism. Learning more vocabulary of a language allows a you to understand more and better communicate. Appreciation for art deepens as one gains experience and learns which rules an artist was following and which ones they were breaking.

In "Music and Language in Social Interaction: Synchrony, Antiphony, and Functional Origins" Nathan Oesch explores music and social bonding in humans.[12] Choirs, jazz bands, and ballroom dancing are forms are art that could not exist privately. There are rules the need to be followed by more than one person to dance the waltz. In a choir, a soprano, alto, and bass all follow specific rules. The social aspect of art is not limited to "interpersonal" participation.[13] For example, simply hearing music from a particular culture can elicit affiliation toward people from that same culture."[14] Humans are connected by music as it changes and passes through different cultures and historical periods, similarly to language.

According to Wittgenstein language is constantly evolving. Wittgenstein compares language to "an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses."[15] Art has changed and grown throughout different historical periods just as language has progressed. Painting styles have changed over the past hundreds of years. From 1848-1900 the most prominent style of painting was realism, a form of art that closely focused on everyday life.[16] This style was vastly different from the early 1900's where Cubism was the most prominent style of painting. Picasso, one of the most famous artists of this time, expressed himself through geometry and perspective.[17] Instrumental music has changed from Baroque to Classical in the 1750's. In Classical music the rules became even more defined with the intention placed on the loudness or softness of the sound and the pace of the music.[18] However, while Wittgenstein implies that language changes over time, he fails to

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[12] Oesch, 4.
[13] Oesch, 4.
[14] Oesch, 4.
[15] Wittgenstein, section 18.
[16] Art History Timeline: Western Art Movements and Their Impact.
[17] Art History Timeline: Western Art Movements and Their Impact.
[18] Michelle.

categorize language into historical time periods. For example, with the invention of the personal computer in 1975, hundreds or even thousands of words have been created to communicate the technological shift from 1975 to 2020. Both language and art are forms of expression, that have changed over time.

Within the systems of language and art there has to be space for innovation within the rules. However, because language is constantly evolving, there needs to be some consistency in following rules that allow for continued communication. Breaking the rules of art and breaking the rules of language differ in this way. Breaking the rules of language arise from a need to facilitate communication, however breaking the rules of art come from a need to express creativity and differentiate oneself.

Different types of paintings and music are present in different historical periods and each period has its own rules. However, in order to be a great artist and to be recognized, it is necessary to break the rules. Creativity is at the center of great art. One can go to art school and study the rules of music and the rules of painting and they can create beautiful art. However, an artist is rarely remembered without breaking the rules. Pablo Picasso became such a famous artist because he differentiated himself from the previous historical period of art, impressionism. While impressionism was centered around realistic imagery created by distinct brush strokes cubism focused on distorted geometric shapes. Even though impressionism influenced Picasso, he separated himself from that historical period by breaking the rules of surround the art form that shaped him. [19]

Given that rule-following holds a lot of weight in Kripke's theory of community consensus, how can an individual artist express themselves if they cannot use the old rules? How

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[19] Art History Timeline: Western Art Movements and Their Impact.

can an artist be innovative under Kripke's view of rule-following? In order for change to happen, preexisting rules need to be broken. Kripke holds the belief that any rule breaking is a mistake because it is going against the community because rule following depends on a community consensus of what the rules are.[20] Can we find space for rule-breaking in Kripke's theory of community consensus?

If we look closely, rule-breaking can be done in two ways. The first way is that breaking the rules can be a mistake or ignorance of the rules. Mathematics is a good example of making a mistake. If you say that 5+12 = 7. The community would say that you are wrong, you did the math wrong or you are ignorant of the rules of addition. However, I assert that someone can skillfully break the rules and this is where we need to make space within Kripke's theory of community consensus.

Breaking the rules of art cannot be complete chaos. It needs to be done with insight. In order to differentiate themselves, an artist must find the balance between crazy and genius from their audience's perspective. In order to successfully break a rule, one needs to be recognized as a skillful player of the art game. The artist needs to aware that they are breaking the rules because they know what the rules are that they should be following. The artist also needs to be skillful at creating art within the rules. If an artist meets these requirements, they are intentionally breaking the rules in order to express themselves, not because they are making a mistake or are unskilled.[21]

However, even if an artist meets these requirements they need to be accepted by the community, So, while breaking the current rules is necessary in order to evolve to the next period of art, breaking rules requires a community consensus. The community comes back into play

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[20] Martinich, On Rules and Private Language.
[21] Office hours with Joy Laine.

after the rules have been broken. Ultimately, the community decides whether an artist has "correctly" broke the rules, where "correct" equates to intriguing and insightful. Therefore, the community is redefining the rules once they have been broken. Sometimes, an artist's rule breaking is not accepted by their current community. For example, Vincent Van Gough did not become famous until after his death. His style was not accepted by his community during his lifetime and he was only able to sell one painting. However, after his death communities all over the world accepted the rules he had broken by using vivid colors to depict his unique interpretation of reality, making them new rules. [22]

Similarly, to language, art changes and evolves over time. In order to evolve an artist needs to break the rules, which goes against Kripke's idea of community consensus. However, not everyone can break the rules in a meaningful way. If an artist breaks the rules, it can just be seen as a mistake unless the community comes to a consensus that the artist broke the rules in a good way. Therefore, the evolution of art circles back to the approval of a community. An artist cannot declare that they are a great artist, it is the community that decides the rules and whether an artist has broken them appropriately, making the artist famous.

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