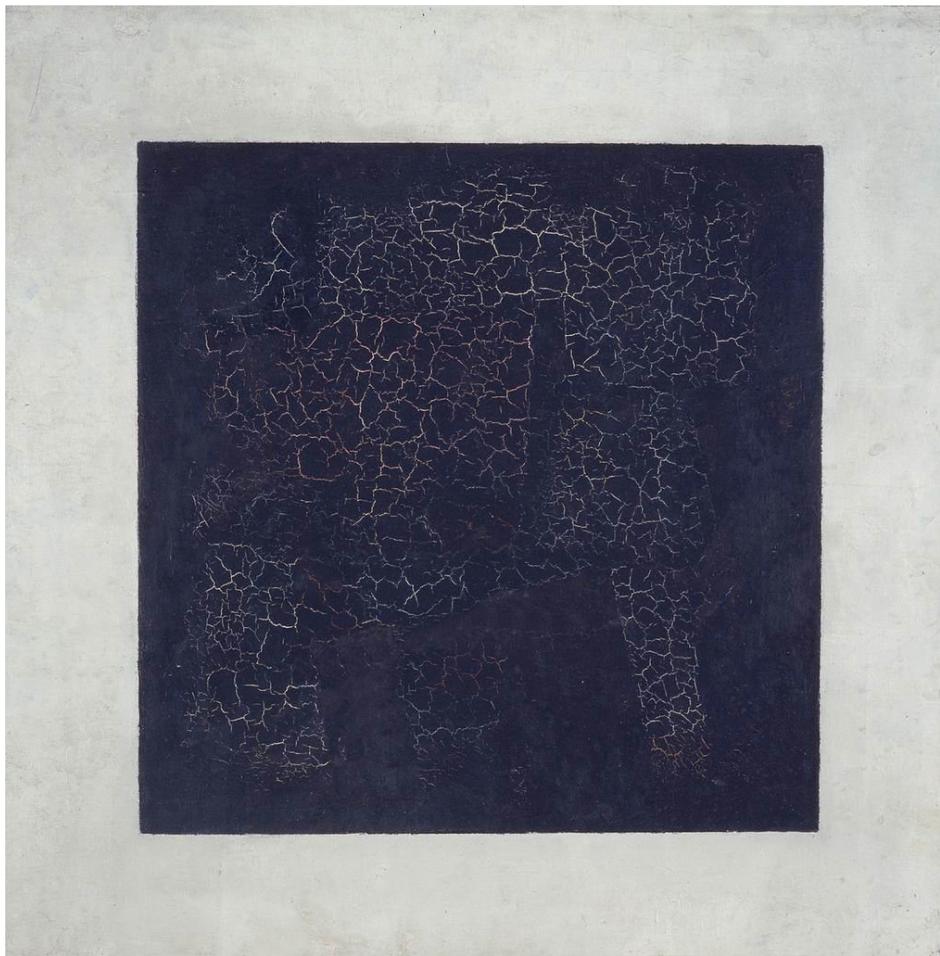


Evaluation of Art



Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square*

But, is

it any

good?

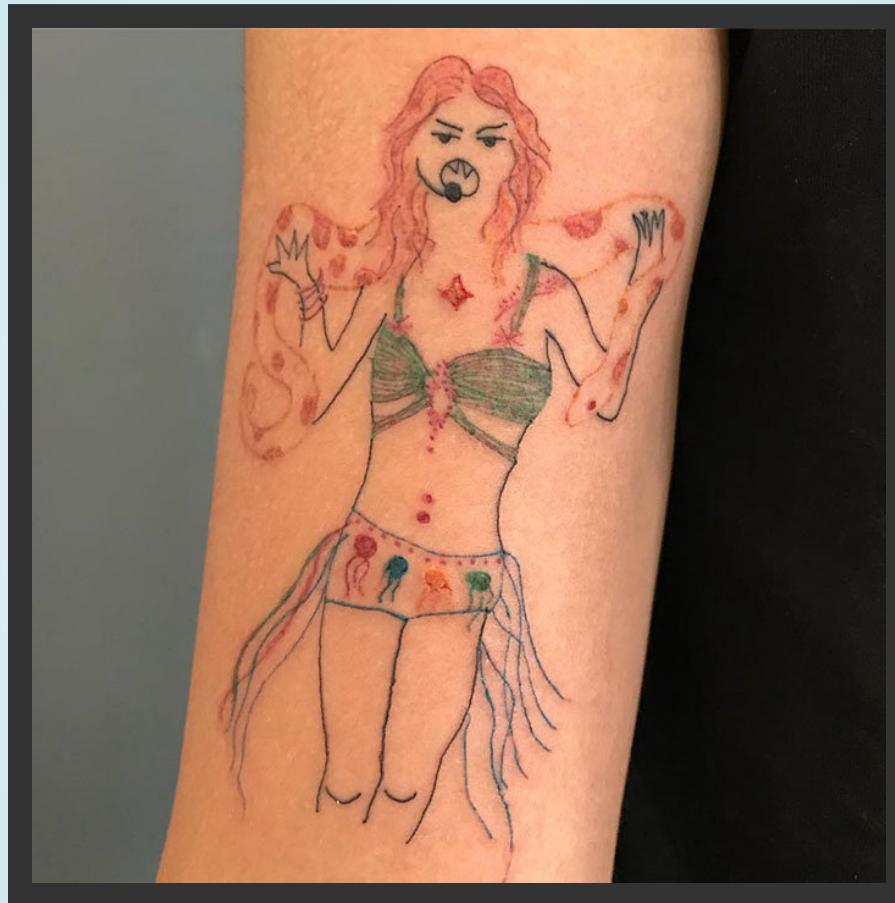
Black Square is at least better than some
stuff...

Malfeitona

Malfeitona is a tattoo artist from Brazil, known for her (self-professed) ugly tattoos

N.B. 'Malfeitona' translates roughly to 'poorly made'







And presumably Black Square is not as beautiful as some other stuff...



Tarsila do Amaral, *O Abaporu*

What do our evaluations track?

1. Our subjective experiences *alone*?
2. The quality of the piece *itself*?
3. Is there another option?

Today's Menu

1. Aesthetic terms
2. Objective beauty
3. Blending in subjectivity
 - Pure subjectivity
 - Hume's account
4. AI as a new paradigm of art criticism?

Aesthetic terms

Talking about artworks

We use strong words to describe artworks

- Insipid
- Dull
- Inspiring
- Elegant
- Subtle
- ...

Many aesthetic terms are ambiguous

- Insipid things can look good in the corner of the room
- Likewise for dull things
- Inspiring and elegant things can look wrong or jarring in certain contexts
- But to call something 'beautiful' is, for all intents and purposes, a good thing

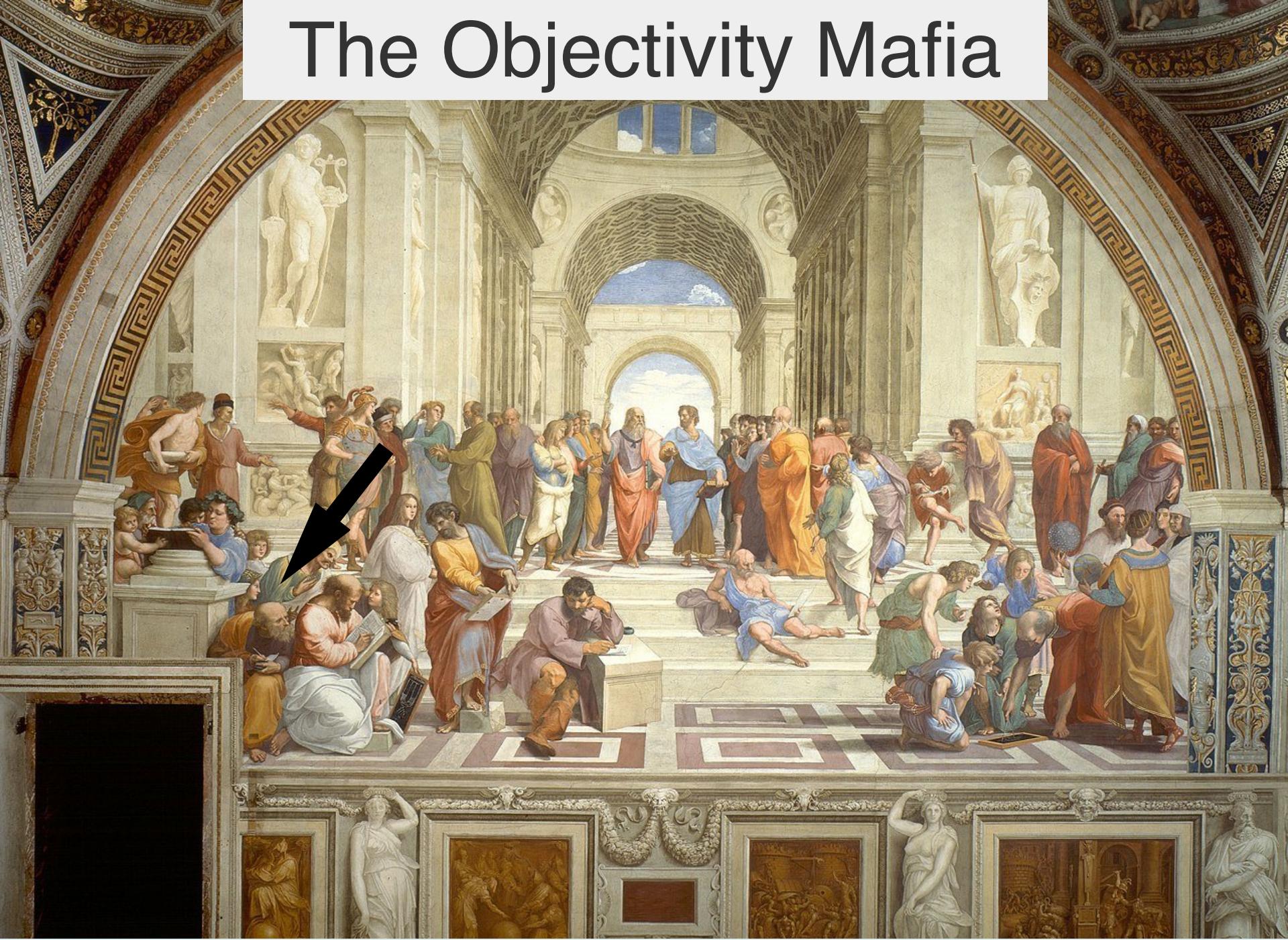
Worth focusing on how we talk about what's
beautiful

The search for beauty

1. what makes something beautiful?
2. how do we recognize beauty?

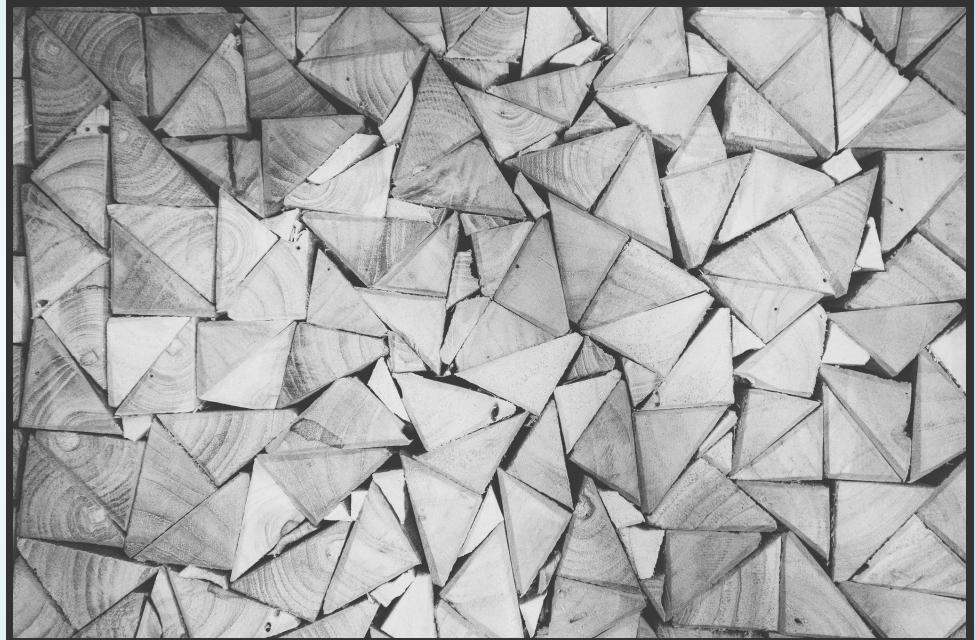
Objective Beauty

The Objectivity Mafia

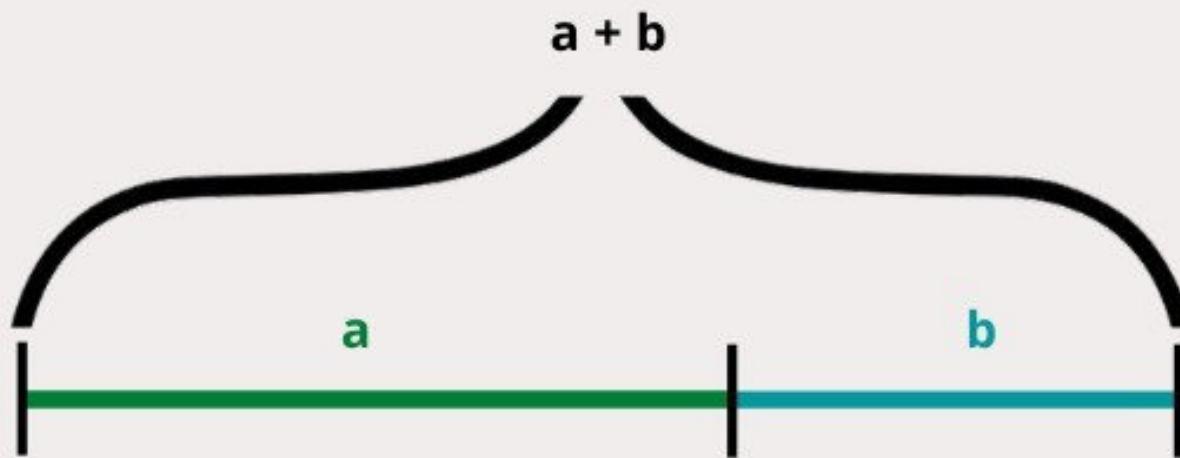


Pythagoras on Beauty

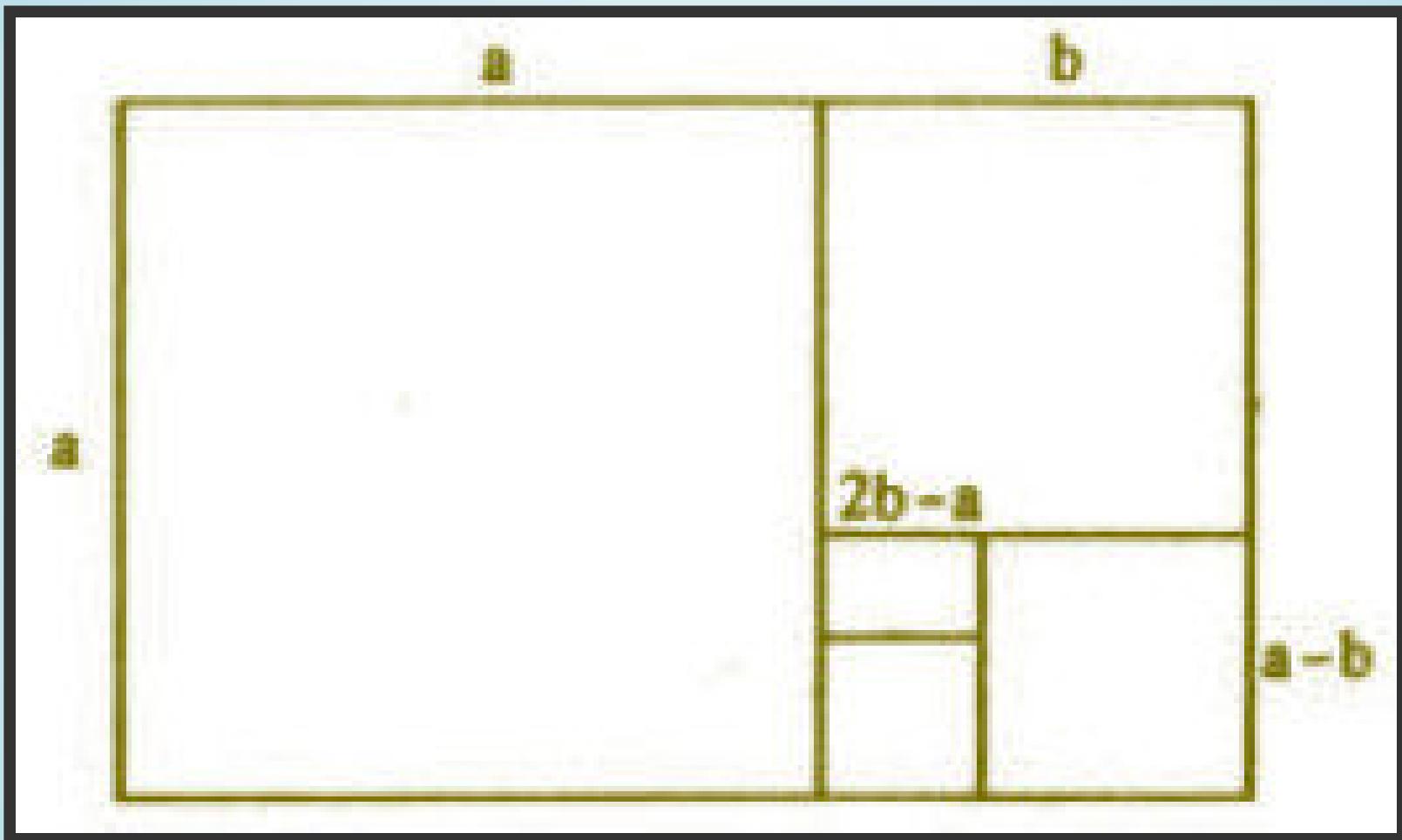
- Had a mathematical outlook on beauty
- Beauty:
 - is quantifiable
 - arises from mathematical harmony, order and regularity
- Evidence:
 - harmonic ratios
 - golden ratio

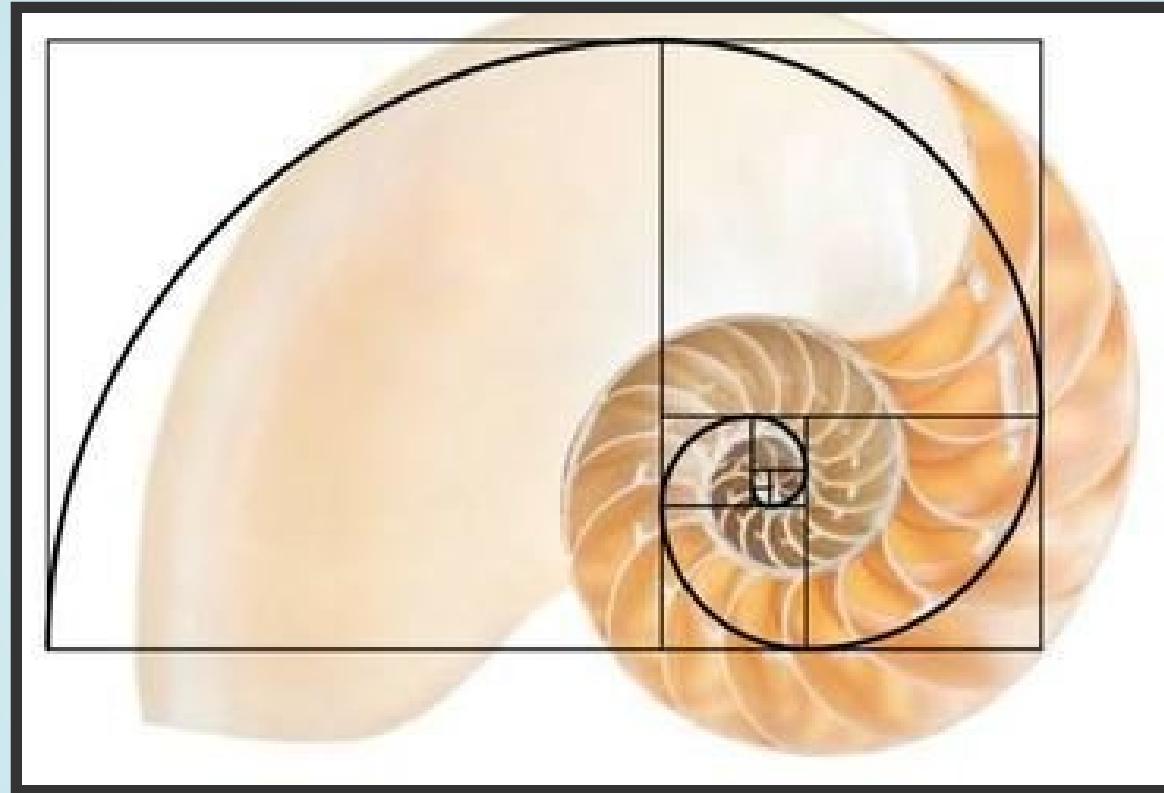


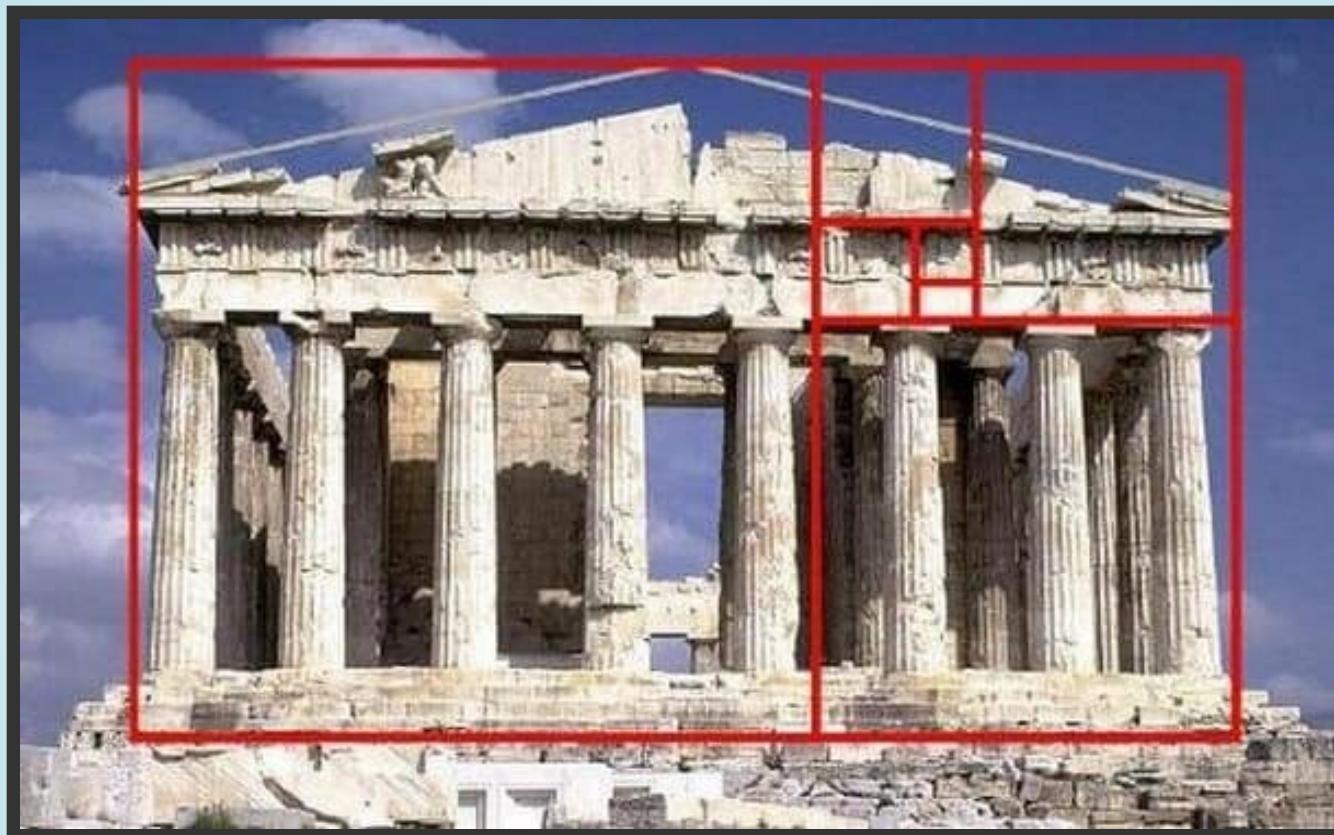
The golden ratio



$$\frac{a}{b} = \frac{a+b}{a} = 1.618\dots = \varphi$$

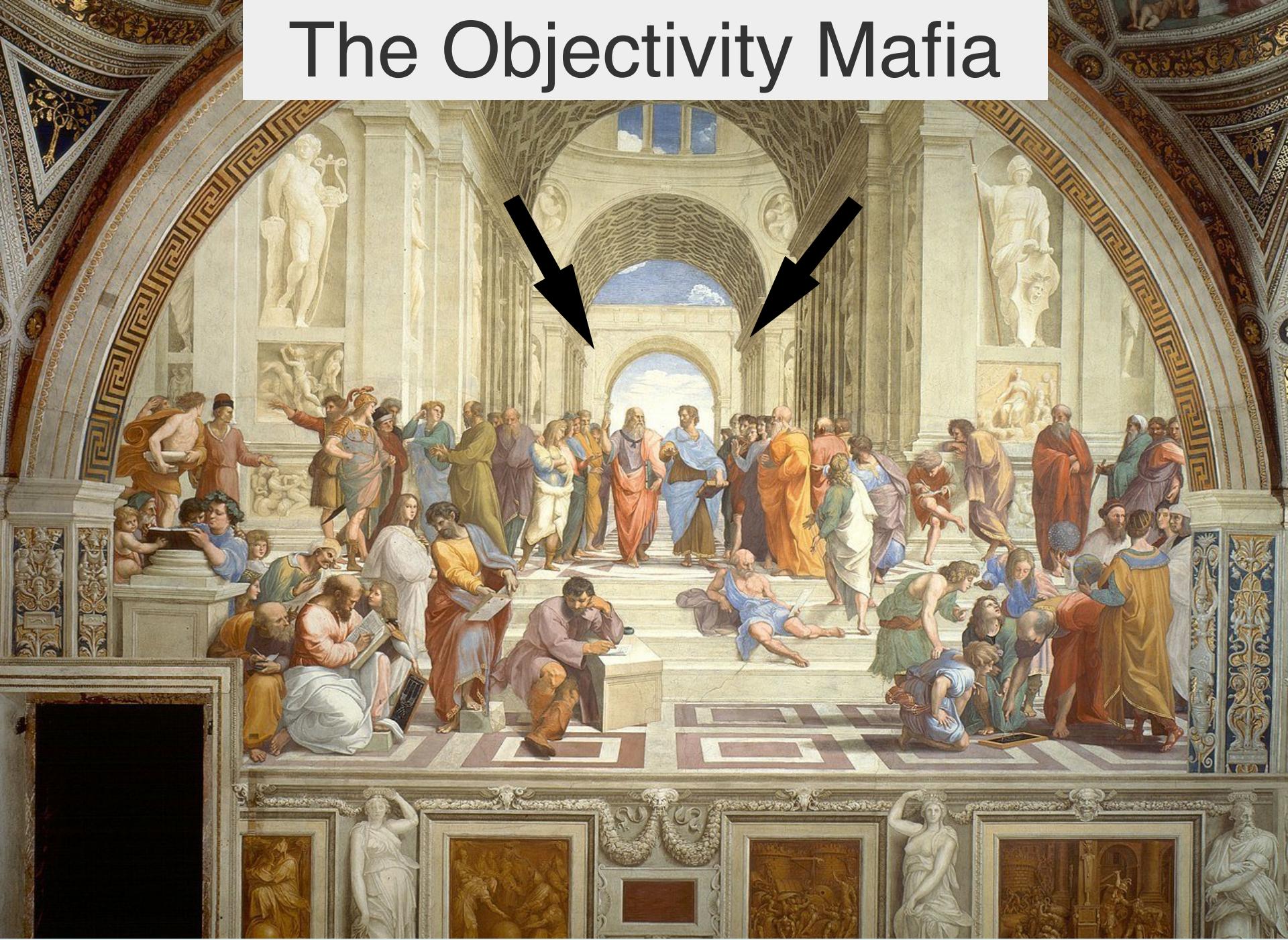






Parthenon

The Objectivity Mafia



Plato

- Beauty behaves in a way similar to the other Forms Plato discusses
- There is a *thing*, beauty, and all beautiful things reflect it somehow

Aristotle

- Beauty is order, symmetry, and definiteness*
- These are properties that can be mathematically measured

* Mind you, his view in the Poetics is quite different

Medieval Objectivity

- St Bonaventure: proportion, arising from congruity, which arises from equality
- Augustine: Beauty requires unity, equality, number, proportion, and order
- Others held similar views...

Implications of objectivity

1. Something is beautiful if and only if it has objective beauty
2. We can recognize beauty by examining whether the thing has the properties that are constitutive of beauty

The problem of pure objectivity: aren't we missing an important subjective element to all of this?

Beauty is such that it presumably elicits something in us; but that's missing here

And this seems wrong. Would it be plausible to say that something is beautiful if no one enjoyed it?

Taking stock

- Aesthetic terms and the focus on beauty
- Beauty is objective
- The problem of pure objectivity

Today's Menu

1. Aesthetic terms
2. Objective beauty
3. Blending in subjectivity
 - Pure subjectivity
 - Hume's account
4. AI as a new paradigm of art criticism?

Blending in subjectivity

Some options

1st option

- Beauty is purely subjective
- We recognize beauty when we sense it
- All disagreements about what is beautiful are vacuous

Can
this be
right?



Malfeitona

Tarsila do Amaral, *O Abaporu*

What does this mean?

- *Some* objectivity seems warranted
- But how do we keep objectivity and not lose subjectivity?

Hume's Account

1st option again?

"Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty; and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others."



Paradox of Taste

1. Aesthetic evaluations are obviously subjective
2. But some people obviously have better taste than others

Some tastes are better

- Hume wants to do justice to the reasonableness of disagreements of taste
- His ingenious proposal: turn attention to us, the consumers
- More precisely, to those consumers who have better taste to begin with
 - Those who meet a high standard of *taste*

The true critics

1. Delicacy of taste



Where's Waldo

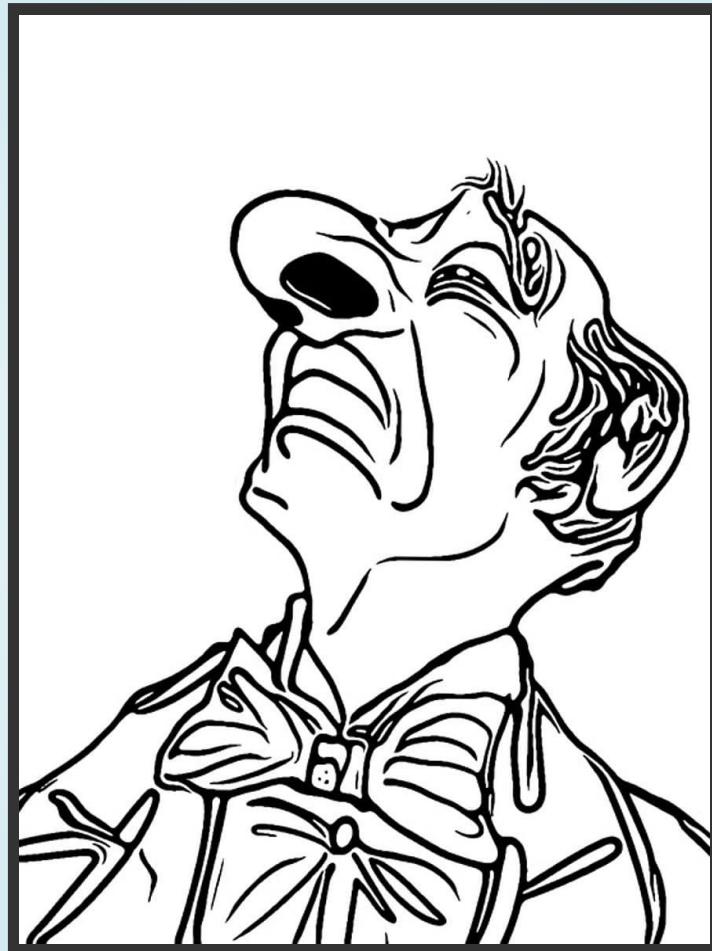
The true critics

1. Delicacy of taste
2. Experience



The true critics

1. Delicacy of taste
2. Experience
3. Lacking prejudice



The true critics

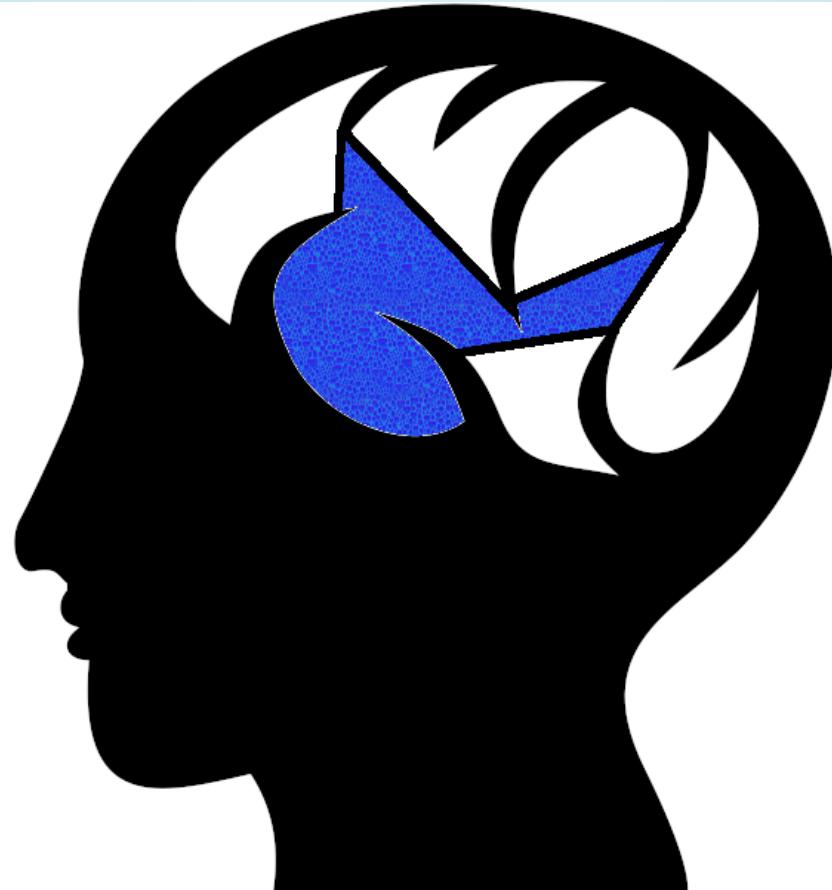
1. Delicacy of taste
2. Experience
3. Lacking prejudice
4. Good sense

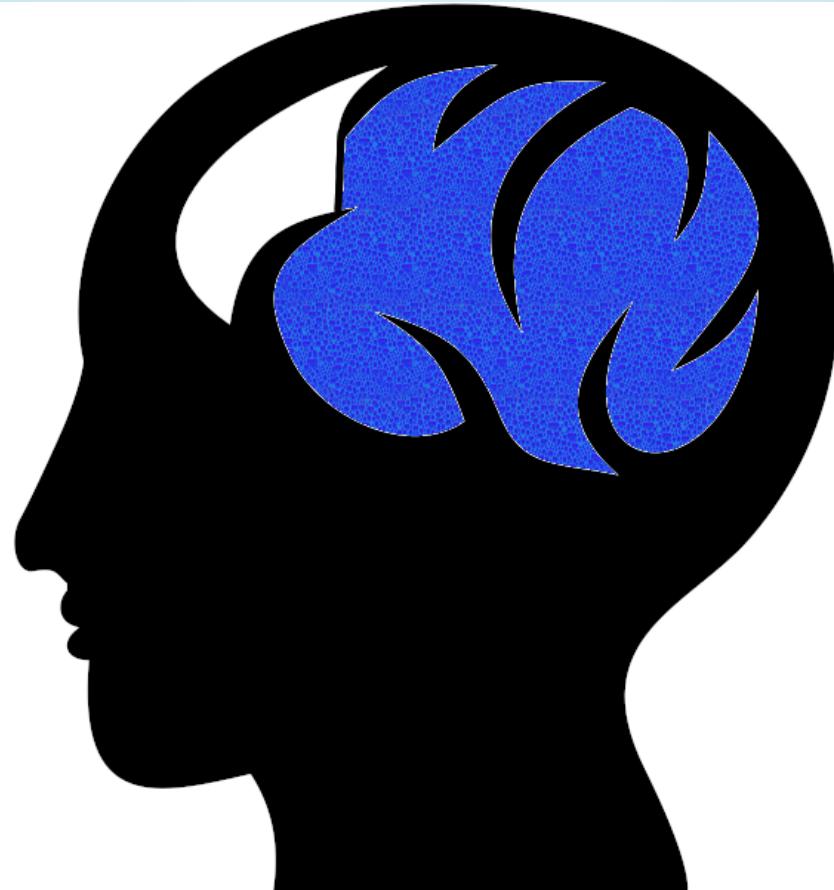
What's so special about these things?

"Though some objects, by the structure of the mind, be naturally calculated to give pleasure, it is not to be expected, that in every individual the pleasure will be equally felt."

"The organs of internal sensation are seldom so perfect as to allow the general principles their full play, and produce a feeling correspondent to those principles. They either labour under some defect, or are vitiated by some disorder; and by that means, excite a sentiment, which may be pronounced erroneous."







Upshots

1. Critics give afford us a *standard of taste*
2. The minds of critics are thereby, in some sense, attuned to what's beautiful

In what sense?

Two options

1. beauty is such that it will systematically animate the minds of true critics
 - (the minds of critics are merely instruments that can measure what's beautiful)
2. beauty just is that which animates the minds of true critics
 - (if something does not animate the minds of critics, then it cannot be beautiful)

Either way

- We solve the problem of pure objectivity
 - something could adhere to golden ratio and be ugly (because it doesn't elicit the right sensations in the critics)
- So, whatever beauty is, it will be connected to subjectivity

Implications of Hume's account

1. What makes something beautiful is whether it elicits the right sensations in the true critics
2. We can recognize beauty by consulting the critics

Taking Stock

- Hume grounds judgments of taste in subjectivity
- It is unclear just what beauty is in the end
- But, whichever way we flesh this out, we solve the problem of pure objectivity

Today's Menu

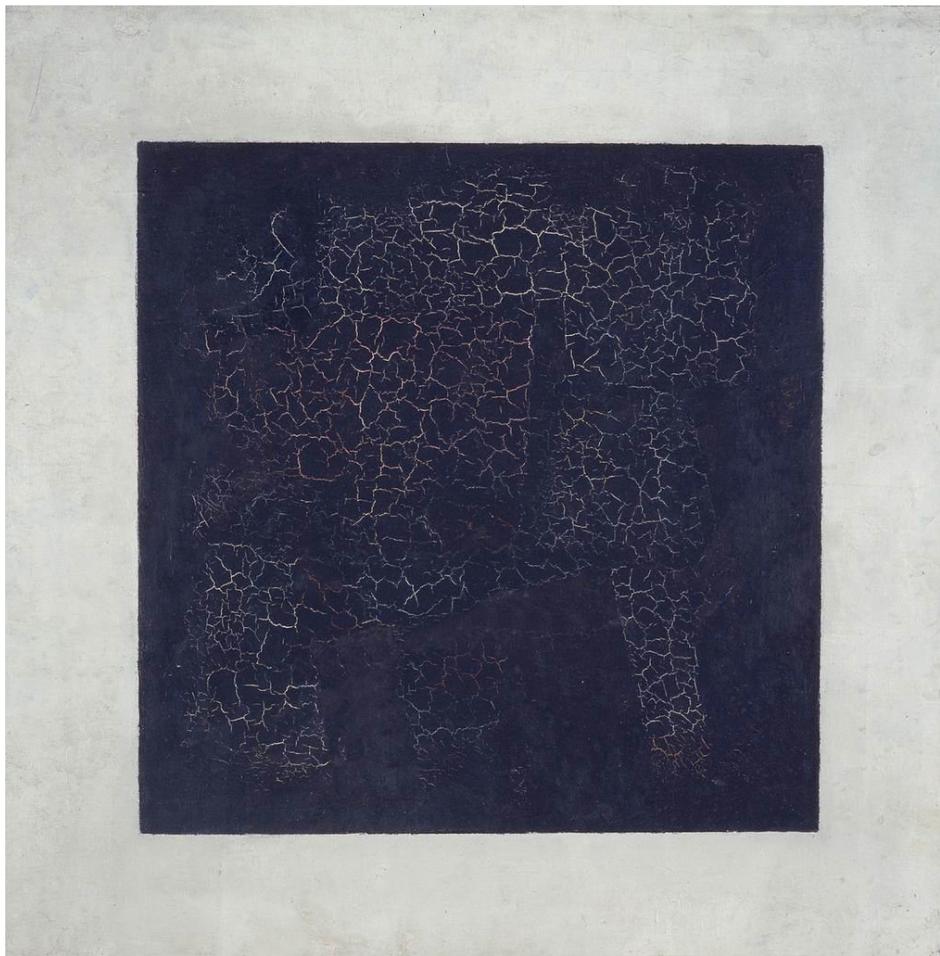
1. Aesthetic terms
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Aesthetic properties

Subjectivity, objects, and beauty

- With Kant and Hume, it's unclear what beauty *is*
- But, in any way, it is linked to subjectivity and to how objects elicit something in us
- Let's look a bit more at the object side of things

Back to Black... Square



Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square*

Disagreement

- Person 1: Black Square is beautiful
- Person 2: It's just ugly
- How can they solve this disagreement?

Presumably, person 1 can point to features of the artwork
that indicate it is beautiful

Non-aesthetic properties

- The painting measures 106.5 x 106.5 cm
- It's made mostly of oil on linen
- It has a black square in the middle of it with a white border around

Aesthetic properties

- It is bold
- profound
- radical
- oddly disturbing
- ...

Note that aesthetic properties depend on non-aesthetic properties (if the latter didn't exist, presumably the former wouldn't either)

Lesson 1: Non-aesthetic properties are partially responsible for causing in us the sensation that leads us to judge them as beautiful

Lesson 2: So, two works of art that are copies of each other in terms of their non-aesthetic properties will presumably elicit the same sensations in us -- and we will judge them as beautiful/ugly in a similar way

Lesson 3: Presumably, we could identify general rules that link arrangements of non-aesthetic properties to aesthetic ones

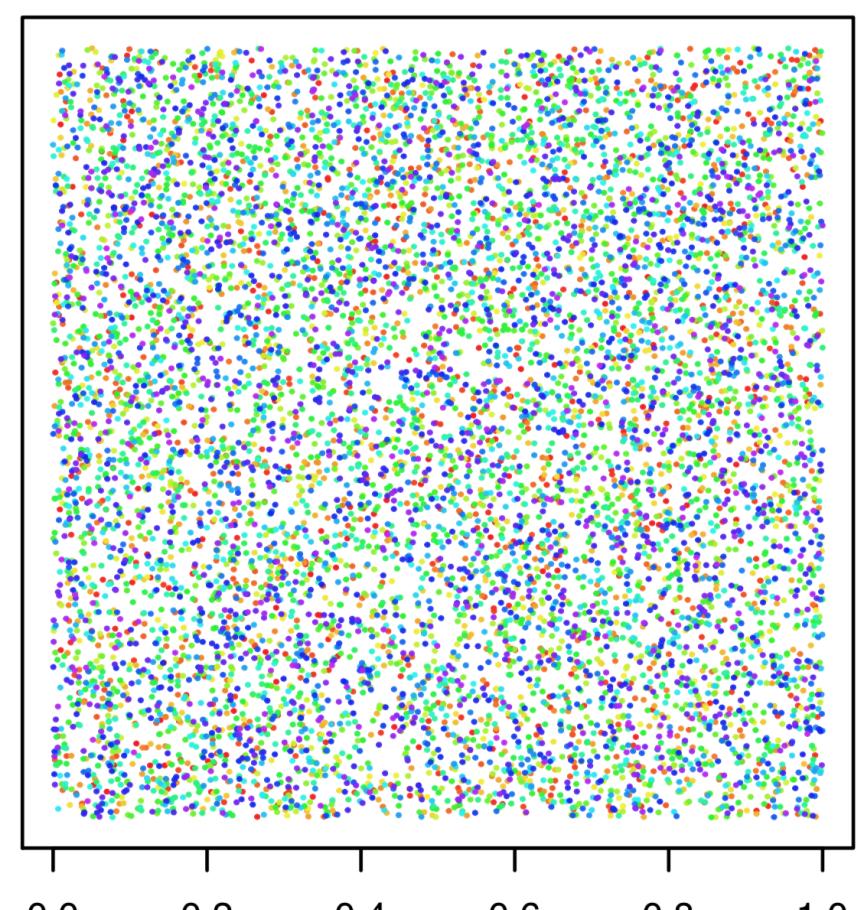
On lesson 3

- Musicians know how to use 'modes' (like locrian, lydian, or aeolian) to elicit certain feelings in people
- Similarly, visual artists know how to arrange colours so as to elicit certain emotions in their audience
- Video editors have a whole assortment of techniques for 'manipulating' the viewers
- And so on and so forth for many other art forms...

AI and art criticism

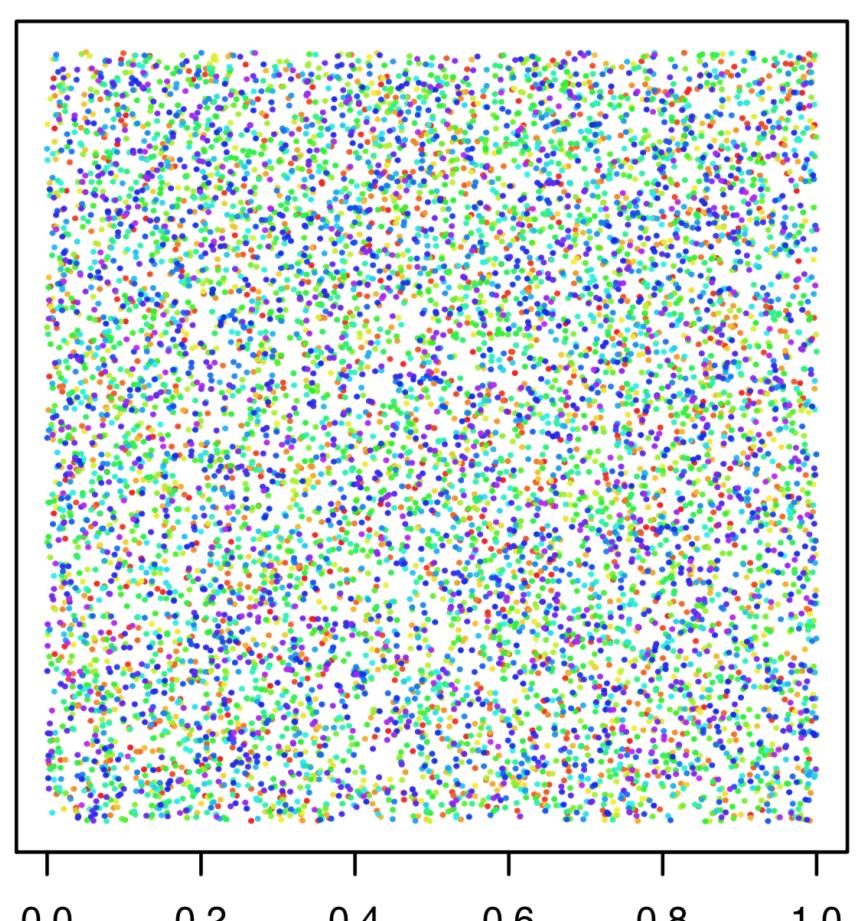
Statistical analysis w/ AI

- One thing that AI can do exceptionally well is draw patterns from large datasets
- It can do this 1000x faster than humans can
- Moreover, some AI can learn from their operations
 - Sometimes, they find patterns where no one expected to find them



AI Statistical analysis (contd.)

- These amazing powers of AI make them great for understanding how we operate
- From large amounts of really simple data, they can derive a reliable picture of what we will do
 - Including, what we will click and what will tend to give us pleasure



AI Statistics and Art

- What would happen if we gave AI the task of finding patterns in the non-aesthetic properties of what are considered to be great artworks?
- Possibly, it would find out which arrangements of these properties are responsible for eliciting sensations of beauty in us
- Would the AI be then able to find some unwritten rules of art?

Example

- The song is in aeolian, so it will be easy-listening
- It uses few dominant chords in order to not produce tension
- It 'resolves' all these tensions quite quickly
- ...



If so...

- AI could presumably be the best art critic
- In line with Hume's proposal, the AI would presumably be less prejudiced, more capable of discernment, and have loads and loads of experience
- In line with Kant's proposal, it would be able to look at art in a disinterested way

Some things to consider

- Possibly, AI may lack the 'Strong sense' that Hume talks about
- Also, maybe AI would have a hard time with *new* art forms
- And maybe one could say that *having* the sensation is crucial for judgments of taste

Taking stock

- Aesthetic vs Non-aesthetic properties
- AI as powerful statistical machines
- AI as the best art critic?

End