A Study of the Adequacy of the Post-Functional Definitions of Art

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Abstract

In this thesis, I investigate the adequacy of post-functional definitions of art, including institutional, historical, disjunctive and buck-passing definitions. I evaluate these definitions with respect to their extensional adequacy, intensional adequacy, and informativeness.

Philosophers of art have not always made a clear distinction between definitions of art and theories of art. I argue that this distinction is important. A definition of art must provide the means to distinguish artworks from non-artworks. In contrast, a theory of art need not do this, but it should be informative about such matters as the production or reception of artworks. To clarify what a definition is, I explain the concept of *essence* and from there, investigate various accounts of *essentialism* and *anti-essentialism* about art.

I conclude that none of the definitions of art so far proposed are adequate. However, I argue that we do not in fact need a definition of art. *Theories* of art are potentially of considerably more use than definitions.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Prehistoric humans made artefacts that are very similar to the objects that we call art today. *The Swimming Reindeer* (see Figure 1) is an elegant sculpture of two swimming reindeer skillfully carved out of the tusk of a mammoth that died around 13,000 years ago in an area of Europe that is France today.[1] Cave paintings in Europe date back more than 40,000 years, but they are not the earliest evidence of artefacts made for their symbolic and aesthetic significance. Modern homo sapiens appeared about 160,000 BP and archeologists have discovered artefacts such as The Venus of Tan-Tan that were probably made by our homo erectus cousins, long before modern homo sapiens.[2] There is widespread evidence, in South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia, of the practice of making things with aesthetic and symbolic functions in prehistoric times. Music and dance are universal among humans and are probably the oldest art forms. Different tribes from different races in different continents have practices and rituals bound to their identity that can be included under the umbrella term 'art'.

Today, artworks do not only influence those of us who go to galleries, museums, or theatres. What we wear, the illustrations in children's books, the stories that play a part in our upbringing, religious rituals, weddings, urban design, TV shows, and many other things are heavily influenced by artists. Art plays a crucial role even in the lives of those who are not interested in it. As Oscar Wilde says: "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates life."[3] In an essay entitled "What is art?" Leo Tolstoy, another prominent 19th-century thinker, tries to

[1] Sieveking, Ann. *A catalogue of Palaeolithic art in the British Museum*. Vol. 151. Trustees of the British Museum, 1987. (550)
[2] Bednarik, Robert G. "A figurine from the African Acheulian." *Current Anthropology* 44, no. 3 (2003): 405-413.
[3] Wilde, Oscar. "The Decay of Lying: A Dialogue." *The Nineteenth Century and after: a monthly review* 25, no. 143 (1889): 35-56.

explain not only what art is but what art should be, dismissing many of the bourgeois ballet and theatre conventions of his time on the grounds that they are detached from the lives that most people live.[4]

Figure 1: *The Swimming Reindeer*. The British Museum. Palart.550

Compared to some of the classic questions in philosophy, such as 'What is knowledge?' or 'What is justice?', the question of 'What is art?' may have been less pressing for philosophers. Some argue that ancient Greek and Medieval philosophers did not care much about categorising a set of art forms such as music, writing and performing poetry and drama, painting, and sculpting.[5] Yet they sometimes distinguished these activities from similar practices that require technique or skill, such as sailing or engineering; an example is

[4] Tolstoy, Leo. *What is art?* Standard Ebooks, 2021.
[5] Kristeller, Paul Oskar. "The modern system of the arts: A study in the history of aesthetics part I." *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1951) p.509.

in *Ion* when Socrates talks about poetry, sculpture, painting, and music.[6] Nonetheless, definitions of art are fairly new and cannot be seen before the modern era.

The making of artworks is universal, and perhaps this universality encouraged modern thinkers to define art with reference to functions such as causing aesthetic experience, which is pervasive among us. There are several entangled problems related to the project of defining art. Many aestheticians agree on the subject of the debate; they strive to answer one question: 'What is art?' Some of them believe that this question should be answered with a definition, whereas others doubt that a definition can be useful or that it is even possible. Among those who answer the question with a definition, some believe that art has an essence, and some do not. Among the ones who argue against a definition of art, some propose methods for identifying art, and some do not. Yet others argue that 'What is art?' is the wrong question and try to reformulate the question. This thesis examines the adequacy of the notable definitions of art that have been provided in the past 70 years or so. Aside from definitions, I will discuss some alternative methods of art identification proposed by contemporary philosophers of art.

In this chapter, I explain and contextualise the main problem of my research. I will draw on insights from the philosophy of language and metaphysics, specifically with regard to conceptual distinctions, such as the distinction between different kinds of definitional adequacy and its relation to concepts such as essence and anti-essentialism. I explain what I mean by extension, intension, being informative, and post-functional definitions of art. I will try to encapsulate the historical background of the problem and provide clues to its significance. In the last section of this chapter, I will display a schematic summary of all chapters so the reader has a mental map of where this is going.

1.1. EXTENSIONAL AND INTENSIONAL ADEQUACY

Before considering any of the definitions of art, it is necessary to take a step back and first ask: What makes for a good definition of art? It may seem straightforward to test the adequacy of definitions of art. However, we can assess the adequacy of a definition

[6] Cooper, John M., and Douglas S. Hutchinson, eds. *Plato: Complete Works*. Hackett Publishing, 1997. 532d-533c.

according to different criteria. To clarify what I mean by an adequate definition, I use a distinction from modern logic and semantics: the distinction between extensional adequacy and intentional adequacy. To understand the difference between these two adequacies one needs to differentiate between *essential* and *accidental* properties of objects. The contrast between essential and accidental properties can be expressed in different ways, but it is usually explained in modal terms. A property is essential for an object if the object must have it to exist and a property is accidental for an object if it just happens to belong to an object. In other words, essential properties are necessary but accidental properties are merely contingent. This is what Ishii and Atkins call the 'modal characterization of essential and accidental properties' which, as they explain, has been widely used in analytic philosophy: "A modal characterization of the distinction between essential and accidental properties is taken for granted in nearly all work in analytic metaphysics in the latter half of the 20th century."[7] This Modal distinction can also be expressed in terms of possible worlds. Thus, we can say that an essential property exists in the object in every possible world, and an accidental property belongs to the object in some possible worlds but not in others.

On the basis of the distinction between essential and accidental properties, we can explain extensional and intensional adequacy as follows: "A definition is extensionally adequate iff there are no actual counterexamples to it; it is intensionally adequate iff there are no possible counterexamples to it." [8] Note that intensional adequacy is stricter than extensional adequacy. Intensional adequacy asks whether a definition identifies the essential rather than merely the contingent properties of what is being defined. Therefore, a definition may be extensionally adequate but not intensionally so, but it cannot be the other way around. Other adequacies could be taken into account, but I limit my research to these two adequacies.[9]

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[7] Robertson Ishii, Teresa and Philip Atkins, "Essential vs. Accidental Properties", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

[8] Gupta, Anil, "Definitions", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

[9]. For example, one can consider the sense-adequacy of a definition, which is even stricter than intensional adequacy:

> Sense of an expression is that which one grasps when one fully understands the expression. Sameness of sense implies sameness of intension, but expressions with the same intension—for example, 'prime number between 6 and 10' and 'identical to 7'—may differ in sense. The concepts needed to fully grasp 'identical to 7' are not the same as those needed to fully grasp 'prime number between 6 and 10'; hence, the two expressions express different senses. The notion of sense, it must be said, is not as clear as that of extension and intension. (Gupta, Anil. *Truth, meaning, experience*. OUP USA, 2011. p. 60.)

To appreciate my discussion of definitions of art, it is critical to understand this distinction and note that a definition can be extensionally adequate without identifying the essence of what is being defined. For example, suppose it happened that gold was the only yellow metal in the world. In that case, the definition 'Gold is a yellow metal' would happen to be extensionally adequate, but it would not be essentially so. A definition of gold that is intensionally adequate is expected to explain the subatomic structure of gold – that is, to tell us about the essential properties of gold. The ideal definition of gold will refer to the necessary conditions of being gold rather than merely the contingent ones.

In addition to extensional and intensional adequacy, we expect a definition to be informative. An informative definition is practically applicable, which means that, amongst other things, it is useful in identifying the instances of what is being defined and in settling controversies over them. We may consider it poetic if someone defines 'human being' as 'the ethereal essence of the universe'. However, this definition is not an informative one: the definition is more obscure than what is being defined. Being informative is often explicitly stated or implicitly taken to be a criterion of an adequate definition. For example, Dominic Lopes counts two criteria for an adequate definition of art. The first condition is being "viable", which he describes as having the ability to deal with counterexamples.[10] The second condition is being informative, which he explains by referring to Patrick Maynard: "to explain phenomena in clear terms, to situate them within wider contexts, to solve old problems, to match the distinctions we observe and the tendencies we exhibit, and to begin to tell us why [the phenomena] should be so important to us"[11]. As I discuss in more detail in the following section, a definition that satisfies the two criteria of extensional adequacy and informativeness and, in addition, is essence revealing (intensionally adequate) is generally referred to as a 'real definition' in the philosophical literature. In what follows, I briefly explain the terms 'essence' and 'real definition' as my choice of terminology is heavily influenced by discussions about these concepts.

I will not be dealing with sense adequacy.

[10] Lopes, Dominic. *Beyond Art*. Oxford University Press, 2014. p.15.

[11] Maynard, Patrick. *The engine of visualization: thinking through photography*. Cornell University Press, 2000. p.xiv.

1.2. ESSENCE AND REAL DEFINITIONS

Definitions are of various types and serve different purposes. Ideally, a definition gives an explanation of an entity, using terms and concepts that are clear and precise. Some definitions may function as a reference to resolve disagreements, such as the definition of a 'party' or 'goods' in a sales contract. Some definitions are used to classify certain kinds and provide cues to identify them; for example, the category of 'marine mammal' in biology is of this kind, and the extension of the term includes dolphins, whales, seals, and so on which are mammals that spend most of their lives in oceans. The word 'definition' comes from the Latin word *definitionem*, which means boundary or limit. One can say that when we seek a definition of X, we are looking for a set of boundaries between X and other things.

The attempt to seek boundaries through the use of arguments is famously attributed to Socrates, the Ancient Greek philosopher who was sentenced to death as a result of his persistence in this very quest. Thanks to the iconic portrayal of him by his students Plato and Xenophon, Socrates is often considered the founding father of Western philosophy. He would frequently show up in places where young men from wealthy families, such as Plato and Xenophon, would gather around him and where he would engage them in lengthy conversations that often involved giving definitions. It is through the works of these students that we have come to associate the Socratic dialogue with providing and revising definitions in the light of reason. According to Plato, Socrates recommends to his students to put good arguments and truth above everything, including himself.[12] Aristotle, Plato's student, is probably the most influential thinker when it comes to definitions. In what follows I will briefly explain how Aristotle's view of definition and essence has influenced the philosophical practice of defining things from ancient times to contemporary philosophy.

We learn from Aristotle that there is a type of definition that identifies the essence of what is being defined. As Bertrand Russell puts it, for Aristotle, "[t]he 'essence' of a thing appears to have meant 'those of its properties which it cannot change without losing its identity.'"[13] Aristotle is particularly interested in essence-revealing definitions, which he calls immediate definitions. He believes that immediate definitions causally explain the item

[12] Plato, *Phaedo*, 91b-c, Translated by Jowett, Benjamin. United States: Viking Press, 1966.
[13] Denonn, Lester E., and Robert E. Egner. *The basic writings of Bertrand Russell*. 2001, 255.

being defined.[14] This is a type of definition that is constructed by adding the *differentia* to a *genus*. Aristotle defined humankind as 'the rational animal' by the same method. Animal is the genus of humankind, and what makes humans different from other animals is their ability to think rationally. For Aristotle, the genus and differentia are prior to the species, which is why they provide essential definitions. Aristotle asserts that:

> …a correct definition must define a thing through its genus and its differentiae, and these belong to the order of things which are without qualification more intelligible than, and prior to, the species. For destroy the genus and differentia, and the species too is destroyed, so that these are prior to the species.[15]

Note that Aristotle's ontology, logic, and epistemology are intertwined. When discussing the conditions of an adequate definition and the causes of species, he is developing a method based on experience and observation to discover the essence of things such as natural kinds. For Aristotle, the cause and the essence go hand in hand. Therefore, immediate definitions state the cause of what is being defined as well as the essence of it. He emphasises that: "The cause of what it is to be something is certainly the essence."[16] He limits the scope of immediate definitions to a particular type of thing, which he calls 'simple items.'[17] In other words, not every entity has an essence that can be discovered by an immediate definition.

This method of defining would not be as influential as it is without Porphyry, a Neoplatonic thinker who lived about six centuries after Aristotle. Porphyry of Tyre wrote a short essay in which he enumerated and explained the five predicates: genus, species, difference, property, and accident. His essay, entitled *The Isagoge* (or "Introduction to Aristotle's Categories"), has shaped our understanding of definition and essence. Its Latin and Arabic translations were taught in a great many *madrasas* and *studia generalia* during the Middle Ages. As Jonathan Barnes points out: "For a thousand years and more, Porphyry's *Introduction* was every student's first text in philosophy."[18] *The Isagoge* is still a

[14] Deslauriers, Marguerite. *Aristotle on definition*. Brill, 2007. pp. 2-3.
[15] *Barnes, Jonathan, ed. Complete works of Aristotle, volume 1: The revised Oxford translation. Vol. 1. Princeton University Press, 1984*, (6.4 141b27–30).
[16] Ibid. p. 93.
[17] Ibid. p. 18.
[18] Barnes, Jonathan, ed. *Porphyry introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2006. p. ix.

popular text among Christian and Muslim theologians and anyone interested in medieval logic.

There are ways to define things other than by identifying their essence. We may define gold as 'a yellow and malleable precious metal.' This is not an immediate definition because yellow, malleable, and precious are not essential characteristics of gold, even though they are permanent characteristics. In this passage, Porphyry explains that accidental properties can be permanent or inseparable:

> Accidents are items which come and go without the destruction of their subjects. They are divided into two: some are separable and some inseparable. Sleeping is a separable accident, whereas being black is an inseparable accident for ravens.[19]

What Aristotle calls an 'immediate' definition is more commonly referred to as a 'real definition' by other philosophers and distinguished from a 'nominal definition'. John Locke, an Enlightenment thinker, holds that nominal essence is an abstract idea made of observable qualities of a thing that is used for classifying it, as opposed to real essence, that is, the structure behind or under those observable qualities. As he put it:

> Thus, a figure including a space between three lines, is the real as well as nominal essence of a triangle; it being not only the abstract idea to which the general name is annexed, but the very essentia or being of the thing itself; that foundation from which all its properties flow, and to which they are all inseparably annexed. But it is far otherwise concerning that parcel of matter which makes the ring on my finger; wherein these two essences are apparently different. For, it is the real constitution of its insensible parts, on which depend all those properties of colour, weight, fusibility, fixedness, &c., which are to be found in it; which constitution know not, and so, having no particular idea of, having no name that is the sign of it. But yet it is its colour, weight, fusibility, fixedness, &c., which makes it to be gold, or gives it a right to that name, which is therefore its nominal essence.[20]

[19] Ibid. p. 12.
[20] Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* by John Locke (First published 1690), The Pennsylvania State University, *Electronic Classics Series*, Jim Manis, Faculty Editor, Hazleton. (1999). pp. 404-405

Locke, a scholar of philosophy with a deep knowledge of Medieval philosophy, tries to revise traditional concepts of scholastic philosophy, such as essence and substance, in the light of his empiricism. Locke claims that we do not have access to real essences except in the case of mathematics and ethics. However, in the case of natural philosophy, only nominal essences are the subject of the study. As Jan-Erik Jones explains: "According to Locke, in mathematics and morality the nominal and real essences are the same. ... In the case of substances, however, the real and nominal essences are always different, and so there is no possible human science of substances."[21]

Some philosophers consider dictionary definitions to be nominal because they give us an idea about the meaning of the defined words. For example, Stephen Davies writes:

> There is a difference between these two questions: "What is gold?" and "What is the meaning of 'gold'?" The former asks directly, as it were, about what makes something gold, whereas the latter asks about a linguistic item, the name "gold". The first asks about gold's *real* essence and the second about its *nominal* essence.[22]

Although he adopts Lockean terminology, it is important to note that Davies means something different than what Locke meant by these terms. According to Davies, "What falls under a humanly invented conceptual category possesses a nominal, not a real, essence."[23] He thinks that art is something in between because it has roots in our natural evolutionary preferences, while also being a category invented by humans.

Not only is Davies' use of the nominal/real distinction different from what Locke means by these terms, it is also not in tandem with our understanding of meaning and essence in contemporary metaphysics. Tying nominal essence to meaning, as Davies does, and contrasting it with the real essence, may conflict with our understanding of intension in modern metaphysics, which is closely bound to both the (real) essence and meaning of a concept. If Davies cares to explore the consequences and implications of adopting a Lockean terminology, he must go down a whole new epistemological rabbit hole. As far as I am concerned, the real/nominal terminology is not helpful in appreciating the essence/accident

[21] Jones, Jan-Erik, "Locke on Real Essence", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)
[22] Davies, Stephen. *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*. Clarendon Press, 2007. p. 23.
[23] Ibid. p. 25

distinction or applying the intension/extension distinction. I will avoid these problems by utilizing the intension/extension distinction, which has become standard terminology in the philosophy of language, as well as the essential/accidental distinction, which is widely used in contemporary metaphysics.

After this short introduction to the concept of essence, it is worthwhile to briefly explain essentialism in contemporary philosophy. Essentialism has been frowned upon by many scholars in the 20th century in both analytic and continental traditions of philosophy. This is due, in part, to the replacement of Scholastic logic with Mathematical logic, and to what is generally referred to as 'the *linguistic turn'.* Mathematical logic or formal logic replaces its Scholastic predecessor in the 19th century through the works of great logicians and mathematicians such as George Boole and Gottlob Frege. *Begriffsschrift* (1879) by Frege is a landmark in the development of logic. In analytic philosophy, the linguistic turn can be dated back to Frege, but there is a general agreement that it is significantly influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein. As Glock and Kalhat note, the linguistic turn can be described as a reconsideration of the role of philosophy in the body of human knowledge:

> 'the linguistic turn' refers to a radical reconception of the nature of philosophy and its methods, according to which philosophy is neither an empirical science nor a supraempirical enquiry into the essential features of reality; instead, it is an a priori conceptual discipline which aims to elucidate the complex interrelationships among philosophically relevant concepts, as embodied in established linguistic usage, and by doing so dispel conceptual confusions and solve philosophical problems.[24]

As a result, in the early 20th century the philosophy of language became the keynote of some philosophical schools, such as The Vienna Circle. Moreover, the study of ordinary language became one of the main topics of research among analytic philosophers who were, among other things, influenced by Wittgenstein's anti-essentialist approach in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Therefore, it is not surprising that many progressive philosophers of the time did not show an interest in the study of essence. For example, here is how Bertrand Russell approaches the subject:

[24] Glock, Hans-Johann and Kalhat, Javier "Linguistic turn". *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Taylor and Francis. (2018).

> The notion of essence is an intimate part of every philosophy subsequent to Aristotle, until we come to modern times. It is, in my opinion, a hopelessly muddle-headed notion. … The question is purely linguistic: a word may have an essence, but a thing cannot.[25]

This linguistic framing can also be seen in the continental tradition due to a similar linguistic turn that led to new ways of thinking, such as structuralism, hermeneutics, and semiotics. Structuralist and post-structuralist movements leave little space for essentialist views. Some of their central ideas stem from the Saussurean model, in which meanings are relational and dependent upon structures rather than referential. Post-structuralist intellectuals such as Jacques Derrida popularised the idea of an indefinite web of signifiers with no referent outside of language, sometimes referred to as the fluidity of signifiers. Thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes have been popular and influential in Asia and South America; their work has been translated from French into Spanish, Arabic, Persian, Chinese, Korean, and many other languages. Of course, the effects of post-structuralism are not limited to the non-English world. Schools of thought such as structuralism, semiotics, and hermeneutics greatly impacted the research in Anglo-American departments of humanities, such as media studies, gender studies, social sciences, art studies, and so on.

Nevertheless, despite the influence of the linguistic turn and anti-essentialism on these movements, the notions of essence and accident have remained an important focus of metaphysics in the analytic tradition, especially from the second half of the 20th century and onwards. In particular, essentialism finds a new expression in the work of Anglo-American externalists such as Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam. Externalism is a view about the reference of some words and their meaning. Externalists believe that some meanings are determined by the external state of affairs outside our minds. Kripke and Putnam assert that essentialism is at least true about natural kinds and proper names.[26] Their ideas, coupled with

[25] Denonn, Lester E., and Robert E. Egner. *The basic writings of Bertrand Russell*. Routledge. 2001, 255.

[26] For an example see Kripke, Saul A. "Naming and necessity." In *Semantics of natural language*, pp. 253-355. Springer, Dordrecht, 1972. Lecture III.

possible worlds semantics, have opened new lines of inquiry, such as *intensional logic*.[27] According to these externalists, a real definition of gold – a chemical element with the atomic number 79 – identifies gold's essence, which does not change in any possible world.

It is worth noting that real definitions, such as the one provided for gold by physicists, may not be helpful for all occasions. For instance, I might not have the theoretical background in subatomic physics to understand the implications of an element having 79 protons and 79 electrons. However, I can comfortably use a 'good-enough' definition of gold in ordinary situations; this is compatible with my belief that the natural structure of gold is not dependent on my understanding of it.

Now, a key question is whether artworks can have a common essence. We can see from the literature on defining art that some philosophers think the answer is yes. As I will discuss in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, the goal of a number of ambitious philosophers such as Arthur Danto and Jerrold Levinson has been to deliver a real definition. In other words, they aim to provide a definition of art that is both extensionally and intensionally adequate. A definition of art is extensionally adequate if and only if it covers all and only works of art, including, for example, Johannes Vermeer's paintings, the Sistine Chapel, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and so on. A definition of art that aspires to be intensionally adequate should reveal the essence of art. An essence-revealing definition of art is expected to explain what constitutes a work of art. If an artwork possesses all the necessary and sufficient conditions specified in the definition, it must be and remain an artwork in every possible world.

Another possible answer to the question of whether artworks have a common essence, for philosophers who engage in the project of defining art, is 'no'. I call these philosophers anti-essentialist. Anti-essentialists who deny the need for a definition to identify art are discussed as radical anti-essentialists in Chapter 2. Anti-essentialists who hold that we need a definition to identify art are discussed in Chapter 5 (along with Berys Gaut, whose view is more complex). In Chapter 4, I discuss Noël Carroll's view: Carroll answers the question with some sort of 'I don't know' but proposes a method for the identification of art.

[27] For example, see Lewis, David K. *On the plurality of worlds*. Vol. 322. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986. And his "Counterpart theory and quantified modal logic." *the Journal of Philosophy* 65, no. 5 (1968): 113-126.

1.3. DEFINITION AND THEORY

Philosophers often use 'theory of art' and 'definition of art' interchangeably. This has been the cause of many misunderstandings that can be avoided by making a clear distinction between a theory and a definition at the outset. I argue that a definition of art and a theory of art are related but different. As I have explained, a definition of art is usually considered to be an effort to identify common characteristics among all works of art in a way that enables us to distinguish art from other things. As Stephen Davies puts it, "A successful definition must specify a set of properties all and only artworks possess and in virtue of which they are artworks".[28] In contrast to a definition, a theory of art does not necessarily aim to identify art; however, it usually has something to say about the production or appreciation of art. There are numerous theories of art that are not definitions. To name a few examples, the Marxist theory of art, post-colonial theory of art, and psychoanalytic theory of art are established theories in the literature of art criticism.

Some theories of art do suggest a particular way of defining art. Aesthetic theories of art – theories that emphasise the way in which artworks generate aesthetic experiences in audiences - are a good example of this sort. However, aesthetic theories of art can be developed and employed without getting involved in the project of defining art. Monroe Beardsley famously developed a full-fledged aesthetic theory of art years before proposing a definition in his later works.[29] Furthermore, a commitment to a particular theory of art does not necessarily commit one to the corresponding definition of art. For example, an aesthetician can consistently develop a theory that evaluates artworks based on their aesthetic properties, but without providing an aesthetic definition of art. In short, then, a definition of art is not a necessary part of a theory of art.

Some theorists are interested in art in general, and others are interested in particular art forms, for example, literature, music, or painting. Two considerations need to be noted about a theory of art/artform and a definition of art/artform. First, there is a difference between a theory of art in general and a theory of a specific art form. For example, a feminist theory of

[28] Davies, Stephen. *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*. Clarendon Press, 2007, 31.
[29] He offers a definition of art here: Beardsley, Monroe C. "The Aesthetic Point of View, ed. Michael J. Wreen and Donald M. Callen." (1982): p299.

literature is different from a feminist theory of art, which has a much wider scope. As a matter of fact, feminist theoreticians rarely preoccupy themselves with discussing the arts in general. Instead, feminist thinkers usually focus on certain art forms, such as literature or on certain bodies of works, such as Jane Austen's novels.[30]

Second, a theory of art as well as a theory of an art form can be an attempt to understand what we already identify as art or art forms, rather than providing a method for identifying artworks or for identifying works that belong to a particular art form. Indeed, theories of art rarely try to define their subjects. A post-colonial theory of visual art, for example, does not need to provide a definition of visual art. A feminist theory of literature, to give another example, does not need to answer the question, 'What is literature?' to draw our attention to the passive role of women in some genres of literature.

In my view, a theory of art should help us understand something about the practice of artmaking and the appreciation of artworks.[31] In other words, it should improve our understanding of the production and reception processes of art. This can be at the collective level, such as explaining the social and historical elements that have a role in producing some artworks. Theories of art are not expected to help us identify works of art. For example, we do not expect a book about dance theory to assist us in identifying samples of dance. However, we do expect it to inform us about the history of dance, choreography (its design and production), and how we are supposed to understand, interpret, and appreciate dance (its reception). By contrast, a definition of art need not have any bearing on the production or reception of artworks. Instead, a definition of art is expected to distinguish samples of art from non-arts; in other words, a definition is expected to be extensionally adequate.

At this point one might wonder: if a theory of art and a definition of art are two separate things, why have they been used interchangeably by aestheticians? I think this has happened partly because the traditional definitions of art, such as the aesthetic definitions of art, were highly ambitious and aimed at defining art by its essence. The idea was that once we know the essence of art, we can explain everything important about art. As Noël Carroll explains:

[30] For example see: Sulloway, Alison G. *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

[31] Similarly, Zangwill argues that a theory of art should have something to say about interpreting art. See: Zangwill, Nick. "Groundrules in the Philosophy of Art." *Philosophy* 70, no. 274 (1995): 533-544. pp. 536-538.

> Now it seems to me that the reason all these questions – ranging from "How do we tell something is art?" to "What is the peculiar value of art?" – have been lumped together is that there is an underlying philosophical dream such that, ideally, all the relevant answers in this neighborhood should fit into a tidy theoretical package. ... there is the expectation that we shall be able to say why art is important, even uniquely important, in the course of defining art.[32]

Today, it is not problematic if one theorises about art without providing a definition. However, the situation was different for some aestheticians at the dawn of the 20th century, with some thinkers believing that a definition of art is essential to any art theory or art criticism. Clive Bell, one of the best-known art critics and aestheticians of that time, seems to be looking for such a definition when he writes: "All works of visual art have some common quality, or when we speak of 'works of art' we gibber".[33]

Theorists like Bell wanted to hit two (or maybe more!) birds with one stone. The idea was that if we can identify the function shared by all works of art and then use it to define art, we can also provide a theory about the value of all artworks based on that how well they perform this function. They thought of this definition as a backbone that helps us understand, appreciate, and interpret artworks better. That is why functional definitions also suggest a theory for the evaluation of art. Representational, expressive, and aesthetic definitions of art are closely connected to corresponding theories of art that encourage us to appreciate and evaluate artworks in a specific way. For example, according to a definition of art that considers the imitation of nature as the main function of art, a highly skilful painter should be able to imitate her subject with more precision and detail than a less skilful painter. This approach is attractive, because if the definition were to succeed, many problems of aesthetics and art criticism would be solved or dissolved. Although this is not something philosophers of art usually do, I try to maintain this distinction between a theory and a definition throughout this research.

[32] Carroll, Noël. "Identifying art" in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. p. 78
[33] Bell, Clive. *Art*. United Kingdom: Stokes, 1914. p.16.

1.4. THE DESCRIPTIVE AND EVALUATIVE SENSES OF ART

The term art or artwork can be used in an evaluative manner; this means we can say something is a work of art when it is not an actual example of art. For example, looking at a bird's nest, one might say: "It is a work of art!" or the same can be said about a car. This implies that some objects that are not artworks may have artistic characteristics that we find valuable, such as aesthetic design or being intricate and elaborate.

Furthermore, we can employ the word 'art' to evaluate an artwork. It is an example of the use of art in an evaluative sense if, after watching a play in a theatre, one says: "This was not art!". The utterer is most probably aware that a play is a form of performance art usually executed in a theatre, so by saying, "This was not art!" they are indicating their disapproval of the play and suggesting that it was not a good play. Also, one can utter similar sentences about art forms in an evaluative manner; examples are: "This is not music" or "That was a movie, not a film!".

When we are trying to define art, are we looking for a definition of art in the evaluative or descriptive sense? A definition of art in the evaluative sense may ignore or exclude mediocre or bad art and only take into account works of art that are good from an artistic point of view. Those who try to define art must include bad and mediocre art, otherwise, their definitions will certainly fall short of being adequate. As George Dickie explains:

> The term 'art' or 'work of art' is used in at least two senses: a classificatory sense and an evaluative sense. The first concerns the question of whether or not a given object is to be classified as a work of art. The classification of something as a work of art, however, does not determine that the thing is a good work of art. ... However, 'work of art' is sometimes used to make a positive evaluation of something. A painting or waterfall may be praised by saying that it is a work of art. It is easy to see that "This painting is a work of art" is an evaluation and not classification because the first two words in the sentence ('This painting') alone presuppose that the object being referred to must be classified as a work of art.[34]

[34] Dickie, George. "Aesthetics; an introduction." *Mind* 83, no. 331 (1974). p 43. Also see Weitz, Morris. "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, no. 1 (1956), pp. 34-35.

Nonetheless, the classificatory sense of art is more complicated than Dickie assumes. The fact that an adequate definition of art must include bad and mediocre art does not imply that all paintings or drawings can qualify as works of art. Many people find it counterintuitive to claim that all paintings or drawings are works of art. There are certain drawings that we do not consider art, for example, the doodles I draw to while away the time at a boring meeting. It is the task of an adequate definition of art to explain which drawings are artistic ones, or which paintings are artistic paintings.

An intuitive temptation is to say that my doodles are not art because they lack value. This would suggest that the term 'art' is used in an evaluative sense and that art status has something to do with the value of the work in question. That is why some philosophers of art deny that the term art has a distinctive descriptive sense. For example, Gaut explains the matter with comparison to the notion of health:

> [S]omeone may be in good or bad health, just as art may be good or bad, but "health" is still an evaluative concept. So the mere fact that we can call some art good, and some bad, does not show that there is a distinct, classificatory sense of "art."[35]

I think Gaut's argument is related to an intuition about artworks that if something is art, it is valuable and attention-worthy. As Richard Wollheim puts it:

> [T]here is an interesting connection between being a work of art and being a good work of art – a connection, in other words, over and above that of the former being a presupposition of the latter. ... it seems a well-entrenched thought that reflection upon the nature of art has an important part to play in determining the standards by which works of art are evaluated.[36]

This view fits nicely with artworks that have practical use. Some vases, knives, swords, tools, and the like are considered works of art in light of their aesthetic properties. Therefore, when we say, "This vase is a work of art" we usually mean that it is exquisite and praiseworthy compared to other vases.

[35] Gaut, Berys. "'Art'as a Cluster Concept." *Theories of Art Today* (2000): p. 39.
[36] Wollheim, Richard. *Art and its Objects*. Cambridge University Press, 1980. p. 109

Related to the discussion above, I adopt four guiding principles for my research. First, the boundary between very bad artworks and objects that are not artworks is not clear, and it is not considered a defect for a definition of art to be vague in this area. Second, a definition of art cannot focus exclusively on the masterpieces in art history and should include works that are done in the same spirit but are not considered highly valuable. These works, for example, include artworks that are produced by students in art schools, kitsch artworks, or artworks that have some obvious flaws in them. Third, the classificatory sense of art does not include all music, all paintings, and so on. There can be pieces of music that are not art, there can be paintings that are not artworks, and so on. And fourth, a classificatory definition of art should provide an explanation for the failed attempts to create an artwork, for example, Duchamp's failed attempt to christen the Woolworth Building in New York as a work of art.[37]

A further complicating factor in the philosophical discussion of art is a lack of consensus about the scope of the term: does it refer only to what we might call "fine arts", or does it have broader scope? A work of fine art usually fits into a category such as paintings, drawings, music, dance, theatre, poetry and other related genres. This sort of artwork commonly aims to be exhibited and performed in galleries, concert halls, theatres, etc. What we might call "Art in general' has broader scope: it includes fine arts, but also covers instances of folk art, decorative art, and so on. In this broader sense, art is entrenched in everyday life and is related to our rituals, religion, magic, propaganda, etc., and objects with a practical function can be considered art. Philosophers of art do not always make it clear whether they are aiming to define fine art or "art in general", and this makes it harder to evaluate their definitions.

1.5. THE BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

So far, I have explained what I mean by 'definition' and considered the criteria for the adequacy of a definition. I have also explained the difference between a *theory* and a

[37] See Bonk, Ecke. "Marcel Duchamp: The Woolworth Building as Readymade, January 1916 (An Approximation)." *Grand Street*, no. 51, (1995) 165-175. Also see: Mag Uidhir, Christopher. "Failed-art and failed art-theory." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88, no. 3 (2010): 381-400.

definition of art, and the difference between an *evaluative* definition and a *classificatory* (or descriptive) definition of art. In this section I provide a brief overview of definitions of art from the beginning of the 20th century and explain the significance of the project of defining art. Since the central focus of my thesis is on the adequacy of post-functional definitions of art, I provide a classification of the definitions of art with the aim of clarifying what I mean by post-functional definitions.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, many German, English, French, and Russian intellectuals were interested in theorising the notion of 'beauty.' This was the era of aesthetic theories of art. As a result, a relatively new branch of philosophy was formed, which was subsequently called *aesthetics*. Leo Tolstoy was one of these thinkers. Apart from his well-known literary talents, he was a prominent linguist and knew Latin, English, French, and German. Tolstoy provides an excellent summary of aesthetic theories in his essay published in 1897, entitled *What Is Art?* He divides all theories about beauty into two main categories:

> The first is that beauty is something having an independent existence (existing in itself), that it is one of the manifestations of the absolutely Perfect, of the Idea, of the Spirit, of Will, or of God; the other is that beauty is a kind of pleasure received by us, not having personal advantage for its object. The first of these definitions was accepted by Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and the philosophising Frenchmen, Cousin, Jouffroy, Ravaisson, and others, not to enumerate the second-rate aesthetic philosophers. … The second view, that beauty is a certain kind of pleasure received by us, not having personal advantage for its aim, finds favour chiefly among the English aesthetic writers.[38]

Aesthetic theories of art have been prominent and influential since the beginning of the project of defining art. There are different variations of aesthetic theories of art. According to some aesthetic theories, the purpose of artworks is to bring about a state of mind referred to as an aesthetic experience and described by Immanuel Kant as 'disinterested delight'.[39] Some aesthetic theories focus on a wide variety of formal and non-formal characteristics. There are also representational aesthetic theories. Charles Batteux, an 18th century thinker, tries to

[38] Tolstoy, Leo. *What Is Art?*. Standard Ebooks, 2021. p.38.
[39] Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgment*. Hackett Publishing, 1987, (§32, 5:283).

define a subset of art forms consisting of music, poetry, painting, sculpture, and dance or the art of gesture. He refers to this group of art forms as the 'fine arts' and argues that they all represent *belle nature* (beautiful nature).[40] He combines a representational theory of art, founded more than two millennia ago in Ancient Greece, with an aesthetic theory that focuses on the beauty in nature. Tolstoy himself advocates the expression theory of art, according to which art aims to express and convey emotions or sentiments through a specific medium.

By the 20th century, an atmosphere of change and innovation in art circles and among aestheticians fueled the debate over the definition of art. Westerners had come into wider contact with tribal artworks and non-Western artefacts that did not fit in neatly with the idea of fine arts; some examples are African masks, Polynesian dance, Islamic mosaics, Japanese Kabuki, and East Asian puppet theatre. Additionally, modern technology affected existing art forms and created new ones. For example, photography and cinematography gave us highly precise visual imitations of nature. Now, machines can produce images more precise than the ones created by artists. Artists have always used the technologies available to them and were influenced by them. An example is the invention of etching and intaglio printmaking around the 15th century, which applied the engraving techniques of metal workers and goldsmiths' practices and was changed and influenced by the introduction of subsequent technologies, such as lithography and photography. However, the second half of the 20th century was unprecedented in providing new tools and equipment for developing styles and genres. For example, synthesisers and recording technologies continuously changed the scene and opportunities for musicians. For example, Hip-hop probably would not have been born without these technological advancements. Hip hop both influenced and was influenced by new media and techniques in other art forms, such as graffiti. Contemporary Graffiti became possible with the mass production of spray cans. Spray painting and hip-hop music accompanied break-dancing, creating a culture that challenged the mainstream notion of art and resulted in phenomena such as b-boying challenges (a form of competitive dance), DJing (playing existing recorded music for a live audience), and rapping (a musical form of vocal delivery).

[40] Batteux, Charles. *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*. Translated by James O. Young. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2015. p.3.

Furthermore, the avant-garde art of the 20th century is replete with revolutionary and unprecedented styles. Conceptual art has been exceptionally troublesome for art aestheticians and critics. As Nick Zangwill puts it: "Extensional inadequacy is seen as the ultimate in philosophical humiliation. It is because aestheticians are worried by their feelings of extensional inadequacy that the bogey of the avant-garde frightens them."[41] Many conceptual artworks are not aesthetically pleasing, and some are intentionally anti-aesthetic. More importantly, producing these works does not involve the execution of skills by the capable hands of a typical artist such as a painter or a musician. One possible response is to deny that these conceptual works are art, and, indeed, many art experts thought that these conceptual works did not deserve to be called 'art'. However, some were more sympathetic towards modern experimentation, and responded differently, by seeking a new definition of art.

These developments posed significant challenges to representational, aesthetic, and expressive definitions of art. Although there are important differences between these definitions, they all have in common that they define art in terms of a single function. Philosophers of art refer to representational, aesthetic, and expressive definitions of art as functional definitions, given that they identify a unifying function for all artworks. By the 1950s, the adequacy of all functional definitions was questioned by different thinkers s it became increasingly obvious that different artworks and art forms do not share a single purpose. As a result, a new type of definition was put forward, often referred to as procedural definitions of art. This terminology stems from Stephen Davies' *Definitions of Art* (1991), where he uses functional and procedural categories to classify definitions of art. He explains that functional definitions define artworks by a purpose or function, and procedural definitions define artworks by the context and procedures that lead to producing them. As he puts it: "Functional definitions give centrality to the necessary condition that works of art serve a purpose or purposes distinctive to art, whereas procedural definitions stress that they are created according to certain conventions and social practices."[42]

Among philosophers of art who criticise aesthetic definitions of art are anti-essentialists. Around the 1950s, some radical anti-essentialists wholeheartedly rejected all

[41] Zangwill, Nick. "Groundrules in the Philosophy of Art." *Philosophy* 70, no. 274 (1995): p. 533.
[42] Davies, Stephen. Functionalism and proceduralism. Art, definition of, 1998, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis. doi:10.4324/9780415249126-M006-1.

prior definitions of art; even more, they held that it is impossible to define art. They were influenced by the doctrines of Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein uses the notion of 'family resemblance' to explain how we amass certain things with multiple common features in a group. One of his well-known examples is the word 'game', which applies to various activities that do not share a single uniting feature. In contrast to essence, which unifies all members, there may be two members of a family resemblance group that have nothing in common: A may have something in common with B, which has something different in common with C, which has something in common with D, without A having anything in common with D.

Contrary to what anti-essentialists wanted, new definitions for art continued to be proposed through the second half of the 20th century, and they continue to be proposed to this day. I will not concentrate on functional definitions of art in this research, as a great deal has been said about them in the past 70 years. Although I do not examine these, it is important to note that aesthetic definitions did not disappear with the advent of procedural ones and are still popular among some philosophers of art.[43] My focus is on what I call post-functional definitions of art. The naming is for the obvious reason that they arose after functional definitions, from around 1960 until now; nonetheless, it is not just the temporal order that makes them post-functional, but the thought that the attempt to provide a functional definition is not going to succeed. I use this term to refer to a heterogeneous group of definitions, including institutional, historical, disjunctive, and buck-passing definitions of art. Despite their differences, one thing they all have in common is that they do not focus solely on the function of art to define it. In contrast to functional definitions, post-functional definitions pay more attention to the context of artworks, making them more resistant to counterexamples. Besides functional and procedural definitions, there are also hybrid definitions that combine some functional features with some procedural ones. In addition, there is the buck-passing theory of art, which I will explain shortly.

I can outline the scope of my thesis by saying that in it I investigate whether any of these post-functional definitions of art are extensionally and intensionally adequate. Also, one of my tasks is to point out when definitions of art fail to be informative. As I have

[43] Some examples are: Wilson, Daniel, *Artistic Value and Art's Definition*, The University of Auckland, 2015. Zangwill, Nick. *Aesthetic creation*. OUP Oxford, 2007.

explained, being informative in this context usually means being practically applicable and useful for distinguishing art from non-art. If a definition is extensionally adequate and informative, it can identify artworks when confusion arises about that matter. My hypothesis is that none of these definitions is adequate to this task. I further hypothesise that any useful work that is done by these definitions could better be done by a theory rather than a definition of art.

1.6. METHODOLOGY

A tremendous amount of research has been done on this subject without the kind of conceptual clarification that I intend to apply in this research. Hundreds of academic papers have been published about the definition of art, and many respond to others' objections. However, they rarely try to clarify what they mean by definition or essence, what sort of adequacy they are looking for, or even what sort of artworks and art forms they have in mind. As Kendall Walton puts it: "It is not at all clear that these words – 'What is art?' – express anything like a single question, to which competing answers are given, or whether philosophers proposing answers are even engaged in the same debate." [44] Therefore, investigating the adequacy of these definitions is not a simple task, as there is much confusion and disagreement about them. One task of this inquiry is to investigate these disagreements and make them more transparent.

It is important to propose plausible desiderata for definitions of art to avoid confusion and prevent debates about the subject in which the protagonists talk past each other. The consequences of taking a methodical course of inquiry can contribute to solving or dissolving some of the most important and lingering problems of contemporary aesthetics. To achieve this, I will focus on three main aspects of each definition: extensional adequacy, intentional adequacy, and informativeness. However, this is not easy, as the contributors to the project of defining art have different assumptions about what it is for a definition to be informative and what it is for it to be adequate.

[44] Walton, Kendalll. "Aesthetics-What? Why? and Wherefore?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 2 (2007): p.148.

Although I will not discuss his position in detail until Chapter 3, it is worth briefly mentioning George Dickie's attempt to provide a definition of art here, to illustrate how thinkers can have different assumptions about what a definition is supposed to do. Dickie gives an institutional definition of art, and after a series of objections admits that he never wanted to offer a 'real' definition of art. Carroll criticises Dickie's definition on the grounds that it is circular. But why does Carroll insist that a definition should not be circular? It is because we expect a definition to be informative, and arguably a circular definition cannot be informative. Dickie responds that 'circularity per se' should not count as a defect for definitions and some other aestheticians agree with him; as Gaut puts it: "…there is nothing amiss with circular accounts (nor even with circular definitions), provided they are informative."[45] Situations like this show how complicated the discussion about definitions can be and why we need conceptual clarifications such as the ones that I made to see progress in this debate.

My project does not require empirical methods such as polling the public or interviewing artists. I will use examples from art history to explain a point or support an argument, but I will not get involved in a particular case study. Although my project does not require conducting empirical investigations, it will take into account and make use of empirical studies such as those conducted by paleontologists, archeologists, and anthropologists.

Like most projects in philosophy, this research can be classified as armchair theorising. I work within the analytic tradition of philosophy. This mainly Anglophone tradition is distinguished from the continental tradition that is mostly Franco-German. Like most projects in analytical philosophy, my research is based on conceptual analysis, thought experiments, evaluation of premises, elucidation of presuppositions, identifying fallacies and logical inconsistencies, introducing counterexamples, and deductive reasoning. Instead of discovering and gathering new data, philosophers often hypothesise about available data. As Kendall Walton says about philosophers:

> They specialize in devising theories, or choosing among alternative theories, after the data are in. ... They also propose hypotheses when the evidence available is

[45] Gaut, Berys. "'Art'as a Cluster Concept." *Theories of Art Today* (2000): p. 28.

> insufficient or when it is unclear what evidence would be relevant; ... The data philosophers organize include, or should include, results of scientific experimentation and observation. But they traditionally have concentrated on devising theories to explain much that is common knowledge, everyday facts of which all of us are aware (or think we are).[46]

The project of defining art is filled with arguments, objections, and examples that do not explicitly differentiate among various senses of adequacy, as well as central concepts such as essence, theory, definition, art form, and artwork. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to maintain consistency in this regard. Nevertheless, throughout the thesis I will try to emphasise these conceptual distinctions in relation to the definitions and theories of art that I investigate. This methodological approach is the distinctive aspect of my research that sets it apart from other works that have been done on the same subject.

1.7. THESIS OUTLINE

In this introductory chapter (Chapter 1), I have explained the problem and its significance. I have provided some context and background for the problem of defining art and demarcated the scope of my research. I have underlined the central concepts of my research such as essence, adequacy, definition, and theory. Here is what to expect in the remaining chapters of this research.

In Chapter 2, I investigate the theories of some prominent anti-essentialists about defining art. Although they did not try to define art, they play an important role in the project of defining art. Some anti-essentialists like Morris Weitz and William Kennick propose that instead of defining art, we can apply an approach based on *family resemblance* to explain how we distinguish art from non-art.[47] I explain what it means to be anti-essentialist with regard to artworks and what ramifications it has for defining art. I examine a few anti-essentialist ideas that are related to this research and clarify some misconceptions about them.

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[46] Ibid. pp. 151-152

[47] For a criticism of their position, see The Introduction of Carroll, Noël, ed. *Theories of Art Today*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, (2000) Also, Davies, Stephen. *Definitions of art*. Cornell University Press, 1991. 3-23.

In Chapter 3, I introduce and scrutinise two procedural definitions that emphasise the social context of the artworks. The first is Arthur Danto's definition of art, which has been described as institutional and historicist. The second is George Dickie's institutional definition. Danto and Dickie reject the idea that all artworks must have a unifying function and attempt to define art in relation to arrangements and structures that are dependent on the socio-historical context of artworks regardless of functions such as aesthetic functions. These definitions are heavily influenced by modern art and Avant-garde movements like Dadaism.

In Chapter 4, I focus on Levinson's historical definition and Carroll's historical method for identifying art. The historical definition gives prominence to the intentions of the artists and the historical context of the artwork. Levinson proposes a full-fledged historical definition, but Carroll suggests that instead of a definition, we can identify artworks by means of a method or an approach that relies on narratives. Carroll acknowledges that most thinkers who tried to define art, including Dickie, Danto, and Levinson, did so to explain the avant-garde artworks of the 20th century. However instead of proposing another definition, Carroll tries to show how avant-garde works can be considered the descendants of more traditional artworks.

In Chapter 5, I introduce and examine disjunctive definitions of art. Disjunctive definitions reject the dichotomy between functional and procedural. Many aestheticians consider them the final answer to the question, 'What is art?'. Robert Stecker refers to disjunctive definitions when he writes: "we are in the paradoxical situation of losing faith in the project [of defining art] just when a modicum of consensus may be in the offing".[48] Disjunctive definitions attempt to define art without specifying conditions that are conjunctively necessary. Instead, they focus on providing conditions that are individually or jointly sufficient. This means that they need not consider any condition necessary for all artworks. For example, art can be defined as an artefact that is either highly aesthetically pleasant or is created in an established genre of art. Some prominent philosophers of art such as Robert Stecker and Stephen Davies agree that a definition of art does not need to be

[48] Stecker, Robert. "Is It Reasonable to Attempt to Define Art?" *Theories of Art Today*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, (2000): 45–64.

conjunctive, and provide hybrid definitions to take both functional and non-functional aspects of art into account. [49]

One theory of art that is closely related to these hybrid definitions is the cluster account of art. One of the most comprehensive and important examples of a cluster account of art is developed by Berys Gaut. Inspired by Wittgenstein, Gaut proposes a non-definitional approach to explaining the concept of art. Therefore, Chapter 5 also includes an examination of the adequacy of his theory of art and explains how the differences and similarities between it and hybrid definitions.

At the end of Chapter 5, I focus on the buck-passing theory of art. In his recent book, Dominic Lopes puts forward a new distinction between types of definitions of art. Lopes refers to earlier attempts to define art as 'buck-stopping' definitions, by which he means those definitions set out to define 'art' without the need to define art kinds such as painting, music, drama, etc.[50] He proposes that, in contrast to buck-stopping definitions of art, passing the buck to the art kinds and defining them provides an informative way for identifying artworks. He also suggests that a buck-passing definition is superior to traditional definitions of art in that it provides a proper framework for research about and study of artworks.

In Chapter 6, I explain how our modern conception of artwork and artist leaves its mark on the philosopher's quest to define art. In doing so, I provide a brief historical background to the role of artists and art institutions in modern societies. I also introduce a few considerations related to the project of defining art that have been neglected by philosophers who have been engaged with this project. I then summarise the conclusions of my previous chapters and draw general conclusions about the adequacy and usefulness of post-functional definitions of art, thus providing an answer to the question of whether it is reasonable to define art.

[49] For example, see Davies, Stephen. "Non-Western Art and Art's Definition", in *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*. Clarendon Press, (2007) 51-67.
Davies, Stephen, "Defining art and artworlds." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 73, no. 4 (2015): 375-384.
[50] Lopes, Dominic. *Beyond Art*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

CHAPTER 2 ANTI-ESSENTIALISM

Anti-essentialism in the philosophy of art is usually considered to be a criticism of the very project of defining art. This makes anti-essentialism a view of special interest for my purposes. In this chapter, I examine some key claims of anti-essentialists about defining art and discuss their importance. In the first section, I provide a historical background to the rise of anti-essentialism and procedural definitions in aesthetics. In section 2, I review the key elements of anti-essentialist arguments against the project of defining art and reduce them to two fundamental beliefs: (1) Art does not have a unifying essence, and (2) We do not need a definition to identify works of art. In section 3, I investigate the weight of anti-essentialist arguments against defining art and discuss what denying the essence of art means for the project of defining art. I explain that even though anti-essentialism makes intensional adequacy inapplicable, it leaves room for the possibility of extensionally adequate definitions. In section 4, I review the concept of family resemblance as it is used in the work of anti-essentialists and investigate the force of two criticisms directed at anti-essentialism in the philosophy of art. I argue against the usually accepted view in the philosophy of art, namely that family resemblance is a method, tool, or approach to identify artworks and distinguish them from other things.

2.1. THE HISTORICAL MOTIVATION FOR ANTI-ESSENTIALISM AND PROCEDURAL THEORIES

Anti-essentialism in the philosophy of art is not just a theory about the arts. Rather, it is a theory about the project of defining art. The claim that art is not definable is a response to the perceived failure of the philosophy of art or, more specifically, of functional definitions to capture the essence of art. In the first half of the twentieth century, expressive and aesthetic

theories of art were aestheticians' main focus. Representational, aesthetic, and expressive definitions are all functional, as they define art in terms of its function.

In my view, representational definitions can plausibly be categorised as aesthetic definitions because they usually define art with reference to the representation of beauty in nature and associate beauty with qualities such as harmony and proportion. However, these definitions usually focus on the content, i.e., what is represented. As a result, representational definitions encounter a problem with twentieth-century artworks that focus primarily on form. For example, it is difficult, and often inappropriate, to determine what is represented by abstract sculptures, minimalist paintings, and modern poems such as T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922). Non-representational definitions, such as expressive and aesthetic ones, avoid this problem.

According to the expressive definition of art, the function of art is to express emotions and moods, such as delight, anger, vengeance, sadness, and yearning, through mediums such as colours, words, music, etc. Leo Tolstoy (1897) and R. G. Collingwood (1938) are two of the most well-known proponents of the expressive theory of art. Tolstoy's version of the expressive theory considers it necessary for art to convey the emotions of the artist to the audience,[1] whereas Collingwood's version focuses on the expression of the emotion itself rather than conveying it to the audience.[2] Another non-representational theory of art was developed by Clive Bell (1916). He expands his aesthetic definition of art by focusing on what he calls 'significant form'. Bell reflects mostly on paintings and the composition of colours, lines, shades, textures, and space. According to Bell, being beautiful is not a necessary condition of artwork. Rather, he argues that the ability to evoke an aesthetic response through the form of the work is a necessary feature of art.[3] A few decades later, Monroe Beardsley developed his non-representational theory of art by expanding on the aesthetic experience in his milestone work, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1958). This can be considered, as Michael Wreen claims, "the first systematic, well-argued, and critically informed philosophy of art in the analytic tradition".[4]

[1] Tolstoy, Leo. *What is art?*. Standard Ebooks, 2021.
[2] Collingwood, Robin George. *The principles of art.* Oxford University Press, 1938.
[3] Bell, Clive. *Art*. United Kingdom: Stokes, 1914. pp. 6-7.
[4] Wreen, Michael, "Beardsley's Aesthetics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition).

Aesthetic and expressive definitions of art fail to accommodate some avant-garde artworks, such as Dadaist sculptures and post-modern paintings. It is not the primary function of anti-aesthetic works like *Fountain* by Marcel Duchamp (1917) to induce aesthetic experience or express emotion. Although expressive and aesthetic definitions of art are suitable for some kinds of avant-garde art like abstract expressionism, they have difficulty accommodating post-modern works that use cognitive play and multiple layers of meaning. For example, Roy Lichtenstein copied the images of comic strips in different sizes and painted them with oil and paint on canvas. His copies are so exact that we can see the Ben-Day dots that were part of the printed images at the time. His works, such as *Drowning Girl* (1963) and *Oh, Jeff... I Love You, Too... But...* (1964) refer to melodramas and clichés in pop culture and change the context of those images by isolating them in a big frame. It is hard to see how expression theories of art can deal with these kinds of artworks because their primary purpose is not to express emotions. Generally speaking, functional definitions of art seem inadequate – there are a very wide range of artworks, and it is easy to find counterexamples to any definition that identifies a single function for all artworks.

Furthermore, many things that are not art can have aesthetic and expressive properties. For example, my friend's laughter can express her emotions, but it is not a work of art. Also, beautiful and expressive forms are not limited to artworks and can be found in many human-made products. Given these problems, many theorists interested in defining art have abandoned the attempt to provide functional definitions. Some of them propose procedural definitions of art, often prompted by the need to accommodate the art status of revolutionary and conceptual artworks in the West. I will discuss procedural definitions of art in Chapter 3. However, another group of philosophers go one step further, arguing that the very attempt to define art is a mistake.

2.2. UNDERSTANDING ANTI-ESSENTIALISM AND ITS PRINCIPLES

The failure of functional definitions led some thinkers to deny the possibility of defining art. By the 1950s, the adequacy of all functional definitions was questioned by anti-essentialists.

Some anti-essentialists hold that it is impossible to define art, and that this is why every definition of art has proved inadequate. Morris Weitz is probably the most well-known analytic aesthetician who denies that art can be defined (1956). Others, such as William Kennick (1958) and Paul Ziff (1953), agree with Weitz that art cannot be defined in terms of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions because it has no essence.

The argument against defining art that starts from the failure of past definitions can be rejected on the grounds that an adequate definition may be found in the future. Logically, it is true that a thousand failed definitions of art in the past do not preclude the possibility of a successful definition of art in the future. Be that as it may, anti-essentialists have more to offer than just pointing to unsuccessful definitions. To understand this debate, it is important to recognise that, in principle, anti-essentialists need not deny that we can discover necessary conditions for art as long as they deny that these conditions can be jointly sufficient. More importantly, they hold that we do not need a definition to distinguish art from other things. But then a question arises: how do we distinguish art from non-art?

Some anti-essentialists propose that we can distinguish art from non-art by intuition, because we know how to participate in what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls a language game. According to him, it is through language games and actions such as naming things and repeating words in different situations that we learn to associate certain actions with certain utterances.[5] Wittgenstein explains that, sometimes, he uses this term "to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life."[6] The doctrines of Wittgenstein in the first part of his *Philosophical Investigations* had a significant influence on anti-essentialists, which is why some scholars refer to them as Neo-Wittgensteinians. Wittgenstein also uses the idea of 'family resemblance' to explain how we group together resembling things that have multiple features that are not shared by all members of the group. One of his famous examples is the word 'game', which applies to many activities that a single uniting feature cannot define. Although Game A may resemble Game B, Game B resembles Game C…, and Game Y resembles Game Z, that doesn't entail that there must be any meaningful resemblance between Game A and Game Z. This happens because the common areas of resemblance may vary through different examples. In contrast

[5] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. John Wiley & Sons, 2009. §7.
[6] Ibid. § 23.

to the essence that unifies all members and that must exist in every member, family resemblance does not require any uniting feature in all members.

It is sometimes claimed that anti-essentialists in the philosophy of art argue that if art does not have an essence, then it is impossible to discover a necessary condition for it. For example, according to Dickie, Weitz denies that there can be any necessary conditions for works of art, not even being an artifact.[7] Weitz writes: "There are no necessary and sufficient conditions but there are the strands of similarity conditions, i.e., bundles of properties, none of which need be present but most of which are, when we describe things as works of art."[8] By claiming that "none of [the properties] need be present" in a work of art, it seems that Weitz endorses the idea that there cannot be any necessary conditions for art. Similarly, in some places Wittgenstein can be interpreted as denying that we can identify necessary conditions for things that do not have an essence. Here is an example:

> Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? – Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games'" – but look and see whether there is anything common to all. – For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.[9]

Although it may be a plausible interpretation to consider anti-essentialism as a view that denies that there are any necessary conditions for entities like games and artworks, I think a more plausible interpretation exists. According to this interpretation, anti-essentialist denies that for some entities, there are a set of necessary conditions that are jointly sufficient and are shared by all instances of them. My understanding is that just because we can point out a necessary condition for something, it does not mean that we have discovered its essence. For example, the definition of a human as 'a moving body' points out, at least, one necessary condition of all humans, which is to be a material body in the physical sense. However, this definition does not show the essence of a human being. The same can be said about games. Even Wittgenstein considers all games a 'proceeding', thus, it can be said that all games are

[7] Dickie, George. "Defining Art." *American philosophical quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1969): p. 253.
[8] Weitz, Morris. "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, no. 1 (1956) p.33.
[9] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. John Wiley & Sons, 2009. §66.

necessarily proceedings. Similarly, one can say all games are activities or, as Bernard Suits defines it, that a game is "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles."[10]

Anti-essentialism has found new expressions in the recent philosophy of art. For example, David Novitz believes that the identification of artworks does not rest or depend on a definition of art.[11] Kathleen Stock defends a new version of this claim; according to her, when confronted with a new candidate for being an artwork, critics and experts do not start from a definition and then conclude that the candidate is or is not art. She believes that the public opinion of art critics, other artists, and art historians makes something art, and not whether it satisfies a set of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions.[12] Both Novitz and Stock reject the idea that identifying art is based on or requires a definition of art, and if they are right, the project of defining art loses a great deal of credibility.

In addition to those anti-essentialists who think art is undefinable, some scholars who actively try to define art have denied that art has an essence. For example, Stecker acknowledges that an object's status as an artwork depends on us. He writes: "Artworks, in contrast, are artifacts; they are not natural kinds. Artifacts, I assume, don't have, as their essence, hidden natures that can be discovered."[13] In spite of this, he believes that identifying art depends on a definition of art. Thus, he still tries to define it: "for the project of defining art, both extreme pessimism (skepticism fed on despair of making progress in this arena) and overly buoyant optimism (supposing there is a definition that reveals the essence of art) are misplaced."[14]

That being the case, it is misleading to run together anti-essentialism with being against the attempt to define art. As we saw, the first anti-essentialists were anti-definition, but some anti-essentialists believe that defining art is crucially important for identifying art. Therefore, it makes more sense to distinguish between two types of anti-essentialists, namely: 1. Radical anti-essentialists, that is, anti-essentialists who are also anti-definition, and 2. Moderate anti-essentialists, that is, anti-essentialists who are pro-definition. My focus in this section is on

[10] Suits, Bernard. *The grasshopper: games, life and utopia*. Broadview Press, 2014. P. 41.
[11] Novitz, David. "Disputes about art." *The Journal of aesthetics and art criticism* 54, no. 2 (1996): 153-163.
[12] Stock, Kathleen. "Historical Definitions of Art." In Stephen Davies & Ananta Charana Sukla (eds.), *Art and Essence*. Praeger. 159-76 (2003)
[13] Stecker, Robert. "Is It Reasonable to Attempt to Define Art?", in N. Carroll (ed.), *Theories of Art Today*, University of Wisconsin Press, (2000) 45-64.
[14] Ibid.

the first type. I conclude that to be a radical anti-essentialist who is opposed to the project of defining art, one must be committed to at least two premises. First, that art has no essence; and second, that identifying art is not dependent on defining art. In the next section, I review the arguments of some anti-essentialists against defining art and examine their plausibility.

2.3. ANTI-ESSENTIALIST ARGUMENTS AGAINST DEFINING ART

Some anti-essentialist arguments against the definition of art focus on whether art has a real essence. For instance, Paul Ziff, Morris Weitz, and William Kennick argue against the view that art has an essence with the aim of showing that no definition of art can be satisfactory. From the observation that the meaning of 'art' changes over time, Ziff concludes that art cannot have a real essence. But even without considering the passage of time, he says, there are different meanings and usages for the word 'artwork' among contemporary communities. Therefore, art has no real essence and hence is undefinable.[15]

Similarly, Kennick maintains that if there were an answer to the question of 'What is art?', it should be a 'definition *per genus et differentiam*'[16] of art, which is the formula of the essence, according to Aristotle. In contrast to things with a real essence, such as helium, he claims that art is a concept without essence and with complex usage that applies to "a large number of very different things".[17] He notes that it is not surprising that we are unable to find a common denominator for all works of art, simply because 'art' does not point to a particular common denominator. Kennick does not offer a detailed argument for his claim that art has no essence. Instead, like Ziff, he tries to support his claim by giving examples and reminding us that art history has witnessed many changes: "it is a word with a long, involved, and interesting history; a complicated concept indeed."[18]

Weitz is another influential anti-essentialist who argues that art is an open and evolving concept that cannot be defined. As he put it "A concept is open if its conditions of

[15] Ziff, Paul. "The task of defining a work of art." *The Philosophical Review* 62, no. 1 (1953): 58-78.
[16] Kennick, William E. "Does traditional aesthetics rest on a mistake?." *Mind* 67, no. 267 (1958): p.319.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid. p.320.

application are emendable and corrigible".[19] He claims that defining art inevitably sets limitations on artists' creativity. Therefore, even if a definition of art can fend off current counterexamples, it may still be vulnerable to future ones. Art history is unpredictable because it involves innovation and creativity. By tying the openness of the concept of art to the artist's creativity, Weitz, like many philosophers of art, considers avant-garde works of art central to the discussion about defining art. According to him, the project of defining art is destined to fail:

> ...aesthetic theory is a logically vain attempt to define what cannot be defined, to state the necessary and sufficient properties of that which has no necessary and sufficient properties, to conceive the concept of art as closed when its very use reveals and demands its openness.[20]

It has already been pointed out that this argument is not plausible because defining things that involve creativity is not impossible in principle, and I agree that Weitz does not have a compelling argument in that regard.[21] However, I think the fact that the practice of art is evolving according to our conventions and has changed so that things like ready-mades can be artworks, provides plausible grounds to doubt that art has an essence. Noël Carroll believes that such arguments rest on a category mistake, that is, they make the mistake of assuming that what is true about the practice of art must be true about the concept of an artwork. He begins by noting that it is the practice of art that is evolving and open to change; however, the fact that the practice of art is changing does not yield the conclusion that individual artworks are changing:

> Talk of the permanent possibility of expansion makes sense only with reference to the practice of art; it makes no sense to say of completed artworks that they need to be open to the permanent possibility of change and innovation. If anything is open in Weitz's sense, it is the practice of art. In general, it would be a category error to maintain that completed artworks must be open to change.[22]

[19] Weitz, Morris. "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, no.1 (1956) p.33
[20] Ibid. p.30
[21] Carroll, Noël, ed. *Theories of Art Today*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. p. 10.
[22] Carroll, Noël, ed. *Theories of Art Today*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. p. 9

Carroll then goes on to argue that there is nothing logically wrong with defining something that involves creativity and imagination.[23] I suspect we all agree with the claim that things that involve creativity can somehow be defined and that change in the practice of art does not mean change in completed artworks. However, Carroll is too quick to dismiss the anti-essentialist arguments. Here the discussion is about 'artwork' as a concept rather than a specific artwork. Contrary to Carroll, it stands to reason that if the practice of art changes, the concept of artwork changes as well. This is what Weitz, Ziff, and Kennick point out in their arguments against definitions that aspire to be intensionally adequate. As radical anti-essentialists, they point out that art is subject to change according to our conventions and collective preferences; therefore, art does not have an essence. However, this claim can be stated in various ways depending on the semantic terminology we choose. One may say: art cannot be defined with necessary and sufficient conditions that reveal its essence. Another might say: art cannot be defined via genus and differentia. Or one can say: art cannot be defined with a set of conditions that are true in every possible world. Or, as I choose to say: art cannot be defined with a definition that is intensionally adequate.

Carroll's argument against anti-essentialist claims about the concept of art is a strawman argument. I highly doubt that there is a ubiquitous conception of an artwork that is shared by experts who use this word, but even if we assumed that there is such a concept for the sake of argument, it will still be the case that this conception has been changing in accordance with the changes that have been happening in the practice of art. The anti-essentialist claim is that the very thing that art is, is constantly evolving, and there is no common denominator for all things we call art. For example, there was a time when music was put in the same category as astronomy and mathematics, but that has changed, and we now classify music with drama and painting. The important point about these changes is that neither of these categorisations are wrong. This means that we decide how to categorise artworks and art forms. In other words, the meaning or definition of art is a matter of convention rather than necessity, therefore, it depends on us and our decisions. I will discuss this issue, namely the changing meaning of art, in more detail in my final chapter.

[23] Ibid. pp. 11-12

I think the problem with the anti-essentialist arguments lies elsewhere. Note that the crux of the arguments turns out, again and again, to be the concept of essence. These arguments rest on the premise that if something does not have a real essence, it is undefinable. I think the problem with this premise is that some phenomena do not have an essence but are relatively stable for a period long enough to allow us to identify a relatively stable set of necessary and sufficient conditions for them. Concepts that are related to human cultures and societies are usually like this. For example, consider the phenomenon of 'the working class'. This is an evolving phenomenon, the meaning of which is dependent on the structures of modern society and one that is almost wholly absent from the feudal system. 'The working class' is a historical concept that is rooted in contingent human activities and does not have a universal or unchanging essence. However, the structures of society that cause 'the working class' to be as it is, are long-standing and well-established enough to allow for a definition. These structures make the meaning of the working class adequately stable for a definition consisting of necessary and sufficient conditions that are limited by the historical boundaries of the subject.

There is an important point here for philosophers of art; that is, any definition of art needs to set its historical boundaries and confine itself to those. For example, if a definition is offered for fine arts, it should not be expected to include sea shanties (folk songs that were once sung to accompany rhythmical labour) or artifacts such as Chinese jade carvings, kites, and baskets. Unfortunately, most philosophers who try to define art do not acknowledge or appreciate this point and seem to aspire to a timeless and universal definition of art. I will come back to this issue in my final chapter and explain it in detail.

I have argued that not having an essence is not equal to indefinability. Nevertheless, anti-essentialists succeed in showing that we cannot offer a real definition for something that does not have an essence and keeps changing. Some definitions can be considered timeless and universal. For instance, a timeless and universal definition for water could be: "Water consists of two hydrogen atoms attached to the central oxygen atom via a covalent bond." This is what contemporary essentialists like Saul Kripke accept as the essence of water, and I think Aristotle would have agreed, too. Unlike water, the meaning of 'art' depends on our decisions and historical events. We acknowledge a level of contingency by admitting the

changing nature of art. In other words, an intensionally adequate definition is unattainable in the case of art. As explained in Chapter 1, a definition is intensionally adequate if it identifies the essential rather than merely the contingent properties of a kind. Intensional adequacy cannot be found in the absence of essence. A definition of 'the working class' cannot be intensionally adequate, but neither does it have to be. My example shows that a definition can be extensionally adequate, for a considerably long period of time, despite it being intensionally inadequate. That being said, if by a definition of art philosophers mean a timeless definition, anti-essentialists are right to argue that art has no essence and is undefinable.

I do not think that the arguments from the lack of essence provide decisive reasons against the project of defining art. As I explained, a concept can lack essence but still be stable enough to allow for an informative definition that picks out the necessary and sufficient conditions of the subject in a limited period. I pointed out that radical anti-essentialists hold that (1) art has no essence and that (2) a definition of art is not required to identify art. So far, I have mostly discussed arguments that focus on the first claim. Now it is time to focus on the second claim.

Perhaps the best-known argument in support of the view that a definition is not required for identifying art is the one put forward by Kennick. While pointing out the mistakes of traditional aesthetics, he briefly touches on another significant problem with the project of defining art. He claims that even if a definition of art is tabled that is adequate in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, it will still not be informative. Kennick tries to explain this problem with an interesting thought experiment. He asks us to imagine a warehouse that contains many artworks of all sorts and other things that are not artworks. This warehouse contains various ballets, circuses, operettas, paintings, cars, furniture, statues, scores of music, buildings, different types of poetry, and ordinary objects like tools or clothes. He claims that a person equipped only with a definition will not be able to separate artworks from other items in that warehouse because definitions of art are not informative. According to him, the person would be more successful if they relied on their intuition, despite being unable to recite any definition for a work of art.

Kennick's point about the informativeness of definitions is important. In his warehouse test, he does not argue that a definition of art is impossible. Instead, he claims that a definition of art is only useful if it is informative. One might argue against Kennick's warehouse test by saying that an adequate definition of art need not be useful for distinguishing artworks from other things. In support of this claim, one might point out that the goal of a definition can be something other than distinguishing art from non-art. As we will see in the next chapter, Dickie claims that his definition is not designed to identify works of art.

Definitions of art can indeed be useful in ways other than distinguishing art from non-art. However, I do not see how an adequate definition of art can be detached from identifying art. A typical way of testing a definition is by introducing possible counterexamples to it, and this will not be possible in the case of a definition that does not seek to provide a way to distinguish art from other things. As Stecker puts it, if identifying art is not dependent on any definition, the project of defining art faces a major problem: "this would be devastating for the project of defining art because the point of that project has long been to articulate the conditions under which we classify items as art."[24] In other words, a definition of art must be both extensionally adequate and informative – even if it is not intensionally adequate.

2.4. OBJECTIONS TO ANTI-ESSENTIALISM THROUGH FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

Anti-essentialists like Kennick and Weitz often refer to the notion of family resemblance amidst their arguments against essence. Critics of anti-essentialism, such as Mandelbaum (1965), Carroll (1991), and Davies (2007), tend to assume that family resemblance is introduced by anti-essentialists to replace the definition of art, and then go on to argue that it fails to do so because it is not informative. They point out that ready-made artworks look the same as their counterparts in everyday life. For example, *In Advance of a Broken Arm*[25] (1915) is an ordinary snow shovel that is given this title by Marcel Duchamp. The original

[24] "*Is it Reasonable to Attempt to Define* Art," in N. Carroll (ed.), *Theories of Art Today*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, (2000): p. 56.
[25] En prévision du bras cassé

work was thrown away, thus having a similar destiny to a few of his other ready-mades, such as the *Fountain*, or the *Bottle Rack* (1914) which his sister threw in the rubbish bin. The fact that copies of his ready-mades are usually exhibited in museums suggests that the appearance of these works has little to do with their significance in art history. This leads critics to argue that its dependence on perceptible properties makes the family resemblance approach unfit to identify the ready-mades. Furthermore, they argue that this dependency on perceptible properties makes family resemblance useless because everything is in some way similar to other things, making family resemblance too broad to be useful. By focusing on the views presented by Carroll and Mandelbaum, two of the most prominent critics of family resemblance in the analytic philosophy of art, I will try to show that this conception of family resemblance (as well as their critique of anti-essentialism) is implausible.

Many skeptics reject family resemblance as a deficient method for distinguishing art from non-art. Davies, Carroll, Danto, and others repeatedly point out that family resemblance is uninformative. For example, Carroll reminds us that "it is a truism of logic that everything resembles everything else in some respect. An alien carburetor from another galaxy will resemble Rodin's *Gate of Hell* at least in respect of being a material object".[26] In what follows, I will argue that for some prominent anti-essentialists, family resemblance is not viewed as a method for identifying art. This is important because the essentialist assumption is that we need a tool for identifying art. Although I think this assumption is not plausible, I will not argue against it in this chapter. I will come back to this issue in my final chapter, where I argue that we do not need a definition or method for identifying art.

Carroll describes the way in which we should use family resemblance to identify art as follows: "we compare new candidates for art status with previously acknowledged paradigms and their recognized descendants, and we look and see whether or not they bear a family resemblance to their predecessors."[27] In a more recent paper Carroll also speaks of paradigm cases as an important aspect of family resemblance:

[26] Carroll, Noël, ed. *Theories of Art Today*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. p 11. See also, Davies, Stephen. *Definitions of art*. Cornell University Press, 1991, p 11, and his *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*. Clarendon Press, 2007. pp. 35-39.
[27] Carroll, Noël. *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*. Routledge, 1999. p. 255.

> Taking some body of established artworks as paradigms, we assess new candidates in terms of their resemblance to the paradigms. Abstractions by Mondrian are art because, like paradigmatic representational works by Poussin, they have a discernible compositional structure. The more similarities between a candidate and paradigmatic artworks, the stronger the grounds for deciding that the former is an artwork.[28]

The role of family resemblance is not explained in detail by either Weitz or Kennick, and Carroll seems to have done his best to explain what has not been specified. However, the literature on family resemblance does not support Carroll's interpretation, in particular the view that identifying artworks is achieved through their resemblance to paradigmatic artworks. We know that anti-essentialists were decidedly influenced by Wittgenstein, who was the first philosopher to use and popularised the term family resemblance. A brief explanation of Wittgenstein's discussion of the role of family resemblance in his *Philosophical Investigations* might therefore assist us in understanding it better.

Wittgenstein argues that some words, like 'game,' cannot be defined because we cannot find necessary and sufficient conditions for all things we call a game. Instead, "we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing".[29] In claiming that the word 'game' cannot be defined, Wittgenstein is referring to a real definition of the word 'game' that acts as a common denominator and includes all games and excludes all non-games. Wittgenstein uses the idea of family resemblance as an analogy to explain how the different instances of a concept can be related. His point is not limited to the indefinability of the word 'game' He reminds us that our inability to define game causes no trouble for our ordinary use of the word. That is because we learn how to use the word 'game' in different language games through rule-following in various situations. This is consistent with his view on meaning, namely that in most cases, "the meaning of a word is its use in the language."[30] Accordingly, it can be said that when I know how to use the word 'art' in different language games, I know what 'art' means.

Now, let's examine some passages from anti-essentialists' writings about this subject and consider whether Carroll's critique is justified. In "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics"

[28] Carroll, Noël. "Art in an Expanded Field: Wittgenstein and Aesthetics" *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 23, no. 42 (2012).
[29] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. John Wiley & Sons, 2009. §68
[30] Ibid. §43

(1956), Weitz mentions paradigm cases only once, and there is no indication that he considers family resemblance to be a method for identifying art. Here is what he says about paradigm cases while explaining the similarity between the concept of art and the concept of game:

> Knowing what art is, is not apprehending some manifest or latent essence but being able to recognize, describe, and explain those things we call 'art' in virtue of these similarities. But the basic resemblance between these concepts [game and art] is their texture. In elucidating them, certain (paradigm) cases can be given, about which there can be no question as to their being correctly described as 'art' or 'game,' but no exhaustive set of cases can be given.[31]

As is evident from the text, he simply argues that we know what art is in the same way that we know what a game is. There is no indication in his words that he is proposing an approach for distinguishing artworks from other things. To the contrary, he emphasises that identifying art is nothing more than "being able to recognize, describe, and explain those things we call art"[32]. Therefore, he seems to say that we do not need a tool or method to tell instances of art from non-art, which is very similar to what Wittgenstein said about instances of games.

Kennick, another anti-essentialist, also rejects the view that there is a method or approach that can be used for identifying art. As we saw earlier, in his warehouse test, the person uses his intuition to distinguish art from non-art. But if we do not use a definition to distinguish art from non-art, he asks, how do we do it? He writes: "We are able to separate those objects which are works of art from those which are not because we know English; that is, we know how correctly to use the word 'art' and to apply the phrase 'work of art'."[33]

These passages clearly show that Kennick and Weitz did not intend to introduce a method for identifying art. A further point to note in this regard is that family resemblance was chosen as the archetype in this analogy partly because of its lack of precision. As Biletzki and Anat write: "Family resemblance also serves to exhibit the lack of boundaries

[31] Weitz, Morris. "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, no. 1 (1956), p. 31. Bracketed words are added.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Kennick, William E. "Does traditional aesthetics rest on a mistake?." *Mind* 67, no. 267 (1958), p321.

and the distance from exactness that characterize different uses of the same concept."[34] That being the case, it is not surprising that its critics would consider it to be inaccurate as a "method" for identifying art. Based on what I have pointed out, it is plausible to assert that for anti-essentialists like Weitz and Kennick, the idea of family resemblance is not a tool or method to identify art; it is rather used as an analogy to explain how the different instances of art may be related.

The critics of family resemblance in the philosophy of art point to the fact that many artworks look like ordinary objects – the appearance of some artworks, such as ready-mades, is indistinguishable from the appearance of their ordinary peers. As a result, any method for the identification of art that is based solely on resemblance is bound to be flawed. Carroll criticises anti-essentialists on the ground that they only consider the manifest features of the artworks. He considers works of art such as ready-mades as knockdown counterexamples to "the family resemblance method"[35] and writes: "Echoing Wittgenstein, Weitz and Kennick maintained that in order to identify an item as an artwork, one just needed to look and see – look and see whether a candidate resembles the paradigms or descendants therefrom in terms of their manifest features."[36] The origin of Carroll's criticism can be found in the work of Maurice Mandelbaum. Mandelbaum points out that for defining or understanding artworks, focusing on their appearance is not enough. Instead, we should focus on the context of artworks. According to Mandelbaum, Wittgenstein's words, namely that we should "look and see,"[37] shows that he is only talking about "directly exhibited resemblances." He writes:

> It is, then, my contention that Wittgenstein's emphasis on directly exhibited resemblances, and his failure to consider other possible similarities, led to a failure on his part to provide an adequate clue as to what – in some cases at least – governs our use of common names.[38]

Mandelbaum criticises Weitz and Kennick on the same grounds because they were supposedly preoccupied with the manifest features of an object instead of paying attention to

[34] Biletzki, Anat and Anat Matar, "Ludwig Wittgenstein", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.).
[35] Carroll, Noël. "Identifying Art", in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. p.80.
[36] Carroll, Noël, ed. *Theories of Art Today*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. p13.
[37] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. John Wiley & Sons, 2009. §66, §93, §578.
[38] Mandelbaum, Maurice. "Amily Resemblances and Generalization Concerning the Arts." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1965) p.222.

its context. In addition to the mistaken assumption that family resemblance is offered as a method of identification, this objection gets something else wrong; in contrast to what Mandelbaum claims, Wittgenstein's recommendation to 'look and see' is not limited to sensory or manifest similarities. Berys Gaut responds to the misconception of considering "look and see" as restricted to the manifest properties: "nothing in Weitz's, still less in Wittgenstein's, account requires the method to be understood with this restriction. Rather, it is simply the standard philosophical method of thought-experiments."[39]

In §621 of his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein asks, "when 'I raise my arm', my arm rises. And now a problem emerges: what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm rises from the fact that I raise my arm?"[40] Here, he is referring to the role of intentions in actions. This widely quoted passage shows that he is well aware of the importance of relational properties and context. Indeed, he was a pioneer in emphasising context and non-manifest properties and expressed it in many instances in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Another example in support of this is the following passage, where he talks about the relations between numbers as similar to the relation between family members:

> And for instance the kinds of number form a family in the same way. Why do we call something a 'number'? Well, perhaps because it has a direct relationship with several things that have hitherto been called number; and this can be said to give it an indirect relationship to other things we call the same name.[41]

When it comes to numbers, there is nothing to look at and see, in the literal sense, because they are not material objects like a cat or a coat. 'Look and see' here means thinking about the relational features of numbers. Therefore, Mandelbaum's criticism of Wittgenstein's neglect of contextual properties is unjustified. Similarly, Carroll's criticism of New Wittgensteinians, based on the same premises, is missing the point.

[39] Gaut, Berys. "The Cluster Account of Art Defended" *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 45, no. 3 (2005) p.278.
[40] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. John Wiley & Sons, 2010. §621
[41] Ibid. § 67.

2.5. CONCLUSION

I explained that in the absence of a universal and timeless essence, any definition is limited by spatio-temporal arrangements and structures. Therefore, an important point to take away from the discussion about essence is that any definition that does not target the essence of art needs to set its historical boundaries. Without knowing what sort of artwork and in which time and place we are seeking to define, a definition of art ends up boneless and uninformative due to the absence of contextual information about the subject of the definition.

I distinguished between two senses of anti-essentialism: the moderate sense and the radical sense. Moderate and radical anti-essentialists share the belief that artworks do not have a unifying essence, but they differ in that the first group proposes a tool (usually a definition) for identifying art and the second group denies that we need such a tool. In this chapter, I focused mostly on radical anti-essentialism, which is often criticised on the grounds that the concept of 'resemblance' in family resemblance is not informative enough to be used as an accurate tool to distinguish between art and non-art. However, I argued that Wittgenstein, Weitz, and Kennick did not intend to use the paradigm cases and family resemblance as a tool or approach for identifying artworks. Family resemblance may be a bad analogy, but it is certainly not meant as a method of identification that relies on manifest or sensory similarities. This conclusion stands in contrast to what is usually assumed about anti-essentialism in the philosophy of art. Some well-known aestheticians in the analytic tradition treat anti-essentialism as a theory that tries but fails to propose a suitable alternative to defining art. I have reviewed the weight of their claims and shown how it stands at odds with the existing literature: radical anti-essentialists do not attempt to provide an alternative way to identify art. Instead, they reject the claim that we need a tool to identify art. Finally, it is important to emphasise Kennick's point, namely that an adequate definition of art should be informative; otherwise, it fails to be extensionally adequate.

CHAPTER 3 PROCEDURAL DEFINITIONS OF ART

The definition of art continues to be one of the most debated issues in analytic aesthetics, despite the criticism it has received from radical anti-essentialists. I will not discuss attempts to improve functional definitions in response to the objections discussed in the previous chapters.[1] Instead, in this chapter, I inspect the adequacy of some of the most prominent post-functional definitions of art: two versions of Arthur Danto's definition and two versions of George Dickie's institutional definition. Danto and Dickie both agree that it is not a unifying function that makes something a work of art, but rather its relation to a historical and sociological context. For aestheticians with a functional mindset, the main question is: Which characteristics of a work of art make it art? However, the main question for Danto and Dickie is: What kind of relationship between a work of art and other things makes it a work of art? Dickie emphasises the social context of artworks, whereas Danto considers theories of art to be the most relevant part of the context of artworks.

It has often been pointed out that both philosophers offer a real definition of art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions.[2] While this claim is true for the most part, I will show that Dickie's later definition of art should not be understood as an instance of a real definition. Dickie and Danto changed their views several times across their long philosophical careers. I will highlight the most influential aspects of their views.

[1] See for example: Beardsley, Monroe C. "The Aesthetic Point of View" *Metaphilosophy* 1, no. 1 (1970): 39-58.
Sibley, Frank, "Aesthetic Concepts", *Philosophical Review*, 68(4): (1959) 421–450. Zangwill, Nick. "Aesthetic functionalism" in Brady, Emily and Levinson, Jerrold (eds.) *Aesthetic Concepts: Sibley and After* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2001):123-148. Eldridge, Richard. "Form and content: An aesthetic theory of art." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 25, no. 4 (1985): 303-316.
[2] For example, see Carroll, Noël, ed. *Theories of Art Today*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. p 10.

3.1. ARTHUR DANTO: ESSENTIALIST, INSTITUTIONALIST, HISTORICIST, AND EXPRESSIONIST

In the first three sections, I explain and review Danto's definition of art in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981). The definition consists of five conditions. I lay out what I think is the most plausible interpretation of the role of metaphor and meaning in his definition. I argue that, in some cases, these conditions are not informative and can be reduced to triviality. I explain that the lack of informativeness is partly a result of the vagueness of the notion of the Artworld in his theory.

In the fourth and fifth sections, I review some of Danto's systematic thoughts with the aim of presenting a plausible interpretation of his definition of art. I explain Danto's 'theory of indiscernibles' in light of his thesis about the end of art and his Hegelian view of the history of art. In the process, I criticise and examine some of the unwarranted assumptions and oversimplifications that lead Danto to a Eurocentric view of the history of art. I then review his later definitions, which abandon the concept of the Artworld, in terms of extensional and intensional adequacy.

3.1.1. DANTO'S DEFINITION IN THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE COMMONPLACE

Arthur Danto was a highly influential critic and philosopher of art. Besides his philosophical writings, he produced a large volume of art criticism for *The Nation*, the oldest weekly magazine in the United States. He is the first analytical philosopher to use the term 'Artworld' to refer to the social, historical and theoretical context of the artwork. He is one of the figures who facilitated the change of the paradigm of defining art from functional to post-functional definitions.

Danto thinks approaches that are based solely on the manifest properties of works of art cannot be adequate. His favourite example is a work of pop art by Andy Warhol, *The Brillo Boxes* (1964). Although Warhol's boxes are made of a different material, they look exactly like the real Brillo soap boxes. In this sense they are indiscernible from the real boxes.

Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades are better examples of indiscernibles because they are actually indiscernible from their everyday peers. All avant-garde ready-mades are examples of what Danto refers to as 'indiscernibles,' because they do not differ in appearance from ordinary objects. Danto raises the question about these objects: If they look exactly the same, what makes one art and the other an ordinary object? He answers that it is their contexts rather than their appearance that makes the difference. As he famously puts it: "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld."[3] Therefore, indiscernibles give us reason to doubt every definition of art that is based on the manifest and perceptible properties of artwork.

Danto explains his art theory in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, but he does not spell out a definition of art. Carroll extracts a definition by abstracting Danto's view from different chapters of this book, and Danto endorses Carroll's definition, noting that it is "quite the best account I can imagine, for its lucidity, comprehensiveness, acuity, and sympathy; and it is to Carroll's text that I would send anyone who sought a statement of what I might have achieved."[4] In retrospect, Danto asserts that he has always been in search of a real definition of art and describes himself as "an unabashed essentialist, as much concerned with specifying necessary and sufficient conditions as I would be were I in the immediate company of Socrates, engaged with him in the pursuit of definitions."[5] Therefore, he claims that the following definition is both intensionally and extensionally adequate. Here is Carroll's definitive statement of Danto's view of artworks:

> x is a work of art if and only if (1) x has a subject (i.e., x is about something) (2) about which x projects some attitude or (this may be described as a matter of x having a style) (3) by means of rhetorical ellipsis (generally metaphorical ellipsis), (4) which ellipsis, in turn, engages audience participation in filling in what is missing (an operation which can also be called interpretation) (5) where the works in question and

[3] Danto, Arthur. "The Artworld" *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): p.580.
[4] Danto, Arthur C. "Replies to essays" In Mark Rollins (ed.), *Danto and His Critics*. Blackwell. (1993): p.300.
[5] Ibid. p. 286.

the interpretations thereof require an art-historical context (which context is generally specified as a background of historically situated theory).[6]

To clarify, the following are some of Danto's crucial claims according to this definition. Each work of art has a subject and projects or expresses an attitude towards its subject. Furthermore, each work of art leaves room for interpretation because it uses rhetorical ellipsis. The main form of rhetorical ellipses is metaphor. The specific ways that artists choose to express themselves depend on their choice of metaphors. The audience participates in this game by filling in the gaps, in other words, by interpreting the artwork. In short, then, the first four conditions provide an expressive definition of art. They focus on conveying some meaning to the audience through a medium that is influenced by the style of an artist and requires the effort of the audience for its interpretation. As Carroll points out:

> In a rough way, this recalls the expressionism of someone like Tolstoy, however startling that may sound. For the artwork derives from the very being of the artist, incarnating her point-of-view and attitude in metaphorical structures whose engagement by spectators enables them to share her point-of-view and attitude.[7]

Danto accepts that many things can be interpreted, and not all of them are artworks. This is likely why he introduces the last condition, which states that the interpretation requires an "art-historical context." This condition helps to tighten the circle of artworks by excluding all the interpretable artifacts that use metaphors but lack artistic context. For example, traffic signs lack artistic context and therefore are not artworks, even if their designers express certain attitudes and use metaphors for communication. However, if an artist decides to duplicate and exhibit traffic signs as art in a gallery, they are no longer road signs. They can be works of art because their context, and therefore also their meaning, will be different.

The last condition also implies that art does not exist without an Artworld. It is for this reason that I take Danto's definition to be a procedural definition of art. It is the Artworld that allows Warhol's boxes or Duchamp's ready-mades to be artworks. According to Danto,

[6] Carroll, Noël. "Essence, Expression, and History." In Mark Rollins (ed.), *Danto and His Critics*. Blackwell. (1993): p.119.
[7] Ibid. p.126.

the Artworld consists of art theories that 'enfranchise' art. Therefore, I think the fifth condition is the backbone of this definition and what makes it a procedural rather than a functional or expressive definition. In the next section I review the first four conditions of this definition and discuss how Danto's view of interpretation and meaning can be explained in terms of ordinary language. In the section after that, I consider the fifth condition.

3.1.2. DANTO: INTERPRETATION, METAPHOR, AND MEANING IN ARTWORKS

A correct understanding of the second, third, and fourth conditions of Danto's definition depends on what Danto means by 'rhetorical ellipsis' in a work of art. Ellipsis is a rhetorical device that refers to the omission of some sections of a piece of language without misplacing the sense of it. In narratives, an ellipsis can be a gap in the chain of events that is not important enough to be narrated and can be filled in by the audience. However, this does not entirely capture what Danto means by rhetorical ellipses. Contrary to this use of ellipses in narratives, Danto thinks rhetorical ellipses involve hiding (or not explicitly stating) something, not because it is unimportant, but rather to encourage the audience to participate in finding the meaning of the work, i.e. in interpreting the work. He claims that rhetorical ellipses are an essential part of works of art, and it is through them that the artist expresses herself. He writes: "it is the function of rhetoric to cause the audience of a discourse to take a certain attitude toward the subject of that discourse."[8] According to him, all artworks must be rhetorical in the sense that they should have a hidden attitude toward their subject which will be disclosed via the participation of the audience. As Carroll points out in his formulation, the metaphorical ellipsis is the main form of rhetorical ellipsis in artworks.

[8] Danto, Arthur C. *The transfiguration of the commonplace: a philosophy of art*. Harvard University Press, 1981. p. 165.

Figure 2: Eugène Delacroix, *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (1830) 260.1 × 325.4 cm[9]

A problem with this view is that it is unclear what Danto means by projecting an attitude with rhetorical ellipses. My understanding is that if the artist intentionally leaves something out, so the viewer is left to imagine the missing details, we have a rhetorical ellipsis. For an example in visual arts, consider *Liberty Leading the People* by Eugène Delacroix (see Figure 2). The painting refers to the revolution against Charles X in 1830, so a kind of narrative is involved. Aside from the narrative, Liberty is shown as a bare-breasted woman carrying a musket in one hand and waving a French flag with her other hand while leading a crowd. She is standing on a pile of dead bodies, perhaps symbolising how precious and dear freedom is. This symbolism is an example that is rooted in the artist's point of view and involves a series of ellipses.

However, symbolism is just one type of rhetorical ellipsis. Another example could be a photograph or painting of someone looking out the window, but without showing what they

[9] Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain

are looking at. Further, some artworks are highly stylised and have peculiar ways of expression, but this is not true of all of them - some artists are satisfied with imitating their masters as much as they can. The critical question here is whether, in order for it to be a work of art, it is enough for the work to express "some attitude" about its subject, or whether, instead, it should make strong use of rhetorical ellipsis, as in the example of Delacroix's painting. It is not plausible to expect all artworks to be as expressive as *Liberty Leading the People*, and Danto himself does not seem to concede such an interpretation. Furthermore, some instances of bad art are not sufficiently stylish to express a peculiar attitude and style toward their subjects. A descriptive definition of art must include, at least, some instances of bad or mediocre art. Therefore, I rule out the interpretation that, according to Danto, artworks need to be highly expressive to count as art. I will now consider whether a weaker interpretation of Danto's claim can solve this problem.

According to the weak interpretation of Danto's claim, all paintings, sculptures, or any piece of music or dance are expressive and stylish enough to express some attitude. The problem with this interpretation is that we do not consider all instances of dance, drawing, or music as works of art, even though many of them do express an attitude. Very few people would consider me to be an artist when I play the notes of *Happy Birthday to You* on a keyboard. The same goes for when I doodle something during a boring meeting; we do not call any drawing on a piece of paper artistic drawing. The important point to note, however, is that the weak interpretation, like the stronger one, is not consistent with Danto's own thought, because Danto clearly does not consider all paintings to be works of art. For example, he denies that children's paintings can be art.[10] Therefore, he must mean something between the strong and the weak interpretation. There should be the right amount of attitude and expression that turns something into a work of art. Me playing *Happy Birthday* or doodling is below that threshold. The question, then, is, what makes an artistic expression artistic? Of course, Danto can answer by appealing to the fifth condition of the definition, namely, the Artworld. He might claim that children lack the required understanding of the Artworld or the theory that makes a painting a work of art. Similarly, my doodles lack artistic intent or artistic context. However, I believe these answers beg the question and reveal the

[10] Danto, Arthur C. "Artworks and real things." *Theoria* 39, no. 1-3 (1973): 1-17.

circularity of this definition. I will come back to the issue of circularity later. For now, my focus is on the first four conditions. Without an account of the Artworld, Danto does not seem to get any closer to the answer to the question, 'What is art?'. Therefore, the role of the first four conditions in this definition remains unclear.

It is difficult to make sense of Danto's claim without turning it into something trivial. If we accept that any act of communication has a subject, the first four conditions can be reduced to this: 'A work of art is the result of an act of communication that usually employs metaphor and requires interpretation for its appreciation'. Danto seems to think that most ellipses are metaphors, so we can say 'metaphors' for the sake of simplicity rather than 'usually metaphorical ellipses.' However, the problem with these conditions is that most ordinary communications are elliptical, often use metaphors, and require interpretation.

A possible objection to this is that I did not consider the richness of interpretations that can be attributed to artworks. One might argue what differentiates artworks from non-artworks is their capacity to generate various interpretations. In other words, artworks are special because of how they can be interpreted. Carroll explains this matter with these words: "Whereas mere representations aspire to transparency, artworks express ideas and attitudes toward whatever they represent. They are referentially opaque, cocooned, so to speak, in the propositional attitudes of artists."[11]

The first problem with distinguishing between ordinary or 'mere' representations and artistic representations that express some attitude toward their subject, is that the majority of artistic representations do so through their aesthetic qualities. However, Danto's definition fails to include mention of aesthetic qualities and beauty. Therefore, explaining how some representations are different from mere representations without any reference to aesthetic properties seems inadequate. Second, I think many ordinary communications are not as transparent as Danto and Carroll think they are. Linguistic communications are often elliptical and require interpretation. For example, notice how Carroll makes use of metaphorical language in his explanation by spelling out the matter with metaphors such as

[11] Carroll, Noël. "Essence, Expression, and History." In Mark Rollins (ed.), *Danto and His Critics*. Blackwell. (1993): p.120.

'transparency', being 'opaque' and 'cocooned'. Metaphor is deeply embedded in the language itself, and ordinary language is very often 'opaque', to use Carroll's words.

My claim that many ordinary communications require the active participation of the audience through the possible meanings of the utterances, is consistent with the idea of implicature in contemporary pragmatics. Implicatures are non-manifest meanings that are suggested or implied by an utterance. As Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, two prominent contemporary linguists, explain, the relevance of some utterances comes from a range of weak implicatures that have a specific effect, which they call the 'poetic effect'[12]. According to them, utterances can have strong and weak implicatures. They explain the matter with the following example:

(33) (a) Peter: Would you drive a Mercedes?

(b) Mary: I wouldn't drive ANY expensive car.

The propositional form of (33 b) does not directly answer the question in (33a). However, it gives Peter immediate access to his encyclopaedic information about expensive cars, which includes, let us suppose, the information in (34):

(34) A Mercedes is an expensive car.

If processed in a context containing assumption (34), (33b) would yield the contextual implication (35):

(35) Mary wouldn't drive a Mercedes.

… If the entire relevance of (33b) depends on the recovery of (35), Mary could have spared Peter some unnecessary processing effort by saying (36) instead:

(36) I wouldn't drive a Mercedes.[13]

Sperber and Wilson argue that it is reasonable for Peter to go further in his derived implications because what Mary makes manifest to him includes other implications. For that reason, the following derivations by Peter are legitimate and reasonable: "(39) Mary wouldn't drive a Rolls Royce. (40) Mary wouldn't drive a Cadillac. (42) Mary disapproves of displays of wealth."[14] In this case, Mary made a set of assumptions manifest to Peter, which in a

[12] Wilson, Deirdre, and Dan Sperber. *Meaning and relevance*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. P.87.
[13] Sperber, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson. *Relevance: Communication and cognition*. Vol. 142. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986. P. 196-7.
[14] Ibid.

specific situation, includes all the above implications. According to the principle of relevance, in order to reach optimal relevance, the addressee tries to achieve a balance between the cognitive effort required and the maximum assumption derivable from the utterance. In these cases, we have a continuum of relevance. This conversation strongly suggests that the interpretation stated in (35) is true and weakly suggests a subset of other assumptions derived from (33b). Therefore, we may not be able to put our finger on the exact dividing point of relevant and irrelevant interpretations. This is in tandem with my point that many ordinary acts of communication satisfy the first four conditions of Danto's definition.

Furthermore, metaphor is not just a poetic technique that is employed by artists. Most acts of communication use metaphors and require a level of interpretation. My chat with a stranger about the weather is an act of communication, and I might use metaphors, for example, "The sun is beating me up today". If my claims are plausible, there appears to be a problem with Danto's definition, in that the use of (usually) metaphorical ellipsis that requires interpretation is common in non-artworks as well as artworks.

So far, I have given counterexamples that show this definition does not exclude non-art. There are also examples that show that many artworks are excluded by this definition. Consider basket weaving, stained glass, or tap dancing. Many of these artworks do not have a subject, and do not use rhetorical ellipses or invite the audience to interpret them. In short, then, these counterexamples show that Danto's definition of art fails to be intensionally or extensionally adequate. Besides this, the vagueness of the conditions, in particular the interpretability condition, makes this definition uninformative.

3.1.3. PROBLEMS WITH THE FIFTH CONDITION: THE ARTWORLD

I have argued that the first four conditions of Danto's definition do not take us any closer to the essence of artworks and can be reduced to triviality. In addition, I have argued that these conditions can include non-artworks and exclude artworks. A defender of Danto might reply: "Aha! You overlooked the fifth clause in the definition! Those non-art examples don't involve an Artworld!" However, in some cases they do. I can say to my friend after watching

a movie: “What a sad movie!” In this case, I use metaphorical language because sadness is usually ascribed to conscious beings, and a movie does not have consciousness. However, according to Danto’s definition, my comment about the movie is a work of art because it has a subject, it makes use of metaphor, my audience (my friend) will need to fill in the ellipses to understand what I mean, and finally, it has an artistic context because it is about a work of art.

According to this definition, many acts of communication germane to artworks can pass as works of art. Consider, for example, the thousands of instances of art criticism published across the world each year.[15] They satisfy all five of Danto's criteria; they are about something (an artwork), they express an attitude to that thing using rhetorical ellipses that require the reader to interpret them, and they require an art-historical context or Artworld. Indeed, art criticism may utilise the same art theories that the creators of the artworks rely on. Danto can respond to these counterexamples by saying that the Artworld he intended is different from what I consider to be the Artworld in my examples. There is a difference, he can insist, between the art-historical context of art criticism and that of artworks. However, Danto does not provide a clear explanation of what he means by ‘Artworld’. A major problem in Danto’s definition of art is that this concept is not straightforward enough to be left without a detailed explanation.

The final condition of Danto’s definition has the implication that art does not exist without an Artworld. It is necessary for every work of art to be enfranchised by a theory of art or ‘an atmosphere of artistic theory’, or ‘a knowledge of the history of art’. Apart from the fact that appealing to the notion of Artworld or artistic theory to define a work of art is evidently circular, there is another problem with this condition. Danto seems to believe that every Artworld is the result of a theory of art, even if this theory is not consciously spelled out. Therefore, what makes some prehistoric cave paintings works of art, I assume, is an implicit aesthetic theory of art. However, an aesthetic theory of art did not exist at that time. Therefore, those cave paintings must have become art years after their creation by virtue of a theory of art. This is inconsistent with an essentialist definition of art, and Danto is essentialist. Note that an aesthetic definition of art does not necessarily encounter the same

[15] Adajian, Thomas, "The Definition of Art", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), section 4.2.

problem. Any artifact that displays the required aesthetic qualities can be a work of art, regardless of time. One who believes that oxygen has an essence cannot hold that it was not oxygen until the 17th century when it was discovered and theorised. Danto seems to realise that there is an inconsistency here, but he ignores it by considering a broader sense of art. When discussing some Christian images from the late Roman times, he writes:

> It was not that those images were not art in some large sense, but their being art did not figure in their production, since the concept of art had not as yet really emerged in general consciousness, and such images – icons, really – played quite different [roles] in the lives of people than works of art came to play when the concept at last emerged and something like aesthetic considerations began to govern our relationships to them.[16]

If the people who created the cave paintings, or the Christian icons of the late Roman period, did not have a grasp of the aesthetic theory of art, then it is false to say that there existed any Artworld to enfranchise their work as works of art. Therefore, it is not clear in what "large sense" they were art. Let's dig deeper into the concept of Artworld and how it is supposed to help us to identify art from non-art.

My understanding is that speaking of the Artworld as a single thing is misleading. If there is such a thing as an Artworld, there is for sure more than one, across the globe. Artworlds will vary, depending on the time and place. It seems legitimate to me that we consider multiple Artworlds, even in one geographical location, during different times. To illustrate what I mean, let us consider an archeological site like Lefkandi, a Greek village on the island of Euboea. Many amazing objects were unearthed from this site, mostly from The Late Helladic period.[17] These objects include pots and vases, jewellery (such as rings and bracelets), an iron knife with an ivory handle, and even a Babylonian gorget that was already a thousand years old at the time it was buried.[18]

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[16] Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. Princeton University Press, 1998. p.3.

[17] The Late Helladic is a period around 1200 BCE to 1040 BCE that is marked by the major developments of Mycenaean Greece.

[18] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lefkandi

Experts have decided that some of these excavated potteries belong in art museums, most likely because of their aesthetic value. It is important to keep in mind that Danto's definition is centered on the relational properties of artwork, not their aesthetic value. This means that what makes some of the objects found in Lefkandi art, is their relation to their Artworld. Therefore, to see which of these objects are works of art, we should consider them against the theoretical and historical context of The Late Helladic period. In the case of the gorget, we should also consider the Artworld in the Babylonian culture. Now it seems plausible to ask, what are the Artworlds of The Late Helladic period and Babylonia like? And what are the differences between them?

Danto can perhaps bite the bullet and admit that, in this case, we cannot know whether the objects are artworks or not. Given our lack of knowledge of the Artworlds in question, we cannot identify the artworks. In other words, the definition does not help us distinguish art from non-art, in this case, but only because it is such an unusual case. Here's an analogy: a definition of a triangle can be that it has three corners. Someone brings me a figure and asks whether it is a triangle. Say part of the figure is blurred out, covered with a coffee stain, so I must conclude: I cannot tell whether it is a triangle. But I don't have to throw out my definition or come up with a better explanation of a corner. Just because there are cases in which we can't tell whether something meets the criteria for being a triangle or not, that doesn't mean there's a problem with the definition.

This response does not succeed. In the analogy above, if the concept of a corner itself is clear enough to be used in practice, the definition may be informative in identifying the triangles. A 'corner' is a familiar concept that has been used in teaching geometry because of its intuitive clarity. However, we do not know what an Artworld is and how to use it in identifying artworks. It is not a plausible philosophical approach to introduce unknown entities to clarify a more familiar entity unless the theorist can provide a plausible account of the new entity that meshes well with the core of our existing knowledge. Thus, the triangle analogy does not reflect the problem with Danto's concept of the Artworld. In the case of Danto's definition, the concept of Artworld is problematic by itself. It is not solely because of the lack of historical information that Danto's criterion is ineffective at identifying artworks. Rather, it is due to the inconsistencies and ambiguities at the heart of the concept of

an Artworld. Note that Danto relies on the concept of art theory to explain his concept of Artworld, but many things that we consider artworks are produced before there were any art theories. Coming back to our analogy about triangles, this is the equivalent of saying: before a definition or a theory of a triangle, there were no triangles.

In response to a criticism by Jerry Fodor, namely that Greek pots are much more aesthetically valuable than *The Brillo boxes*, despite not being artworks, Danto writes: "But, of course, Greek pots are works of art, or some of them are, and the problem of discriminating between those that are and those that are not puts us back where we started."[19] An aesthetic definition of art seems much more promising in distinguishing between Greek pots that are art and the ones that are not. However, as I explained, Danto's definition is not an aesthetic one.

In the last two sections, I examined the five necessary conditions that Danto proposes for a work of art. I reviewed several counterexamples to this definition that question its adequacy. Also, I analysed the meaning of some keywords in these conditions to point out the ambiguity and inconsistencies that come with them. If my claims are justified, or at least partly plausible, it seems highly unlikely that Danto's definition in the *Transfiguration of Commonplace* can help us identify artworks.

3.1.4. DANTO'S SYSTEM AND THE END OF ART

Thus far, my focus has been on providing a critique of a definition of art that is endorsed by Danto, and taken in isolation from his broader philosophical views. However in order to do justice to Danto, we need to consider his theory of art more broadly. My focus in this section is on Danto's definition of art within his systematic theory of art. As will become clear later on in the thesis, Danto's theory of art makes an important contribution to our understanding of the role of art. I begin by examining Danto's notion of an Artworld in more detail.

Carroll does not use the words Artworld in his formulation of Danto's definition. Instead, he talks about an "art-historical context" and a "historically situated theory." These terms are included to explain the Artworld, which Danto himself tries to elucidate by writing:

[19] Danto, Arthur C. "Replies to essays" In Mark Rollins (ed.), *Danto and His Critics*. Blackwell. (1993): p. 293.

"I thought of the Artworld as the historically ordered world of artworks, enfranchised by theories which themselves are historically ordered."[20] Further, he claims that: "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld."[21] If someone were to ask, Could artists in the 18th century have created artworks like Warhol or Duchamp's?, Danto's answer would be 'no' because the Western Artworld was not there yet; that is, there was no art theory to enfranchise the works that emerged as pop and conceptual art in the 20th century.

As we've seen in the previous chapter, this emphasis on the changing nature of Artworlds is unusual for a theorist who claims to be an essentialist. However, Danto emphasizes his commitment to essentialism and tries to explain it with reference to Hegel's philosophy of history. He distinguishes between the intension and extension of artworks as follows:

> The concept of art, as essentialist, is timeless. But the extension of the term is historically indexed — it really is as if the essence reveals itself through history. ... History belongs to the extension rather than the intension of the concept of art, and, again with the notable exception of Hegel, virtually no philosophers have taken seriously the historical dimension of art.[22]

Danto supplements his essentialism and historicism with a thesis about the end of the history of art. He argues that we have reached the end of art history, in the sense that we have seen all possible kinds of manifestations of the essence of art. As a result we are well-placed to define works of art with a definition that is both intensionally and extensionally adequate. However, he concedes that a definition of art which is aimed at discovering the essence should not be dependent on the historical and contingent properties of artworks, and should only consider what is timeless and universal in all works of art: "... the essence cannot contain anything that is historically or culturally contingent."[23]

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[20] Danto, Arthur. "The Artworld revisited: comedies of similarity." *Beyond the Brillo box: The visual arts in post-historical perspective*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux (1992). p 38.
[21] Danto, Arthur. "The Artworld." *The Journal of Philosophy*, no. 19 (1964): p. 580.
[22] Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. Princeton University Press, 1998. p.196.
[23] Ibid. p 197.

Danto's view about the essence of art can be described as Hegelian and historicist. Sometimes, Danto talks as if the essence of art must exist in some idealist realm and that it manifests itself to us throughout history in the same way that Hegel's 'Spirit' manifests itself through various stages of consciousness. He writes, for instance, that: "… it is consistent with an essentialist philosophy of philosophy or of art that the essential nature of either should only reveal itself through history and expose its face to general consciousness only at a specific historical moment."[24] Thus, the essence of art 'exposes its face' to us during the history of art in the same way that Hegel's 'Spirit' or *Geist* unfolds through history in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1861). Danto views the history of art as moving forward to explore and actualise the possibilities of making art. The essence of art is exposed through these (contingent) developments.

As mentioned earlier, Danto supplements his historicist view with a thesis about the end of art. In *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (2005) Danto tries to interpret the history of art in a Hegelian way.[25] According to him, when the history of art reaches a point where indiscernibles can be works of art, art history has ended. What exactly does Danto mean by this? In what sense has the history of art ended? Obviously, he cannot mean that no new artworks can be created or that no more genres of art can be constructed. Clearly, many new artworks and genres have been introduced since Danto presented his thesis about the end of art. A closer examination of Danto's thoughts about this subject is essential for understanding his views about the Artworld and the definition of art.

As is well known, Hegel sees history as the development of reason through dialectic; this process transpires by a series of theses confronted by paradoxes,, " and then replaced by antitheses, which leads to the emergence of new problems and new solutions until the next breaking point reveals itself, which leads to the next thesis and so on. According to Hegel, each solution consists of combining the dichotomies into a synthesis. History, in this sense,

[24] Danto, Arthur C. " Replies to essays" In Mark Rollins (ed.), *Danto and His Critics*. Blackwell. (1993): p. 287.
[25] Danto, Arthur C. "The end of art." In *The philosophical disenfranchisement of art*, Columbia University Press, (2005) 81-116. Also see: Danto, Arthur C. "The end of art: A philosophical defense." *History and theory* 37, no. 4 (1998): 127-143.

has a purpose: to become self-conscious. Philosophically speaking, the end of history is to reach this goal (to become fully self-conscious).[26]

Danto's remarks about the end of art should be interpreted in light of Hegel's philosophy. Danto thinks that the history of art ends when artists reach a point where they can play the role of philosophers by producing artworks that beckon us to philosophical reflection. According to him, this point in the history of art manifests itself with the production of indiscernible artworks, that is, artworks that are identical in their perceptible properties to real objects. Here is how Danto abstracts his view about this matter:

> What of art after the end of art, where, by 'after the end of art,' I mean 'after the ascent to philosophical self-reflection?' Where an artwork can consist of any object whatsoever that is enfranchised as art, raising the question 'Why am I a work of art?'[27]

Danto goes on to explain that in Modern art, artists have become self-conscious about their actions. He claims that some modern artists create works that have as their subject the art itself, and this is due to artists conceptualising about art. Some artists no longer feel obliged to represent anything or to convey any message; they are content to explore the possibilities of their medium in their artworks. The content of these artworks is the art form itself, in Danto's words: "what they are about is aboutness, and their content is the concept of art." According to Danto, the subject of an abstract painting can be light, shape, and colour; the subject of an abstract sculpture can be space, volume, and light; the subject of an avant-garde dance can be bodily motions.

Furthermore, post-modern artworks such as *The Brillo Boxes* show that any ordinary object can be a work of art if the artist places it in the right context. Danto thinks this is the end of modernism in art history because indiscernible artworks push self-reflection even further and go beyond the material and the medium, which is what occupies modernist art. According to Danto, this is where art and philosophy merge. "The artworld today is, as predicted, without an internal historical drive toward further self-consciousness."[28] Post-

[26] Hegel, G. W. F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1861). Translated by J. Sibree. London: George Bell and Sons, 1902.
[27] Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. Princeton University Press, 1998. p.14.
[28] Danto, Arthur C. "Replies to essays". In Mark Rollins (ed.), *Danto and His Critics*. Blackwell. (1993): p.307.

modernism is a signal that the history of art has ended. Danto explains himself in words that one cannot help but read in a lofty tone:

> Having reached this point, where art can be anything at all, art has exhausted its conceptual mission. ... Pluralism and relativism are philosophies which take their stimulus from the dizzying array of cases. ... Post-modernism is the celebration of openness. The end of postmodernism lies in its explanation. For the indefinite future, art will be post-historical art-making. ... Now the further history is for philosophy to take, and unlike art, philosophy is something that will have no post-historical phase, for when the truth is found, there is nothing further to do.[29]

Carroll believes that Danto's thesis about art history coming to an end is a reaction to anti-essentialism. As I discussed in the previous chapter, one of the anti-essentialists' arguments against the project of defining art was that art history is unpredictable because it involves innovation and new ways of art-making. Therefore, even if a definition of art can be sustained against the current counterexamples, it can still be vulnerable to future ones. However, if the history of art has reached its end, a theorist like Danto can develop his definition without the fear of future counterexamples. Carroll writes:

> Put it simply: if art history is over, then there will be no more counterexamples issuing from the future. All the evidence is now in; essentialist theorizing can proceed with no anxieties about future counterexamples. If art history has ended, then we are in a position to determine that no art-historical development contradicts the rest of the theory of art.[30]

This theory is close to Ernst Gombrich's narrative about visual arts.[31] Gombrich's story is mainly focused on the history of pictorial representation, which, according to him, is the main problem of visual art. Gombrich believes that with the invention of photography and similar mechanical developments, the perfect representation, which was the ideal of visual artists, is somehow achieved. That is why painters had to choose a different purpose other

[29] Danto, Arthur C. "Art, evolution, and the consciousness of history." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 44, no. 3 (1986): p.233.
[30] Carroll, Noël. "Essence, expression, and history: Arthur Danto's philosophy of art." *Danto and his Critics* (2012): p. 130.
[31] Gombrich, Ernst Hans. *The story of art*. Vol. 12. London: Phaidon, 1995. This book is broadly considered as one of the most influential introductions to visual arts.

than representation. This mechanical progress led artists to contemplate the medium in which they were working, and as a result, modern movements such as cubism emerged.

Danto seems to hold the same view as Gomrich with regards to the development of visual arts. One problem in Danto's characterisation of self-conscious artists is that choosing different aspects of the medium as the subject of an artwork differs from choosing the concept of art as the subject. It is important to acknowledge this difference. Many artists are interested in exploring the possibilities of their medium but not in the concept of art as a subject for their work. As I see it, light, colour, movement, or space are parts of the medium in some art forms, but they are not *the* concept of art per se. Second, Danto's theory is about art in general and not just pictorial representation. He does not provide enough evidence or explanation for how the works of Warhol have an effect on, for example, music or architecture in the post-modern era. Has music and architecture become self-conscious in a similar way to visual arts? He does not give evidence or explain how something similar has occurred with these art forms.

Although music and architecture in the 20th century were vastly affected by new technologies, it has always been the case that musicians and architects have taken advantage of new technologies, and it is not clear that these changes have made a radical difference in their approach toward art-making, similar to what Danto claims happened in visual arts.

Danto claims that there is an essence of art that encompasses all changes and transformations of art. My understanding is that Danto accounts for the changes and transformations of the practice of art by acknowledging that the art-historical context can vary at different times. However, it is not clear why or how Danto considers his definition to be essence-revealing and intensionally adequate. Danto's theory about the end of art depends on the premise that the process of the artist's becoming "self-conscious" has been completed. Danto tries to propose a narrative that concludes with the end of art history. The trouble is that his narrative is formed by observing a small portion of artworks, namely Western fine arts and conceptual art, which does not reflect the complexity and diversity of art on a universal scale. Danto does not limit his claims to fine arts; his ambition is to cover all artworks at all times. Indeed, it is ironic that both Hegel and Danto, with their extensive knowledge of Eastern and Western art, sometimes appear to think in a Eurocentric way.

Danto's narrative often does not go any further than the Western world. His examples are often from the Western tradition of arts, and almost exclusively from fine arts or conceptual arts. The fact that his narrative is not compatible with Chinese, Indian, Islamic, and African history of art does not seem to worry him.

This problem aside, it seems that Danto's story about art is not even compatible with the tradition of fine arts in Western societies. Many avant-garde artists were not struggling to become self-conscious in the sense that Danto has in mind. These artists were not involved with the question, 'What is art?'. Unlike Warhol, many Land Artists, Surrealists, and the artists in the school of *Bauhaus* do not seem to be interested in the philosophical question about the essence of art. Furthermore, non-avant-garde movements like Art Deco, which had an enormous impact on urban life throughout the world, are completely ignored by this narrative. Danto does not explain what is special about the modern artist asking a philosophical question about the nature of art, such that it can end the history of all art forms, including music, dance, and poetry.

By focusing on a small portion of pop art that was created during the 1960s in The United States, Danto draws conclusions about the purpose of the universal concept of art. He treats as peripheral and inessential what, in my opinion, are the most important forms of art – artworks that do not live in art galleries and exhibitions but are embedded in the everyday lives of human beings. This is the concept of art that is universal and includes all categories that we call art, such as folk arts, performing arts, applied arts, decorative arts, tribal art, crafts such as mosaics, basket weaving, enamel, embroidery, printmaking, engraving, and music such as dance music, church songs, work songs, and so on. The list can go on and on. Like Hegel, Danto's narrative of art history is implausible when it comes up against historical facts. He claims that the history of art is over in the twentieth century because now the artist can think like a philosopher. Daniel Herwitz criticises Danto for having a simplistic view of both art and philosophy:

> philosophy has itself been brought to an end by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Dewey, Rorty, Derrida, and Wittgenstein (who ended it twice for a double-header). It has been superseded by Marx, Freud, the early sociologists, deconstruction, and Foucault. ... Then amidst this explosion of beginnings and endings of all kinds, the claim that art

has become philosophy must appear unclear and uncertain until we know more specifically into what it has been turned.[32]

3.1.5. DANTO'S LATER DEFINITIONS

In a more recent book, *After the End of Art* (1997) Danto offers a straightforward definition of art. This definition consists of two simple conditions: A work of art should have meaning (be about something), and this meaning should be embodied in the work. In other words, an artwork is an embodiment of meaning.[33]

As explained in the previous sections, Danto claims that a work of art is always about something, which seems right about visual arts or literature. Even highly abstract visual artworks are about something. For example, Piet Mondrian's abstract paintings could be about colour, space, or the medium of painting itself. However, it is hard to say the same about music or dance. Some kinds of music or dance may have a subject (be about something) and can be interpretable in a way that Danto suggests. Antonio Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* (1725) is an example of a musical work with a subject. But it seems impossible to identify the subject of other violin concertos by Vivaldi or other musicians, especially those without a descriptive title.[34] Danto's condition, therefore, excludes some artworks. Apart from music and dance, many decorative artworks do not have a subject. For example, stained-glass windows and doors in a mosque (see Figure 3). Likewise, many mosaics and ceramics patterns we consider to be art are not about anything specific. They can simply be ornaments to make a place more beautiful.

[32] Herwitz, Daniel. "The beginning of the end: Danto on postmodernism." In Mark Rollins (ed.), *Danto and His Critics*. Blackwell. (1993): p. 224.
[33] Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History-Updated Edition*. Vol. 10. Princeton University Press, 2021. p. 194.
[34] Here Danto tries to explain how music can be about something: Danto, Arthur C, *The philosophical disenfranchisement of art*. Columbia University Press; 2005. pp. 76-81.

Figure 3: Stained glass in the winter prayer hall of Nasir al-Mulk Mosque in Shiraz, Iran[35]

In his later definition, Danto omits the relation of artworks to the Artworld and does not offer anything to fill in the gap left by the absence of the Artworld. He might have considered that the concept of Artworld does not add much to what we already know and that it can be replaced by art history. Carroll refers to this definition as a neo-representational theory of art, given the role that representation of the content plays in it. He finds it surprising that Danto has left behind the procedural aspect of his first definition by adopting this new definition without any reference to the concept of the Artworld.[36]

Yet despite their obvious differences, in my view both definitions given by Danto encounter the same problem. Many (perhaps all) acts of communication, and many artifacts that are *not* art, involve the embodiment of meaning. But there is a difference between the

[35] Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain
[36] Carroll, Noël, "Danto's New Definition of Art and the Problem of Art Theories", In Mark Rollins (ed.), *Danto and His Critics*. Blackwell. (1993): p. 146.

former definition and this one. In the former definition, the concept of Artworld acts as an equaliser that is supposed to account for all the context-related questions. However, in the later definition, Danto seems to throw away his magical wand by setting aside his concept of the Artworld. Without it, the condition of being the embodiment of meaning fails to exclude many non-artworks. In a descriptive sense, many things embody meanings. Sentences are the embodiments of meanings. Christmas trees, Easter bunnies, road signs, food packages, and television advertisements can all embody certain meanings. This makes the definition too inclusive.

I think Danto's later definition of art must be understood as prescriptive to make sense. In a descriptive sense, his definition is too inclusive because many things that are not art can embody meaning. Therefore, he seems to hold that the meaning and its embodiment should be connected, in a special way; in other words, a work of art is an embodiment of meaning 'in a good or proper way.' For example, Danto tries to explain that, even before Andy Warhol created *The Brillo Boxes*, the cover of the real Brillo box, designed by a commercial artist, James Harvey, is a good or proper example of the embodiment of the meaning and can therefore be a work of art.[37]

If we accept this explanation, however, we have a new problem: finding out the good or proper way of being artistic. Considering Danto's philosophy of art, it can be said that this proper way should be determined by the Artworld. This jargon was present in his first definition but absent from this one. He therefore needs to add more conditions to this definition to make it extensionally adequate. However, as I argued in the previous section, adding the 'Artworld condition' does not solve the problem; more needs to be said about the role of the Artworld to get closer to an adequate definition. However, as we will see in the next section, when concepts like 'Artworld', 'artistic crowd', 'artist' and so on are used in a definition, the problem of circularity arises.

Danto's later definition of art puts forward a simple and effective view that can be used to interpret and analyse many artworks. For example, some street styles of dance, like mannequin or robot dance, have a general subject, namely dancing like a mannequin or

[37] Danto, Arthur. "Art and meaning" in Carroll, Noël, ed. *Theories of Art Today*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, (2000): 135-140.

robot. We can assess the instances of mannequin dance by paying attention to how well they embody a mannequin or a robot. Danto is an art critic, and this definition is a reflection of his approach to art criticism. Indeed, in some places it seems as if Danto's definition is put forward merely as an approach to art criticism. For example, he writes that:

> Hegel speaks of intellectual judgment of "(i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art's means of presentation." Criticism needs nothing further. It needs to identify both meaning and mode of presentation, or what I term "embodiment" on the thesis that artworks are embodied meanings.

In this passage, it seems that the main concern of Danto is art criticism, not art identification. In his last book, *What Art Is*, published in 2013, around seven months before his death, Danto adds another condition to this definition. He adds to the embodiment of the meaning that a work of art is a 'wakeful dream':

> I have decided to enrich my earlier definition of art — embodied meaning — with another condition that captures the skill of the artist. Thanks to Descartes and Plato, I will define art as 'wakeful dreams.' One wants to explain the universality of art. My sense is that everyone, everywhere, dreams.[38]

He seems to propose that, like dreams, artworks are both similar and different from reality. *The Brillo Boxes* by Warhol have a dreamlike quality compared to the real Brillo boxes in the warehouse or supermarket. Also, being wakeful allows the artwork to be experienced in the public realm rather than being private, like dreams in sleep.

This condition is more poetic than informative. Danto acknowledges that this is a new idea and it is unfortunate that he did not have enough time to think it through. The upshot of this idea seems to be that although artworks may look identical to other objects, "Art always stands at a distance from reality."[39] Danto does not explain this condition in any detail and limits his discussion to a few examples and memories that can serve his point that artworks are dreamlike. Clearly, adding a vague condition like this cannot save Danto's definition from the criticisms and counterexamples that I mentioned earlier. Again, it seems to be

[38] Danto, Arthur C. *What art is*. Yale University Press, 2013. pp. 48-49
[39] Ibid. p. 49.

another example of a philosopher feeling obliged to express their theory in terms of a universal definition of art, even though it is not necessary to do so.

Danto is one of the first influential philosophers who proposes definitions and theories that are, to a large extent, different from traditional theories and definitions of art. I believe Danto's aesthetics can be seen as an important contribution to art theory rather than the project of defining art. As I have argued here, his definition of art is not informative in a way that would help us identify works of art; however, his philosophy of art is fairly informative in the way that it puts forward insights about the way artworks are created and the way the audience can interpret and understand them. As I explained in Chapter 1, a theory of art has something to say about the production or reception of artworks. Danto's theory says something in both realms, making it a useful theory of art. A theory of art can guide us to understand art better, but it does not have to include a definition of art.[40] In his tribute to Danto, Peter Kivy says it best:

> The publication of Arthur Danto's *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, in 1981, ushered in a period in the aesthetic revival of which I speak that, at least in Anglo-American circles, has been largely dominated by Danto's philosophical presence. The *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* is philosophy of art in the "grand manner": in the universe of the arts, a "theory of everything." I myself think it will be the last such grand speculative venture in the field for a very long time: how long a time I cannot possibly guess.[41]

3.2. GEORGE DICKIE'S INSTITUTIONALISM

Danto is not the only philosopher of the 1970s who engages with the problems of aesthetics with a procedural attitude. George Dickie is a notable aesthetician influenced by anthropology who tries to define art by showing its place in our social engagements. His definition of art is probably the most full-fledged institutional definition of art. Dickie's answer to the question of what makes something a work of art can be summarised as follows:

[40] He titled his last book *What Art Is*, however, this book is not about definitions of art and was made out of his speeches, memories, and seminars on different occasions that did not have much to do much with defining art.
[41] Kivy, Peter. "Foreword," in Noël Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, (2001), p. ix.

Being present on the right occasion and embedded in the right social structure makes something a work of art.

As I explained in Chapter 1, Davies's suggestion (1991) that definitions of art should be divided into categories, such as functional and procedural definitions, was broadly accepted by analytic philosophers of art. George Dickie (1997) uses similar terminology and introduces a distinction between natural and cultural definitions. According to him, natural definitions consider art-making an intrinsic activity, similar to nesting or hunting. By contrast, cultural definitions consider art-making a conventional and customary activity, similar to marriage, fashion, and tourism. There is a huge crevasse between these two attitudes to art. Dickie considers his own (institutional) theory of art to be quintessential in that it is the only theory that is purely cultural.[42] As mentioned above, Dickie is perhaps right about this. In what follows, I focus mostly on the definitions that are suggested by Dickie and less on his theory of art.

Dickie has revised his definition of art a few times, but he always remains faithful to the procedural or cultural aspect of his definition. His theory is often referred to as the institutional theory of art. Although Danto uses the word "Artworld" for the first time in analytic aesthetics, Dickie is the first to employ Artworld as an essential part of his definition. As Danto writes: "I am often credited with being the founder of the institutional theory, though in fact, it was George Dickie whose theory it was."[43] Danto and Dickie both use the term 'Artworld' in their theories, but it seems that they refer to different things by it. As we saw, the Artworld for Danto is a collection of thoughts and theories. However, Dickie's Artworld is a structure that is made of artistic practices, artists, galleries, critics, and their social arrangements. I will address this difference during my discussion of Dickie's institutional definition.

I divide Dickie's thought into two periods. In the first period, Dickie can be said to 'play by the rules' of the philosophical tradition of defining things. He tries to propose a set of necessary conditions that are jointly sufficient, and he does his best to avoid circularity. In

[42] Dickie, George. "Art: Function or Procedure — Nature or Culture?" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55 (1997):19-28. Dickie, George. "Art and value." The British Journal of Aesthetics 40, no. 2 (2000): 228-241.

[43] Danto, Arthur C. "Replies to essays." *Danto and his critics* (2012): 285-311.

this phase, Dickie has an epistemological ideal, which is to provide a tool for the identification of artworks, thereby proving that radical anti-essentialists are wrong. In the second period, Dickie evidently denies that circularity is problematic for defining art. As Dickie points out: "it is this circularity that marks the definitions of the institutional theory as different from the linear definitions required by the original rules of what Carroll calls "a real definition.""[44] In this phase, he seems to distance himself from the epistemological concern of identifying art and approaches a more ontological stance that aims to explain the structures that make art-making possible.

3.2.1.1. DICKIE I: AN ESSENTIALIST DEFINITION OF ART

In his essay, "Defining art" (1969), Dickie provides his first formulation of the institutional definition of art. Dickie starts his essay by responding to the scepticism of Weitz and sets up to define art in terms of the Aristotelian tradition of defining things. He mentions necessary and sufficient conditions and talks about the genus of art, which is, according to him, artifactuality. Then, he carries on to find the differentia of art and defines the descriptive sense of a work of art as being a "candidate for appreciation":

> A work of art in the descriptive sense is 1) an artifact 2) upon which society or some sub-group of a society has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation.[45]

Although Dickie does not mention anything about the Artworld in his formulation, he makes it clear in his explanations that he thinks conferring the status of candidacy for appreciation happens under the authority of the Artworld. He refers to Danto's Artworld and writes: "... just as two persons can acquire the status of common-law marriage within a legal system, an artifact can acquire the status of a candidate for appreciation within the system which Danto has called 'the artworld.'"[46] It seems to me that the reason Dickie avoids using the term 'Artworld' in his formulation is to avoid circularity. In this stage, Dickie is still committed to

[44] Dickie, George. "The institutional theory of art." in Carroll, Noël, ed. *Theories of Art Today*. University of Wisconsin Press, (2000) p 103.
[45] Dickie, George. "Defining art" *American philosophical quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1969): p. 254.
[46] Ibid.

the standards of defining things according to the Aristotelian and scholastic tradition and is careful to avoid collapsing "the definition into circularity"[47]. Avoiding circularity has its roots in a venerable tradition of defining things that goes back to Aristotle. Classically, a real definition must be non-circular and informative. He concludes his short essay with these remarks:

> Now what I have been saying may sound like saying, "a work of art is an object of which someone has said, 'I christen this object a work of art'." And I think it is rather like that. So one can make a work of art out of a sow's ear, but of course that does not mean that it is a silk purse.[48]

His reference to the sow's ear and silk purse should be understood in the light of his conviction that the status of being a work of art is applicable to bad and tasteless artworks, as much as to good artworks. I can christen some piece of wood that I have found on the shore as a work of art and take it home and hang it on the wall, but at the same time, I might have terrible taste, and the result may not be something praiseworthy and valuable.

A few years later, Dickie repeats his definition with minor changes that seem to aim at making the Artworld an evident part of his definition:

> A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) a set of aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld).[49]

The difference between the first and second definition is that in the second, the status of being a candidate for appreciation is conferred "on behalf of a certain social institution". Here Dickie describes the Artworld as 'a certain social institution'. In one of his later essays, he notes that "[m]y basic claim is that the artworld is a structure of roles within which artists create art."[50] Does Dickie consider the Artworld an institution? It seems that he does, at least in his earlier works. However, he clarifies that the word 'institution' should be used loosely regarding the Artworld. He is aware of the difference between what he calls the institution of art and a more formal, well-established institution. He claims that anyone can join this

[47] Ibid. p. 255.
[48] Ibid. p. 256.
[49] Dickie, George. *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*, Cornell University Press, (1974), p. 34.
[50] Dickie, George. "A Tale of Two Artworlds", *Danto and his critics* (2012): p. 113.

institution: “every person who sees himself as a member of the artworld is thereby a member. ... [S]pecified procedures and lines of authority are nowhere codified, and the artworld carries on its business at the level of customary practice”.[51] This liberal attitude toward the Artworld creates fundamental problems. For example, by endorsing the idea that anyone can be a member of the Artworld, Dickie seems to allow that anyone can change ordinary things into art by christening them as art. How does this square with the fact that there are failed attempts to create art? To stay within the boundaries of conceptual art, an example is Duchamp’s failed attempt, in 1916, to christen the Woolworth Building in New York as his work of art.[52] An institutional definition of art should provide an explanation as to why *Fountain* becomes an accepted instance of conceptual art but *Woolworth Building* does not. In the next section, I explain some objections to Dickie’s ideas and try to shed some light on them.

3.2.1.2. DICKIE I: OBJECTIONS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Dickie makes it clear that his aim in both versions of his institutional definition is to define art in the descriptive or classificatory sense, rather than an evaluative sense.[53] He has been criticised for making such a distinction. An example of these criticisms is suggested by Richard Wollheim. Wollheim thinks that it is an unnecessary move by Dickie to distinguish the descriptive or classificatory sense of a work of art because in the evaluative utterances about art, like the examples above, there is a kind of ellipsis involved. So, when someone says: “This was not art!” after watching a play, she actually means that “This was not [a marvellous example of] art!” or something like that.[54] I am not convinced that Wollheim is right about this distinction being unnecessary. I think Dickie’s move to distinguish between the descriptive (or classificatory) and the evaluative senses of the term ‘work of art’ is justified given that many people, including experts, use ‘art’ in an evaluative sense by

[51] Dickie, George. *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*, Cornell University Press, (1974). p.36.
[52] See Bonk, Ecke. “Marcel Duchamp: The Woolworth Building as Readymade, January 1916 (An Approximation).” *Grand Street*, no. 51, (1995) 165-175.
[53] I explained this distinction in Chapter 1, section 4.
[54] Wollheim, Richard. *Painting as an Art*. Princeton University Press. 1987 pp. 106-107.

assuming that bad works of art are not art.[55] Many concepts can be used in a non-descriptive fashion; for example, I can say: “This is not a broom!” referring to the old broom that does not serve me as well as a new one. Unlike the notion of a broom, the notion of a work of art is complicated, making it more susceptible to misunderstandings. Multi-layered concepts, such as ‘art’ or ‘freedom’, are more prone to change and correction in relation to our theories. For example, I can say: “This is not freedom!” referring to the monitoring and collection of data by the tech giants of the Worldwide Web, such as Google or Facebook. However, that exclamation should mean something different than the assertion, “This is not freedom!” by an enslaved person in the fishing industry on the Pacific Ocean.

My point is that complicated concepts with a vast range of sociological and psychological links are often used in different senses. Being fastidious and selective about these senses is not a vice when trying to demarcate and define them. If someone asks Dickie which buildings are works of art, his answer will probably be the ones that are made with art-making intentions and within an Artworld, no matter how mediocre, ordinary, or boring they may seem. Regardless of its truth, this claim is not trivial and has significant ramifications. There is a stark contrast between Dickie’s approach to bad art and that of aestheticians like Clive Bell, who define artworks by their ability to evoke an aesthetic response through their form. Bell’s definition is evaluative at the root, but Dickie’s definition is descriptive or classificatory.

Dickie’s use of the term ‘institution,’ and the idea that someone confers the status of art on behalf of this institution, has caused some confusion about his definition. For example, many aestheticians interpret Dickie as claiming that the institution of art has its own officials. According to this interpretation of the institutional theory, a work of art receives its status from the representatives of the institution of art. Thus, Wollheim asks: “Does the art-world really nominate representatives? If it does, when, where, and how, do these nominations take place?”[56] Wollheim continues his criticism in the form of a dilemma. He asks whether the representatives of the Artworld have good reasons for their actions. If they make something a candidate for appreciation for some reasons, then it is those reasons that we should be

[55] For example see: Rowe, M. W. "Why ‘art’ doesn't have two senses." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 31, no. 3 (1991): 214-221.
[56] Wollheim, Richard. *Painting as an Art.* . Princeton University Press. 1987. p15.

interested in. Wollheim concludes that either the representatives bestow art status for no reason, which is implausible, or they bestow art status for some reason, in which case it is the reason we should be interested in as the thing that determines art status rather than the institutional bestowing. [57] He can even concede that these reasons do not have to be perfectly sound or explicitly stated, but his point is that the structure of the Artworld cannot be arbitrary and irrational.

Dickie rejects this reading of his definition and explains that he never intended to say that the Artworld is a well-defined institution with representatives. Dickie holds that his definition was not properly understood by Wollheim and all he meant by 'some sub-group of a society' was the artists, not any institutional or official representatives: "I spoke of 'some person or persons,' that is, artist or artists, conferring the status of candidate for appreciation in order to avoid the impression that society acted as a whole to make art."[58] Then, he explains that he used the word 'group' only because some artworks, such as film and theatre, are made by several artists, for example, costume designers, actors, cameramen, directors, etc.

I do not think Dickie's response succeeds in addressing the problem. Besides the intentions of the artist, Dickie often talks about the role of the Artworld in his definition.[59] The problem is that he does not account for the reasons for declaring something as art. In what follows, I try to defend Dickie's definition against Wollheim's objections and in doing so, I give a more charitable interpretation of the institutional theory of art that is consistent with Dickie's body of work.

We can begin by noting that Dickie holds that something being art or not is dependent on the Artworld, and the Artworld itself is part of a social structure that may have many arbitrary features. There are, of course, various causal relations at work that make something an accepted work of art and others not. However, these casual relations are not easily translated into reasons. The procedure that leads to something being considered art may stem from something other than consistent reasoning, such as natural selection and socialisation

[57] Wollheim, Richard. *Art and its Objects*. Cambridge University Press, 1980. p107-110.
[58] Dickie, George. "The institutional theory of art." in Carroll, Noël, ed. *Theories of Art Today*. University of Wisconsin Press, (2000) p 94.
[59] In the next chapter we will see that Levinson, in a similar manner, proposes a definition of art based on the intentions of the artist.

processes. Dickie is more interested in the latter. There is abundant evidence supporting the idea that art forms are contingent and dependent on social processes. For instance, some societies consider certain movements as dance, whereas others consider them to be acrobatics or athletic activities. Many contingent causes, such as technological advancements, have participated in the social structures that lead to the consideration of something as an art form. Therefore, the weakness of Wollheim's objection is that the dilemma he puts forward presupposes that rational reasoning among the art public is the sole or main driver of the development of art history, whereas it can develop in accidental and arbitrary ways. Therefore, Wollheim's dilemma is not fatal to the institutional definition of art. It does not follow from artists having reasons for conferring the status of candidate for appreciation that philosophers must base their definition on those reasons.

Dickie can therefore avoid Wollheim's dilemma, however, he encounters another objection. He talks about the Artworld as if it is an institution, but makes it clear that people who see themselves as members of this institution are members and that this institution does not have clear procedures, guidelines, or representatives. In this case, why does he even call his theory the institutional theory of art? Many thinkers criticise Dickie for considering the Artworld an institution.[60] When we subtract all the institutional features of the Artworld, we are left with the historical and social context of artworks. But is this what Dickie means by "a structure of roles within which artists create art"? To put it simply, it is a trivial observation that the practice of art-making is a cultural, social, and historical phenomenon, and Dickie should have more to say if he wants to offer a plausible institutional definition of art.[61]

The usage of terms such as 'conferred upon' and 'the status of candidacy' alongside the 'institutional' title strongly suggests that, in Dickie's view, art is a well-established institution. However, unlike the Ministry of Justice, say, art does not have a Minister, Associate Ministers or a Secretary: it is not an institution with official representatives. An established institution like The New Zealand Parliament, The Roman Catholic Church, or The University of Waikato has certain regulations and procedures to organize and execute certain activities. Institutions usually have directives for their procedures, but there are hardly

[60] For example, Carroll, Noël. *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*. Psychology Press, 1999. p233-34
[61] Bachrach, Jay E. "Dickie's institutional definition of art: Further criticism." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 11, no. 3 (1977): 25-35.

any regulations for creating and appreciating art; similarly, I can declare myself an artist without any official procedure, but I cannot do the same if I want to be a priest or a judge or a university professor.

Another objection is that Dickie's definition of art is not inclusive of works of art that are not produced under the structures that he calls the Artworld. It is true that the institutional definition accommodates the modern avant-garde artworks of the 19th century and the conceptual works of the 20th century. His definition can accommodate new art forms such as conceptual art perfectly well, if the Artworld allows for them. However, there are many works of art that are produced outside the context of an Artworld. Consider many tribal works of art, works of folklore, and prehistoric works of art. Either Dickie's Artworld does not include these examples, or he stretches the meaning of Artworld so that it no longer means "a structure of roles". Stephen Davies points out this deficiency in the institutional definition of art by writing:

> I accept that in some non-Western cultures—those of Japan, China, Indonesia, India, Iran, and Iraq, for instance—art has long been formalized and professionalized in some respects. In many other societies, however, I doubt that art is served by a distinctively structured institution; rather, it is an inseparable aspect of wider social practices concerning kinship, religion, commerce, ritual, and government.[62]

In response to these objections, Dickie radically changes his definition in a controversial move in his book entitled, *The Art Circle:* A *Theory of Art* (1984). In the next section, I explain how this definition is different from his earlier formulations of institutional definitions of art.

3.2.2. DICKIE II: A SEMI-ESSENTIALIST DEFINITION OF ART?

It might be hard to draw a sharp line between Dickie's theory of art in his *Art and the Aesthetic* (1974) and in his later work, *The Art Circle.* However, these two books seem to have a different attitude toward art. He starts *The Art Circle* with a criticism of anti-

[62] Davies, Stephen. *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*. Clarendon Press, 2007. p. 64.

essentialism and declares that he is trying to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions of art. However, Dickie holds that some definitions of art need to be circular because of their subject. This is a clear departure point from the tradition of defining things that considers circularity as a cardinal sin in real definitions. In this book, he does not seem to take a definition of art as an identifying tool that is supposed to clarify which items are art and which are not. He writes: "what philosophical definitions of 'work of art' are really attempting to do is … to make clear to us in a self-conscious and explicit way what we already in some sense know."[63] Here Dickie sounds more modest than in his earlier book, in which he seems to promise a definition that reveals the essence of art. Here, he proposes his controversial definition of art and acknowledges that it is a circular definition:

> An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art. A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public. A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them. The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems. An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public.[64]

He avoids legal terminology and formal language this time. His formulation is less ambiguous, giving us more information about its keywords. The logical structure of this definition is circular. The crucial keywords are defined by other keywords. Artist is defined by appeal to a work of art; a work of art is defined by appeal to an Artworld public. Similarly, the Artworld and Artworld systems are defined by appealing to the artist and the art public. Dickie accepts that this definition is circular, but he claims that the circularity is not vicious and that the definition is informative. The circularity in the definition is the inevitable result of the interrelated state of affairs in the Artworld.

In cases where a circular definition is not informative, the circularity is vicious and often immediate. For example, it is not informative when someone defines life as the opposite of death and then defines death as the opposite of life. This is an example of immediate circularity; however, in cases of mediated circularity, it is possible to gain

[63] Dickie, George. *The Art Circle: A Theory of Art*. New York, 1984, p. 79.
[64] Ibid. pp. 80-82.

something from the definition. In my opinion, this happens because the mediated circularity can point out a connection between ideas where the connection had not been addressed earlier. In a more recent article, Dickie explains that the circularity of the concept of art is not a rare instance; if a notion is inter-related with a set of notions so that it is difficult to define one of them without referring to the others, we are dealing with a set of inflected concepts: "a set of concepts that bend in on themselves, presupposing and supporting one another."[65] According to him, many social concepts have the same structure. For example, "the political notions of executive, legislature, judiciary, and law are such a set of concepts."[66]

The point that Dickie makes is compatible with the point I made in Chapter 2 about the essence of art. I pointed out that some anti-essentialists argue against the possibility of defining art by focusing on the changing meaning of art. In other words, art's dependency on human arrangements makes it plausible to say that art does not have an essence. My point was that, despite it not having an essence, we can still be open to defining art because of its relative stability. I used 'the working class' as an example of a concept that can be defined despite not having a timeless essence. However, it is crucial to note that we cannot expect a timeless definition of art in this manner. I think a definition of a cultural phenomenon cannot be intensionally adequate; simply because intensional adequacy results from the essential rather than contingent properties, and cultural phenomena are always contingent. By admitting the changing nature of art, we acknowledge a level of contingency that is inconsistent with the notion of intensional adequacy. However, it does not follow from my point about the essence that defining essence-less things does not require adherence to any rational or logical criteria. A definition that is not intensionally adequate can still be expected to be extensionally adequate for a considerable period of time.

In response to Carroll's criticism (that his institutional definition is circular and real definitions should not be so), Dickie accepts that his definition is circular but replies that he never intended to offer a 'real' definition. To remind the reader, a real definition demarcates the nature of what is being defined by expressing its necessary and sufficient conditions. Dickie asserts that his definition has an ontological function rather than an epistemological

[65] Dickie, George. "The Institutional Theory of Art." in Carroll, Noël, ed. *Theories of Art Today*. University of Wisconsin Press, (2000) p 102.
[66] Ibid.

function.[67] What he means is that he did not intend to propose a definition to differentiate artworks from other things. Instead, he believes that his definition puts forward insights into the nature and meaning of art. In other words, his definition is not extensionally adequate but may nevertheless have something to say about the nature of artworks. Before this announcement, however, it was reasonable for his fellow philosophers to assume that he wanted to offer an alternative to the aesthetic and expressive definitions of art. In his first period, he played by the rules of traditional definitions when he talked about the genus and differentia of works of art and offered his definition as a response to anti-essentialist who denied that identifying art requires a definition.

By contrast, in his later work Dickie explicitly steers clear of the traditional definitions of art and the Aristotelian tradition of defining things. His strategy finds some support in recent theories of truth and meaning. For example, Anil Gupta argues against the idea that circularity and informativeness are at odds with each other. He claims that circular definitions are semantically and logically legitimate in the case of circular concepts. Therefore, the process of elucidation of a concept can be done by presupposing it. He writes:

> It is not going to be easy to prove this claim, for outside of logic and semantics definitional links between concepts are hard to establish. However, I do find encouragement in the fact that for many concepts there are persistent puzzles and that philosophers in their analyses often go around in circles.[68]

Examples of informative definitions that are circular include definitions of colours that have this form: ‘Blue’ is the colour that is seen as blue by most people, ‘Red’ is the colour that is seen as red by most people, and so on. Of course, such definitions are by no means essence-revealing, but they are informative.

Dickie also admits that his definition is not designed to be extensionally adequate and to distinguish art from non-art; instead, his aim is to introduce his insights about the nature of art – insights that turned out to be both controversial and vastly influential. Dickie is inspired by anthropology, which studies beliefs, customs and behaviours in human communities. In my view, Dickie’s philosophy of art is illuminating and explanatory because, among other

[67] Ibid.
[68] Gupta, Anil. *Truth, meaning, experience*. OUP USA, 2011. p. 93-95.

things, he puts his finger on the fact that the practice of making art cannot be explained without considering it as a set of social customs in human communities. He provides an informative *theory* of art. However, my question is, why does Dickie refer to it as a definition of art? He could have explained everything he has accounted for in his prolific writings without claiming that he has succeeded in defining art. It is unfortunate that he could not resist the temptation to get involved in the project of defining art. Dickie 'defines' art and subsequently tries to defend his position, which leads to the admission that he never intended to define art in a conventional manner.

As I briefly pointed out in the previous section, a frequent objection to the institutional definition is that it rejects the possibility of artworks outside the Artworld. Many societies do not have an established art tradition that can be described as an Artworld.[69] Another way to approach this problem is by considering the earliest artworks. According to institutionalism, there can only be art within an art public. It seems that Dickie's account cannot explain the creation of the first works of art because there could not be an art public or an Artworld before the earliest works of art. The first works of art were not the result of engaging in some pre-existing standards because there were no standard ways of producing art in those cases. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, it is highly plausible that the first works of art were produced because of the natural inclination of early humans towards beauty. Dickie seems to neglect our biological mechanisms involved in favouring beautiful things. It is plausible that aesthetic interest led early humans to ornament their tools and surroundings in the first place, and that, later on, communities adopted these activities in their practices and customs. Therefore, this objection is valid because the institutional definition of art does not explain these primitive instances of art.

I have reviewed two versions of institutionalism proposed by Dickie and investigated some criticisms directed at them. I claim that there is a fundamental difference between these two definitions. In his first two formulations, he aspires to a real definition of art that is extensionally and intensionally adequate. Dickie fails to achieve an adequate and informative definition of art in this period. In the second period, he proposes a third definition. He seems to have different intentions in this latter definition. In this period, he approaches the subject

[69] Davies, Stephen. *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*. Clarendon Press, 2007. p. 64.

from an ontological point of view and does not aim at identifying art. I conclude that, like his first definition, Dickie's second definition of art is not adequate. However, viewed as a theory of art, Dickie's philosophy has had a significant impact on analytical aesthetics. His observation about the social aspect of artworks and their dependency on contingent traditions and customs is widely acknowledged among contemporary aestheticians. This becomes apparent when we note that the theories of art after him are often heavily influenced by his terminology and his way of apprehending artworks. This will be evident in the rest of the definitions of art that I will review.

3.3. CONCLUSION

Danto and Dickie are two philosophers who took on the challenge of discovering the essence of art. These aestheticians brought to our attention the fact that works of art are inherently rooted in society, culture, and history. They both start by criticising radical anti-essentialism and expressing the need for a definition of art. Unlike radical anti-essentialists, who claim that the identification of artworks is not dependent on a definition of art, Danto and Dickie claim that a definition is at the heart of the attempt to distinguish art from non-art. In this chapter, I inspected the adequacy of their definitions of art which included two definitions proposed by Danto and two definitions proposed by Dickie. I conclude, based on my observations and arguments, that none of these procedural definitions come any closer to proving that art has an essence. Therefore, they are not intensionally adequate. Furthermore, many counterexamples are imaginable for them; therefore they are not extensionally adequate either.

Another important criterion for a real definition of art is informativeness, and both Danto and Dickie, struggle to provide informative conditions. This is mainly the result of their dependence on the idea of Artworld, which has not been explicated to the degree that it can carry the weight of the institutional definitions. Circularity is a further problem that is acknowledged and embraced by Dickie in his latter definition. This acknowledgment comes at a price, and Dickie lets go of the claim that his definition can distinguish art from non-art (extensionally adequate). By examining these procedural responses to anti-essentialism, we

can conclude that they do not defeat radical anti-essentialism. Both Danto and Dickie form their definition by mainly considering particular visual art forms and conceptual art, and then mistakenly claim that they have discovered the essence of art in general. As we will see in the next chapter, Jerrold Levinson encounters a similar problem in his attempt to define art.

CHAPTER 4 A HISTORICAL DEFINITION AND AN IDENTIFYING APPROACH

In this Chapter, I explain and examine the ideas of two thinkers who influenced the project of defining art, Jerrold Levinson and Noël Carroll. Levinson proposes a definition that has been described as intentional, historical, or recursive. His definition is similar to Dickie's and Danto's in that it considers the relational properties of artworks to be the ones that determine their identity. However, the historical definition differs from institutional definitions in that it emphasises the role of the artist's intentions in the constitution of an artwork, where those intentions refer to the history of art, as opposed to what Levinson refers to as "that murky and somewhat exclusive institution, the *artworld*."[1]

In the second part of this chapter I explain an alternative approach to identifying art suggested by Carroll. Carroll proposes a method that is not definitional but is aimed to replace definitions of art in identifying artworks. Carroll's method is called historical narration and, similar to Levinson's definition, has a recursive structure, meaning it tries to explain artworks by their relation to past artworks. That being said, Carroll's proposal is different from Levinson's in several aspects. An important difference, I think, is that Carroll does not try to provide necessary conditions that are jointly sufficient, and that he makes no claim about the essence of art. He focuses only on identifying the extension of art in controversial cases, mostly from recent art history.

[1] Levinson, Jerrold. "Defining art historically." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 19, no. 3 (1979) p. 232.

4.1.1. JERROLD LEVINSON'S HISTORICAL DEFINITION OF ART

Levinson's paper, "Defining art historically" (1979), begins by pointing out a fundamental problem in the institutional definition of art. Levinson notes that Dickie talks about the artist who presents a work of art for appreciation, but claims that Dickie neglects *how* the artist presents something for appreciation. He argues that by considering the artist's intentions, we can solve this problem. As Levinson puts it: "While the sociology of art is of great interest, the essence of art does not lie there but instead in art's relation to its contingent history."[2] To understand the importance of Levinson's criticism, I need to briefly explain the role of intention in defining art.

Levinson's suggestion is similar to Jerry Fodor's suggestion in his response to Danto; Fodor recognises that the problem of 'indiscernibles' in the philosophy of art is similar to the problem of action in the philosophy of mind. As Wittgenstein famously asks: "what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?"[3] Whatever the answer is, it cannot be found in the appearance of the arm and its movement. Fodor suggests that in the same manner that the notion of intention helped us to understand this problem in the philosophy of action, it can be employed in aesthetics. However, Danto rejects this suggestion, noting that an explanation of art that appeals to the intentions of the artist takes us no further since it traps us in circularity.[4] As we saw in the previous chapter, Danto tries to solve this problem by proposing that we should consider the historical and theoretical context of indiscernibles; in other words, we should consider them in relation to their Artworld. Unlike Danto and Dickie, Levinson proposes a definition of art that does not include the notion of an Artworld. In his view, the intention of the creator of an artwork is a necessary condition of its being an artwork, and this intention refers to the concrete history of art. He writes: "*a work of art is a thing intended for regard-as-a-work-of-art*: regard in any of the ways *works of art existing prior to it have been correctly regarded.*" [5] (The italics are Levinson's.)

[2] Ibid. p. 247.
[3] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. John Wiley & Sons, 2010. §621.
[4] Danto, Arthur C. "Replies to essays." *Danto and his critics* (2012): 293.
[5] Levinson, Jerrold. "Defining art historically." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 19, no. 3 (1979) p. 234.

Levinson aims to provide a universal definition that is intensionally and extensionally adequate. He notes that his definition is an attempt at revealing the essence (intension) of what is called art in his own era, which is in the Western world of the 20th century. Like his predecessors, he rejects the anti-essentialist idea that art cannot be intensionally defined and claims that "Wittgensteinians in art, as elsewhere, exaggerate the extent to which cultural concepts fail to have extractable, fairly serviceable, essences."[6] It is not clear what Levinson means by 'fairly serviceable essences,' but he aims to provide a universal definition that is intensionally and extensionally adequate. This is obvious when he asserts that the intension and extension of art are tied together in a retrospective manner: "the intension of 'artwork at t' is to be explicated in terms of the extension of 'artwork,' and of 'ways artworks are correctly regarded as art,' for times prior to t."[7] Here is his complete formulation of the historical definition of art:

> X is an art work at t = df X is an object of which it is true at t that some person or persons having the appropriate proprietary right over X, non-passingly intends (or intended) X for regard-as-a-work-of-art, *i.e.* regard in any way (or ways) in which objects in the extension of 'art work' prior to t are or were correctly (or standardly) regarded.
>
> It is clear that the *meaning* of 'art work' is not involved in the right hand side of this definition, but only its past extension at some point. [8]

In this definition, Levinson highlights the artist's intention and its relation to art history. He holds that a work of art is something that its creator intends to be regarded in one of the ways that the works of art have been regarded in the past. The issue is not whether the item has a connection with a tradition of art-making but whether the relevant person (the artist) intends the item to be regarded in one of the ways that artworks have previously been correctly regarded as art.

To clarify how these intentions are connected to past artworks, Levinson considers three kinds of intentions: 1. specific art-conscious intentions, 2. non-specific art-conscious

[6] Levinson, Jerrold. "Refining Art Historically." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47, no. 1 (1989) p. 23.
[7] Ibid. p. 26.
[8] Levinson, Jerrold. "Defining art historically." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 19, no. 3 (1979) pp. 240-241.

intentions, and 3. art-unconscious intentions. He explains that the artist's intention can be conscious or unconscious. An artist can make something and directly intend it to be one of the instances of a certain art form. For example, an artist may create a painting with oil paints on canvas in the genre of portrait and intend it to be part of the tradition of portrait-making. This is an example of specific and conscious intention. Non-specific and conscious intentions seem rather vague as Levinson describes them as follows "intending for regard in whatever ways any past art works have been correctly regarded, having no particular ones in mind."[9] It seems to me that he includes these intentions mostly to justify conceptual art, as conceptual artists often regard something as art in that way. These two kinds of intentions are called *art-conscious* intentions, which account for the majority of artworks. However, Levinson maintains that artworks can also be created with *art-unconscious* intentions, which means the creator does not know that what they are doing is connected to an art tradition; nonetheless, their artifact is intrinsically related to a correct way that some past artworks have been regarded. According to Levinson, "An example of this might be intending for listening to with attention to timbre."[10] Being familiar with a tradition of art-making and intending the work to be part of that tradition accounts for most artworks but is not a necessary condition of artworks. Artworks that are made outside any art tradition are still possible. He allows a person with no knowledge or education of prior artworks or art institutions to create a work of art "if he intends his object for regard in a way which happens to be, unbeknown to him, in the repertory of aesthetic regards established at that time."[11]

Levinson appears to be concerned with ready-mades and conceptual artworks when he asks, doubtfully: "can you artify anything you do not either own, or otherwise have legitimate access to? (Can *persons*, say, be made into artworks – 'pieces' – against their will?)."[12] It seems that the proprietary rights and non-passing intentions are implemented in the historical definition to prevent turning every ordinary thing into an artwork just by intending it to be so. The 'non-passing intentions' limit the relevant intentions to those that persist over time rather than short impulses. And about proprietary rights, Levinson explains that:

[9] Ibid. p. 237.
[10] Ibid. p. 237.
[11] Ibid. p. 238.
[12]Levinson, Jerrold. "Refining Art Historically." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47, no. 1 (1989). p.31.

> You cannot ‘artify’ what you do not own and thus have no right to dispose of. All your intentions will not avail in such a case, because another person's intention, that of the owner, has priority over yours. (Of course, if he is not opposed to your intention, he can grant you permission to make his possession into an art work).[13]

With these conditions, he is able to limit the scope of arbitrary acts intended to create conceptual or avant-garde artwork. Also, the comment about ‘granting permission’ is useful in many cases, such as buildings and monuments. For example, the architects who worked on the Blue Mosque in Istanbul did not own it, but permission was granted to them by Ahmed I, the sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1603 to 1617.

4.1.2. OBJECTIONS TO THE HISTORICAL DEFINITION OF ART

Let us look at Levinson’s formulation again. It is not hard to see that the term ‘art work’ appears at both sides of the equal sign (=), and it is for this reason that Levinson emphasises that they have different senses. He seems to say that the ‘art work’ on the lefthand side refers to the intension of the artwork, but the second ‘art work’ on the right side refers to the extension of the artwork. I think the difficulty with this claim is that it is simply not true. Levinson is confusing “objects in the extension of ‘art works’” with “art works”. If one assumes an intension for the term artwork, as he does, the phrase “objects in the extension of ‘art works’” refers to the extension of artworks, but the term ‘art work’ in this very phrase refers to nothing less than the intension of artwork. Therefore, this is an example of the red herring fallacy to justify the circularity of his account. The circularity is still there no matter how firmly Levinson insists that: it is clearly not so!

Levinson rejects the objection that his account is circular with another argument. He holds that because he defines artworks at t with reference to artworks before t, there exists no circularity. But even if we accept this claim, a problem that remains, as I will argue shortly, is that the definition is not informative. According to Levinson, phenomena like art are intentional in nature, and as a result, allow for such an approach. As he puts it, this is “just

[13] Levinson, Jerrold. "Defining art historically." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 19, no. 3 (1979): 232-250. p237.

the way art itself works."[14] However, he accepts that his account is problematic as far as the first artworks are involved. Because Levinson defines works of art with reference to prior works of art in a recursive manner, he needs a point where this recursion stops, and that point is inevitably the first artwork.

He proposes that to avoid this problem, the claim that all artworks are constituted with reference to past artworks needs to be altered. However, he maintains that this alteration is not on such a scale as to undermine his definition. As he puts it: "...since the tempering required is confined to the very earliest stages of the story of art, the universality of the analysis of arthood offered is not, I think, seriously compromised, nor are its prospects vis-a-vis future art in any way dimmed."[15] I agree with Levinson that the inability of his definition to justify first artworks should not be a reason to reject his definition in its entirety. But such inability is a valid reason to consider the definition to be intensionally inadequate. In other words, if the essence of art consists of some sort of reference to past artworks, this reference should be true across the board and for all instances of artworks, including the first artworks. This is evident when he proposes a disjunctive definition to solve this problem:

> Anyway, it looks like an expanded definition of art is needed if both first art and later art are to be comprised, and that this will need to be disjunctive in form. It would be that something is art iff either (a) it satisfies the basic definition or (b) it is an instance of first art—that is, one of those things from which all other art, that satisfying the basic definition, springs.[16]

The best candidate for part (b) of the above definition that is supposed to account for the first artworks is an aesthetic definition of art. As we will see in the next chapter, disjunctive definitions of art have a similar structure, while one of the disjuncts covers the aesthetic aspects of artworks and the other the institutional aspect.

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[14] Ibid. p. 240.
[15] Levinson, Jerrold. "Extending art historically" in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cornell University Press, 1996. p. 169.
[16] Levinson, Jerrold, "The Irreducible Historicality of the Concept of Art" in Levinson, Jerrold. *Contemplating Art: Essays in aesthetics.* Clarendon Press, 2006. p. 18.

In “Refining Art Historically,” which was published a decade later, Levinson seems to be more careful with the claim that his definition is essence-revealing (intensionally adequate). He writes:

> That a concept may lack strictly necessary and sufficient conditions of application, which is probably the case for all save those explicitly introduced in a formal context, is not reason enough to totally abandon the attempt to theorize in a definitional vein – if seasoned with a grain of salt – as to the nuclear operating conditions of the concept.[17]

I should point out that Levinson writes this in response to anti-essentialists who claim that art cannot be defined. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, I am sympathetic to Levinson’s view in this regard and agree that the absence of essence does not amount to indefinability. If a concept lacks essence, it only means that it cannot be defined with a definition that is true in every possible world. In other words, a universal definition is off the table. However, there is nothing theoretically wrong with defining an essence-less concept for piecemeal theoretical purposes, provided we acknowledge the limits of the definition and its application.

Another objection to Levinson’s definition which is worth discussing briefly is that having proprietary rights is not a necessary condition for claiming something to be a work of art, and ownership rights are often redundant to the art status of works. As Carroll mentions in his criticism of historical definition, the creation of some forms of art, such as graffiti, can be a crime in some cases, and this does not fit with the condition of proprietary rights. “To say that the same configuration when painted on a canvas that Picasso happened to own is art, but when painted on the side of a subway car, it is not art, sounds completely arbitrary.”[18]

I think Carroll’s objection does not pose a serious problem for Levinson, but that Carroll is right to suggest that the legal status of artworks is accidental rather than essential. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the ideal is to have a definition that points to the essential properties of artworks rather than accidental ones. The proprietary condition does not seem to be something related to the nature of art. If I plant a vegetable garden in my neighbours’ section while they are away on holiday, it is still a vegetable garden even if it does not belong

[17] Levinson, Jerrold. "Refining Art Historically." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47, no. 1 (1989) p. 23.
[18] Carroll, Noël. *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*. Routledge, 1999. p. 245.

to me. It seems to me that having proprietary rights over the work of art is an issue related to law rather than the art itself. The distinction between tangible and intangible assets can explain examples like this. Had Picasso painted *Guernica* on the side of a subway car, the configuration would still be a work of art and the intellectual property of Picasso. Would this turn the whole subway car into a work of art? Not necessarily.

Another objection is that the formulation remains problematic because it is painfully uninformative. I think this is the main problem for the historical definition. An important part of this formulation is 'the relation' that artwork at t has with artworks prior to t, and Levinson does not explain this relation. A natural question about this definition is to ask, what are the correct ways of art-making in the past such that, with regard to them, art-making in the present becomes justified? Levinson appears to be ambivalent about answering this question, and on different occasions he provides different answers to it. In his 1979 article, he gives us some clues about the correct ways of regarding something as art and writes in a footnote:

> The notion of correct regard for an art work is a difficult one to make out, but surely relevant to it are the following considerations: (1) how the artist intended his work to be regarded; (2) what manner of regarding the work is most rewarding; (3) the kinds of regard similar objects have enjoyed; (4) what way of regarding the work is optimum for realizing the ends (e.g. certain pleasures, moods, awarenesses) which the artist envisaged in connection with appreciation; (5) what way of regarding the work makes for the most satisfying or coherent picture of its place in the development of art.[19]

However, in his 1989 article, in response to Beardsley's criticism aimed at clarifying the correct ways of regarding something as art, Levinson changes his stance and explains that the correct ways of regarding art should be taken for granted in the extension of art. He writes:

> The idea that not only earlier artworks themselves, but also their associated proper modes of engagement, had to be granted, in extension, for the analysis (of 'art now' in terms of 'art until now') to be effective, was indeed not clearly brought out in my

[19] Ibid. p. 248

original discussion. I am grateful to Beardsley's criticism for prodding me to make this plainer.[20]

Instead of explaining what the correct regards of intending something as art are, he directs us to the extension of artworks in the past. If, as Levinson claims, the definition does not need to explain the correct ways of regarding something as art, one can define many things in a similar way without knowing much about them. For example, one can define a society as whatever is *correctly* regarded as society in the past. One can define war as whatever is *correctly* regarded as war in the past. One can define 'charity at t' as what some earlier person regarded as a charity, i.e., in any way that objects in the extension of 'charity prior to t' are or have been correctly (or standardly) regarded. Each of these definitions might be slightly different, but what they have in common is that they are not informative. To 'be correctly regarded' carries a lot of weight in these definitions, and as Beardsley points out, Levinson owes us an explanation if he wants his definition to be informative.[21]

In a similar vein, it can be objected that according to the historical definition, many things can be related to artworks indirectly and unconsciously, but not all of them are artworks. For example, we know that creating beautiful forms has been one of the central intentions in art history. From rhythmic figures of speech in Arabic poems to elegant Baroque stuccoes of the Jasna Góra basilica, most artworks involve creating beautiful and harmonic patterns and forms. Is Levinson ready to accept that many dishes, tools, items of furniture and the like are works of art because they are somehow related to a recognized way of art-making? Dickie is able to deny that some artifacts are works of art if they are not part of an Artworld, but Levinson does not have that option.

I will shortly explain Levinson's answer to the above question. Before I do so, it is useful to note that the objection can also be stated in the following way: The historical definition is not exclusive because many non-artworks are regarded in a similar way to artworks. For example, some altar paintings are regarded as a vehicle to remind the believers of the judgment day. Does this mean that the historical definition includes many non-artworks with the same religious purpose?

[20] Levinson, Jerrold. "Refining Art Historically" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47, no. 1 (1989) p. 26.
[21] Beardsley, Monroe. "An Aesthetic Definition of Art" in *What Is Art?* ed. H. Curtler. New York: Haven. 1983.

Levinson's answer is negative, and he has a plausible explanation for it. He holds that it is not enough for a 'regard' to be partially similar to some art-regards in the past, but the regard in question must be about the "total package" and "overall approach." He writes: "The backward-looking invocation must be not just to a single part or element in the complex way some preceding art was correctly regarded, but to a total package or overall approach."[22] In response to a similar objection by Carroll,[23] who criticises the historical definition of art for not allowing art regards to be historical and to go obsolete in some cases, Levinson writes that this objection: "mistakes a *single, isolated regard* appropriate to some past artworks for a *complete, integral ensemble of regards* appropriate to some past artworks. ... Integral ensembles of regards appropriate to past artworks in fact never become obsolete."[24]

I think Levinson's response to the above objection is plausible. However, it seems to me that the main problem can be reduced, again, to the concept of a correct or proper way to relate to past art, which Levinson modifies by adding the attributes of 'integral' and 'complete' to it. When Levinson appeals to the standard and correct ways of making art, he has no choice but to accept a degree of institutionalism. There are many ways of artmaking and modes of appreciation of artworks. One of the core ideas of Dickie's theory is that in determining the art status of an artifact, the Artworld has pre-eminence over other factors, such as the intentions of the artist, aesthetic value or whatever else. Certain standards in our present Artworld determine that a papier collé is a work of art, but a kata in Judo is not; likewise, our Artworld determines that photography is a standard art form, but baking cakes is not. The concept of 'to be correctly regarded' in the historical definition of art plays a similar role to the concept of Artworld in Danto's and Dickie's definitions.

4.1.3. HISTORICAL DEFINITION AND ARTWORKS WITH PRACTICAL FUNCTIONS

As Levinson claims that his definition is universal, there are a few related questions that he needs to answer about 'art in general', in contrast to 'fine' and 'conceptual art'. Some kinds

[22] Ibid. p. 24.
[23] Carroll, Noël. "Identifying Art", in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. p. 96.
[24] Levinson, Jerrold, "The Irreducible Historicality of the Concept of Art" in Levinson, Jerrold. *Contemplating Art: Essays in aesthetics.* Clarendon Press, 2006. pp. 16-17.

of artworks are not usually produced for mere contemplation and have a practical purpose as well. We usually do not think about them when we talk about fine arts. They are also not part of the conceptual arts or art forms aimed for exhibition in theatres, galleries, or art happenings. Examples are beautiful baskets woven from local plants, beautiful pots and vases made of clay or ceramics, exquisite weapons such as swords and shields, folklore music and songs such as work music, expressive tribal masks and ornaments, quality hand-knotted rugs, and so on. Does the historical definition of art leave space for these objects? When considering whether custom-built cars are works of art or not, he admits that this is not an easy question and points out that the possession of some qualities may be sufficient to justify calling a craft object a work of art:

> Thus, factors that would dispose one to see a craft object as art would include whether it was fashioned by a single individual and reflected that individual's personality and taste, the amount of care evident in the handling of detail, the degree of attention to form as apart from fittingness to function as such, the sense of statement being made, or an attitude expressed.[25]

As we saw in his "Refining Art," his stance about the art-regards or, as he sometimes refers to them, "modes of engagement," was that "the proper modes of engagement" should be granted, and the historical definition of art does not need to explain what these 'modes' or 'regards' are. However, when it comes to the question of which craftworks qualify as works of art, he lists qualities that are nothing but aesthetic. In its broad sense, aesthetic qualities include expressing attitudes, attention to form, and making a statement. However, in a manner that is clearly inconsistent, Levinson denies that some craftworks with highly aesthetic features can be works of art. In a more recent article he writes about practical objects that are aesthetically appealing:

> .. the idea that any of them were ever conceived or projected in a purely utilitarian way is implausible. Thus, when we exhibit such objects in art museums we don't need to be thought of as transforming or altering their status, but as simply acknowledging the quasi-artistic status they already have, at least in part, as created. On the other

[25] Levinson, Jerrold. "Extending art historically" in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cornell University Press, 1996. p. 169.

> hand, it is possible that some such objects, e.g. magic-ritual ones aimed only at invoking the spirits or manipulating natural forces, really don't belong in art museums, given their original constitutive projection by their makers, however aesthetically interesting or artistically advanced they might seem.[26]

I will explain how this paragraph is problematic, but first, I will underline what is plausible in this paragraph. Levinson concedes that because some artifacts have been made in a not "purely utilitarian" way, they have a "quasi-artistic status." He seems to presume that inviting contemplation is a necessary condition of such quasi-artworks as if there is a bond between being regarded for contemplation and being a work of art. It is important to note that Levinson's argument does not grant the existence of some sort of 'purely artistic intention', which is an empty and bloated myth. He does not claim that artworks cannot have functions such as religious, spiritual, magical, pedagogical, political, economic, and ideological intentions, and so on. Such a claim would be in clear conflict with art history. However, he argues that if some object is made with intentions that are, for example, purely magical without any intention for contemplation, those objects are not artworks, no matter how "aesthetically interesting or artistically advanced they might seem."[27]

As Levinson's definition is intentional, he allows that the lack of artistic intention, which is, in this case, inviting contemplation, trumps all aesthetic qualities. On this basis, he denies that an object made for magical purposes can be an artwork because it is not made with the intention to invite contemplation. But this claim strikes me as counterintuitive and inconsistent with Levinson's thought. No matter how hard I try, I cannot imagine an aesthetically advanced artifact that does not invite some sort of contemplation. Even an item made for purely magical purposes and that is forbidden to be seen by anyone except the witch or the sorcerer that is going to use it, invites contemplation by that person. This would still be the case even if the sorcerer is the same person who created the item. That is why I think his remarks are counterintuitive. But I also think Levinson's remarks are inconsistent with his overall view, because according to his definition of art, art-unconscious intentions are a legitimate mode of artmaking, and the case above is a clear example of such intentions.

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[26] Levinson, Jerrold, "The Irreducible Historicality of the Concept of Art" in Levinson, Jerrold. *Contemplating Art: Essays in aesthetics.* Clarendon Press, 2006. p17.

[27] He makes a similar point in "Defining art historically." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 19, no. 3 (1979) p. 237.

Levinson concedes that works of art have both "artistic/aesthetic" functions and practical functions, and it is not the "artistic/aesthetic" functions that make them works of art but "proper ways or regards" that do so. These ways or regards can sometimes trump any aesthetic qualities, but unfortunately, they remain, to use his own words, as "murky" as the Artworld.

4.2. NOËL CARROLL'S HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

4.2.1 IDENTIFYING ART WITHOUT DEFINING ART

After criticising some definitions of art in his *Art and Its Objects*, Richard Wollheim proposes that it is more realistic that philosophers look for a method of identifying artworks instead of defining art. To put it in terms of adequacy, this suggestion means that instead of aiming at intensional adequacy and finding the essence of art (if such a thing exists), we can aim at extensional adequacy, which is to identify which objects fall within the extension of "art". The important point is that if we are to identify the extension of art, there are other ways to do this rather than defining art. Carroll is the aesthetician who takes this suggestion seriously.

Unlike philosophers who try to define art, Carroll approaches the matter from a different angle; he chooses to step out of the circle of definitions and, instead of asking 'What is art?', focuses on why this question becomes important in the twentieth century. He argues that most thinkers in the 20th century who tried to determine what art is were looking for a reliable method to distinguish art from other things. In other words, he thinks the main problem is the extensional adequacy of a definition of art. Therefore, he focuses primarily on a method for identifying art. Carroll proposes that the interest of aestheticians in the 20th century toward defining art has something to do with the emergence of avant-garde movements, like Dadaism. The tendency of aestheticians to try to define art, he argues, has been nourished by the avant-garde artworks that have mercilessly challenged our standard conceptions of art. His solution involves a method he calls historical narration; I will investigate Carroll's method in this chapter because he claims that it can solve the problem of extensional adequacy.

Carroll is influenced by the historical definition of art and anti-essentialist arguments against defining art. He claims that analytic philosophers of art, in contrast to continental philosophers, lack a historical perspective, and this has caused them to define art in ahistorical ways with essentialist definitions.[28] He believes that most aestheticians who concern themselves with the question of 'what is art?' want to find a reliable tool for identifying avant-garde arts as art. However, he asserts that we do not need a definition in order to distinguish arts from non-arts.

Like a radical anti-essentialist, he believes that we do not need a definition to identify works of art. According to Carroll, because identifying art can be achieved without a definition, defining art remains a mere academic subject that "we do not really need"[29]. Nonetheless, unlike radical anti-essentialists, he does not deny that there can be a real definition of art and claims to be an agnostic about it, an agnostic that is not eager to find out the answer: "Since I maintain that we do not really need such a definition, our agnosticism is not of the anxious variety."[30]

Carroll thinks it is not a coincidence that a surge in the variety of theories of art is synchronised with the outburst of innovative artworks and styles in modern avant-garde arts. He asserts that philosophers of art – from Bell and Collingwood to anti-essentialists, Danto, and Dickie – are all influenced by avant-garde movements and the revolutionary art of their time.[31] It is plausible that there is a connection between the upswing in artistic innovation and the apparent urgency of the need to define art in the twentieth century. When artists present something as a work of art that does not look or sound like an artwork, many art lovers may ask, 'What is the point of this?' We engaged with a few controversial cases like Fountain or Brillo Boxes in previous chapters. Art history has witnessed numerous cases like these, in visual arts, performance arts, and literature, particularly in the past hundred years.

As explained in Chapter 2, the critics of family resemblance in the philosophy of art treated and described it as a method or approach to distinguish artworks from other things. I argued in detail against the plausibility of this assumption; however, Carroll thinks

[28] Carroll, Noël. "History and the Philosophy of Art." Journal of the Philosophy of History 5, no. 3 (2011): 370-382.
[29] Carroll, Noël. "Identifying Art", in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. p 83
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid. 83-85

otherwise. Nonetheless, because he is not convinced that family resemblance can differentiate art from other things, he proposes a new method for this task based on historical narratives.

Carroll's approach to the problem of identifying art is interesting and important because he starts from a practical point of view that addresses disagreements about some object being art or not. According to him, to convince someone who does not believe that a particular object is art, we should present an identifying narrative. This narrative starts from a paradigmatic case that both sides of the debate agree is a work of art and concludes with the artwork in question. This narrative should show how the case in question is related to the paradigmatic case through a series of plausible historical relations. In other words, he suggests that when we are in doubt about something being a work of art, we can find the answer through a kind of genealogy. This genealogy is a non-fiction narrative that explains how the object in question relates to other artworks.

Carroll suggests that a historically accurate narrative can show the relation of an object to an established artwork. He refers to these narratives as identifying narratives. He explains that "insofar as they are historical narratives, rather than fictional narratives, they are committed to reporting sequences of events and states of affairs accurately or truthfully."[32] Carroll illustrates what he has in mind with several interesting examples of controversial avant-garde paintings, plays, music, dance, and conceptual art from the recent history of art.[33] These examples have more or less the same anatomy. They start from an uncontroversial established art genre or artwork and end with the controversial artwork in question.

A good identifying narrative, then, should show us how the work in question ties in with a tradition of art-making. For example, suppose someone believes that rapping cannot be art; a narrative, Carroll argues, can be helpful to "identify rapping as a recognizable variation of traditional forms of African-American performance by arguing that it has emerged from a continuous process of evolution from such practices as, among others, The

[32] Carroll, Noël. "Identifying Art", in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. p 88.
[33] Some clever examples of 'identifying narratives' can be found in Part II of his *Beyond aesthetics* titled Art, History, and Narrative. See: Carroll, Noël. *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Dozens and The Toast."[34,35] He believes that artists themselves provide such narratives through their manifestos and interviews to make their work intelligible to the public. Critics, art galleries, and museums have a similar role in providing identifying narratives.[36]

Carroll explains that these narratives may have various structures, such as repetition, amplification, or repudiation of past artworks. Repetition is the primary form among these narratives because following the standard ways in established practices of art-making is the main way of creating artwork. Amplification happens when an artist finds a better solution for an existing problem so that she excels in doing the task better than others. Furthermore, Carroll argues that not only can new artworks be created by these strategies, new movements and new art forms can be established by similar patterns. One of his examples is expressionism, which is a movement with roots in the Middle Ages, although it is against the standard ways of realistic painting. Carroll does not limit the scope of identifying narratives to repetition, amplification, or repudiation. He allows for other types of narrative, like when an artist combines different styles or even art forms to create a new work.[37]

About the origin of art, Carroll concedes that it has roots in spiritual practices and rituals that, over time, turned into independent practices of art-making that stretch out through strategies such as repetition, amplification, or repudiation:

> Objects were made for the purposes of representing (in some sense of the term) gods and myths, and such objects were replete with potently expressive qualities, were inscribed with hermetic messages, and reflected cultural self-conceptions. Spectators responded to these objects by, among other things, recognizing their referents, by being moved affectively, and by interpreting their significance. The possibilities of these sorts of broadly described interactions were probably put in place by religion, but they were gradually developed independently and, ultimately, secularly through

[34] The Dozens is a game of spoken words between two contestants, common in black communities of the United States, where participants insult each other until one gives up. For example, Muhammad Ali often used the Dozens format in banter with reporters. from "Dozens (game)", *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia,* (accessed November 20, 2021).
[35] Carroll, Noël. "Historical narratives and the philosophy of art." in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. p. 108.
[36] Ibid. p. 107.
[37] Ibid. p. 117.

processes such as repetition, amplification, and repudiation in ways that have generated the history of the practice of art.[38]

Carroll's reasoning is very much in tandem with art history. An important example of amplification in the history of painting happened when Filippo Brunelleschi spelled out the principles of linear perspective in the fifteenth century. And latter-day generations of painters like Paul Cézanne or Pablo Picasso tried to repudiate the rules of linear perspective in their work. The upshot is that when we doubt the art status of a created work, a historical narrative can help us connect the work in question to previously established artworks. In the next section, I will delve into his philosophy of history to see if his claims can be backed up epistemologically.

4.2.2. THE TRUTH OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES. ARE THERE ANY TRUE STORIES?

Carroll assumes that some historical narratives can be truthful. This means they can inform us about a certain state of affairs in the past. In other words, he believes in truthful and factual historical narratives as the basis of our knowledge about how things were in the past. However, as most would agree, historical narratives can have fictional bits and pieces, and many narratives that claim to be historical are inaccurate.

It might be objected to Carroll that we cannot verify the truth of identifying narratives insofar as historical narratives are essentially constructed stories; there is always a gap between what is real and "out there" and what is narrated; there is always distortion and bias in narration. The skeptic can go on to assert that we impose stories on the events to shape a narrative that makes sense to us; in other words, our narratives are tailored to fit our ideological and explanatory point of view. Therefore, historians and fiction writers have something in common; they both make narratives. As Alun Munslow puts it:

> The past is not discovered or found. It is created and represented by the historian as a text, which in turn is consumed by the reader. ...The idea of the truth being

[38] Carroll, Noël. "Art, Practice, and Narrative." in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. p. 74.

> rediscovered in the evidence is a nineteenth-century modernist conception and it has no place in contemporary writing about the past.[39]

Roland Barthes was an influential skeptic about the objectivity of historical narratives. In, *An introduction to the structural analysis of narrative*, one of his widely acknowledged papers co-authored with Lionel Duisit, we read:

> The function of narrative is not to "represent"; it is to put together a scene which still retains a certain enigmatic character for the reader, but does not belong to the mimetic order in any way. The "reality" of a sequence does not lie in the "natural" order of actions that make it up, but in the logic that is unfolded, exposed, and finally confirmed, in the midst of the sequence. ... What goes on in a narrative is, from the referential (real) point of view, strictly nothing.[40]

Objections against the objectivity of historical narratives vary in detail, but the basic argument can be summarised as follows: The process of writing history is interpretive and distortive. The historian does not discover the reality or truth of history but tries to construct it as a narrative. Therefore, historical and fictional narratives are far more similar than they are usually assumed to be. This objection can have various expressions that may be moderate or extreme. In the extreme version, the skeptics deny a distinction between historical narratives and fictional or mythic narratives; Lévi-Strauss is sometimes named as the proponent of this view. In the moderate version, the skeptic still considers a level of truthfulness for the historical narratives that is *weaker* than or different from truth in the scientific sense. For example, Hayden White suggests that historical narratives should be evaluated at the metaphorical level as well as the factual level.[41] Therefore, it can be argued that historians impose their preferred plots on the events of the past to create a narrative, and in that respect, exaggerations, idealisations, or mythical and fictitious approaches are bound to happen.

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[39] Munslow, Alun. *Deconstructing history*. Routledge, 2006. p 197.
[40] Barthes, Roland, and Lionel Duisit. "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative." *New literary history* 6, no. 2 (1975): p. 271.
[41] For more, See: White, Hayden. "The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur's Philosophy of History." In *On Paul Ricoeur*, Routledge, 2002. pp. 154-173.

This fundamental objection can be extended to Levinson's and Danto's definitions, too. As explained in the previous section, the history of art is the reference point of the historical definition. Without truthful and objective histories of art that delineate the changes in the practices of art-making, there would be no criterion or standard for Levinson's historical definition. Carroll himself has responded to this kind of objection in several articles. I will therefore investigate this objection by focusing mainly on Carroll's view.

Carroll believes a historical narrative must not be fictional: "the reports of events and states of affairs that constitute the narrative must be true and … the asserted connections between those events and states of affairs must obtain."[42] I will illustrate this point with a few examples. Fictional narratives like the story of *Beowulf* or *The Merchant of Venice* are not historical narratives, even if they have some references to real affairs, such as the name of places like Venice. If someone objects to Shakespeare that his story is false because it never happened, we may try to remind them that this is not a historical narrative but purely fictional. In the case of fictional narratives, it does not make much sense to call them true or false. On the other hand, historical narratives can be questioned epistemologically; for instance, a standard condition for a true historical narrative is to get the order of the events right so that they correspond to the order of the real states of affairs. Suppose a historian writes that 'Napoleon Bonaparte established the Legion of Honour after he became the Emperor of the French'. In that case, others will deny the truth of her claim because it is a historical fact that Napoleon did so before being the emperor. So far, Carroll's claim is simply that some stories are true.

Furthermore, Carroll maintains that different incidents and events can vary in significance depending on the course of events that are being narrated. Having varied significance does not mean that those narratives are fictional. Therefore, one single event can participate in several narratives with a different import in each narrative. Carroll illustrates this point with an example:

> The appointment of Sandra Day O'Connor to the Supreme Court is part of the course of events that led to the decision alluded to above. But that event also undoubtedly figured in various other courses of events – some in the history of the O'Connor

[42] Carroll, Noël. "Identifying Art", in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. p 88.

> family and some concerning the social advancement of women in the United States. And, equally, the event of O'Connor's appointment will also figure in courses of events still in the making. The same event can be part of different courses of events, and, therefore, can be represented in different stories. [43]

The skeptic, however, may insist that all we have about Napoleon Bonaparte or Sandra Day O'Connor are some stories that cannot be transparent in reflecting the real state of affairs; we attribute the meaning that we want to the courses of action and events while in reality, they have no inherent meaning. Carroll takes on this objection by criticising the notion of transparency. He points out that the focus of the skeptics on transparent representations or exact copies of the past is the residue of an empiricist point of view based on the correspondence theory of truth. Writing history involves selecting events that can have different imports in different narratives. However, Carroll continues, the fact that historical narratives are not absolute replicas of the past does not mean that they are implausible or fictional. He criticises deconstructionists for setting unattainable standards for truthful narratives:

> When they note the failure of certain theories of language on the grounds that no language is an absolute mirror of the world, they conclude that meaning is an arbitrary, infinitely fluctuating construct rather than surmising that the expectation that a language might absolutely mirror the world was a theoretical error to begin with, and that a better view of the way in which a language is objectively constrained should be sought. [44]

Therefore, the absence of a meta-narrative or God's eye view does not mean that historical and fictional narratives are indistinguishable.

Some arguments against the objectivity of historical narratives are similar in structure. They usually have a central claim that can be interpreted in two senses. One is a trivial sense, and the other is radical; the claim is usually true and uncontroversial in the trivial sense and false in the radical sense. For example, consider the claim that "The reality of the past is not

[43] Carroll, Noël. "Interpretation, history and narrative." in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. p. 143.
[44] Ibid. p.145

in our grasp". This proposition can be interpreted in two ways. First: there is no difference between reality and fiction or myth. Second: an absolute and transcendent narrative of the past is out of our grasp because historical narratives involve selection and preference. The first claim is so radical and inconsistent that barely any thinker fully holds onto it, and the second claim is almost trivial and obvious because barely anyone who understands it disagrees with it. Sometimes, however, in their arguments against objectivity, thinkers swing between these two senses, making it much harder to spot their position in the debate.

4.2.3. THE EXTENSIONAL ADEQUACY OF CARROLL'S METHOD

Carroll claims that the main purpose of definitions of art has been to distinguish art from non-art. He also claims that he has solved this issue by introducing a method that accomplishes the task without defining art. The important question, of course, is whether his method works. In other words, are identifying narratives extensionally adequate? If we cannot construct an identifying narrative for a work of art, his method is not inclusive, and if we can put together identifying narratives for the things that are not artworks, his method is not exclusive; any of the above can provide enough reason to deny the extensional adequacy of his approach.

I think Carroll's approach is inclusive: it is very difficult to imagine an artwork that cannot be related to past artworks with the kind of narrative Carroll has in mind. Carroll's suggestion is the closest to truth in a practical manner. If there is a disagreement about the art status of an object, it stands to reason to appeal to identifying narratives instead of definitions. Identifying narratives are often useful for understanding the avant-garde. Carroll argued that the need for a definition stems from avant-garde works, therefore, it makes sense that his solution will be useful for controversies about these works.

On the other hand, I doubt that Carroll's method can always be exclusive. I suspect we can make historical narratives for many objects that are considered ordinary and connect them to the traditions of art-making. For example, many handmade swords, ceramics, paintings, and rugs are not considered artworks, and many are. It does not seem difficult to

shape a narrative that places ordinary swords, ceramics, paintings, and rugs in the traditions and practices of art-making. That being said, Carroll himself clarifies that controversial cases are usually avant-garde and conceptual works of art, and it is with regard to those works that his method would be useful. This is important because, unlike philosophers who propose a universal definition, Carroll does not make any claim about the essence of art and somehow limits the application of his method to modern and avant-garde artworks.

My last point about identifying narratives is that to explain the structure of identifying narratives, Carroll uses terms such as "Artworld" and "art public" that are derived from institutionalism. Carroll's method of identifying art depends on the theoretical framework provided by institutional and historical definitions of art. In explaining identifying narratives, he borrows a lot from the institutional theory of art. As Dickie puts it:

> It turns out that the framework for constraining identifying narratives that Carroll describes is made up of the central notions of the institutional theory of art. ... Carroll's use of the institutional theory as the framework within which his narrational scheme for identifying arts operates causes no logical problem. In fact, Carroll's account for identifying art is nested within the institutional theory.[45]

I agree with the statement above. Carroll's approach would not be as informative as it is were it not for historical and institutional definitions of art. However, this does not mean that he is on the wrong track. If Carroll's approach is nested within institutional or historical theories of art, it does not follow that he has to concede institutional or historical definitions. As I explained before, a 'theory of art' and a 'definition of art' are two different things, and using these terms interchangeably may cause confusion. In other words, Carroll can use the institutional framework as an art theory. Therefore, it is a mistake to claim that Carroll's approach is only meaningful if he concedes the institutional definition of art, but it is true that Carroll's approach is indeed meaningful in light of the institutional theory of art.

Carroll focuses more on the practical way of answering the question, that is, instead of aiming to answer the question, 'What is art?' he tries to find a solution for the question, 'Is this art?'. What happens when two critics disagree about the status of an artifact, where one

[45] Dickie, George. "Art: Function or Procedure — Nature or Culture?" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55 (1997) p. 25.

says it is an artwork, and the other denies it? The critic who believes the work in question is an artwork can present a narrative to convince the other party. On the practical level, it is plausible that these situations can occur in the way Carroll describes them.

4.3. CONCLUSION

In the first part of this chapter, I investigated Levinson's historical definition of art. Similar to Danto and Dickie, Levinson attempts to provide a real definition for the concept of artwork. He aspires to reveal the essence of art and claims that this essence is nested in the irreducible historicality of artworks. His claim is not simply that artworks are historical but that the very existence of artworks becomes possible by reference to past artworks. I argued that his definition falls short of being informative, particularly when it comes to identifying the correct ways of artmaking. Also, his account is circular, and this circularity forces him to change the form of his definition to a disjunctive definition that remains painfully uninformative.

The historical definition takes a step forward by acknowledging that the artist's intention is a determining factor in the existence of a work of art. However, Levinson's definition, which is based on past ways of making art, has two main problems. First, it is not informative for the identification of artworks. Second, Levinson's historical definition needs an institutional definition of art to justify ideas such as 'standard ways of art-making,' yet Levinson is silent in this regard. I conclude that Levinson does not succeed in providing a definition of art that is intensionally or extensionally adequate.

In the second part of this chapter, I reviewed Carroll's proposal about identifying narratives and argued that his claims about conceptual and avant-garde works of art are plausible. Although he borrows a considerable amount from institutional and historical theories of art, he makes it clear that he is not aiming to sketch a definition. Carroll's approach to identifying art focuses on extensional adequacy without any claim about the essence of art. Also, his emphasis on avant-garde and conceptual artworks is a useful move that limits his claim to a part of the extension of 'artwork'. Unlike definitions that aspire to explain all artworks at all times, Carroll explains the problem in its historical context and in

relation to modern and avant-garde art. His approach to identifying modern and avant-garde artworks is informative and highly plausible.

Also, I argued that the dependence of historical definitions and approaches on objective historical narratives does not make them unpractical or implausible, as a plausible argument in the philosophy of history can support such narratives. Although I focused on Carroll's explanation of historical objectivity, such objectivity is discussed by Danto and is implied in the works of most other analytic philosophers of art.

CHAPTER 5 THE PLURALIST APPROACH

As I explained in Chapter 1, the distinction between functional and procedural definitions has been part of the terminology in discussions of the definition of art for a few decades. George Dickie (1997) uses similar terminology, dividing definitions of art into natural and cultural definitions.[1] After the rejection of both functional and procedural definitions of art, some thinkers argue that it is not necessary to choose between these categories; instead, it is possible to employ both in one definition, that is, to provide a disjunctive definition of art. I will refer to this relatively new approach to the identification of art as a pluralist approach, as opposed to the monist (or essentialist) way of thinking about art that has been more or less dominant in the philosophy of art for a long time.

The monist way of thinking is structured around one type of artistic property that has its roots in either our natural tendencies or our contingent ways of living. Of course, the two sides of the debate accept that art has both natural and cultural roots, but each party considers one of these to be primary or essential and the other secondary or incidental. For example, as we saw in Chapter 3, Dickie acknowledges the heterogenous nature of art but at the same time, he abandons the notion of aesthetic function in favour of institutionalism. The pluralist theories I will discuss here engage with both institutional and aesthetic descriptions to explain what constitutes a work of art.

Pluralist approaches share a common characteristic; they are all committed to some form of anti-essentialism. As I explained in Chapter 2, anti-essentialists can be either radical or moderate. Radical anti-essentialists are against defining art, but moderate anti-essentialists are still after a definition of art. Another characteristic of pluralist approaches is that they agree that many (but not all) artworks have close ties with aesthetic functions. However, they

[1] Dickie, George. "Art: Function or Procedure — Nature or Culture?" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55 (1997):19-28.

argue that the vast diversity of artworks calls for an institutional explanation. A philosopher who proposes a pluralistic approach to identifying art is Berys Gaut. Gaut can be referred to as a radical anti-essentialist as he argues against the idea that defining art is possible. After discussing Gaut's views, I will investigate two versions of moderate anti-essentialism, suggested by Stecker and Davies respectively, that employ different disjunctive definitions of art. Amongst other issues, my discussion of Stecker and Davies raises questions about their appeal to the idea of art forms, and in particular central or established art forms, in their definitions of art. In the final section of this chapter this issue comes to a head in my discussion of one final pluralist account of art, the buck-passing account given by Dominic Lopes.

5.1.1 BERYS GAUT AND CLUSTER CONCEPTS

Following decades of unsuccessful attempts to define art, Gaut thinks it is reasonable to reconsider Wittgenstein's anti-essentialism about phenomena such as art. As I explained in Chapter 2, Wittgenstein proposes that we 'look and see'[2] to find the resemblances among the extensions of a concept, such as the concept of a game. Some aestheticians interpret this suggestion as meaning that in the case of artworks, the scope of our search for similarities is limited to the perceptual and tangible similarities of artworks. Philosophers of art, such as Wollheim and Carroll, criticise family resemblance on the grounds that it cannot explain non-perceptual properties, such as the context and the history of a work. As explained in Chapter 2, I do not agree with this interpretation of family resemblance and believe that it is mistakenly and unjustifiably attributed to both Wittgenstein and anti-essentialist philosophers of art.

Gaut asserts that his interpretation of family resemblance in terms of cluster concepts is more plausible. He thinks that the usual interpretation of family resemblance has been criticised on two counts; first, for leaving the art status of paradigm cases unexplained, and second, for being uninformative. Gaut explains this as follows:

[2] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. John Wiley & Sons, 2010. part I, proposition 66.

> The reasons for this are familiar: if we characterize works of art as those which resemble certain paradigms, then, first, the account is incomplete (it needs to state which objects are paradigm works), and, second, the notion of resemblance is sufficiently vacuous (anything resembles anything in some respect or other, since it shares some property with it) that the characterization would count anything as art.[3]

As I explained in Chapter 2, these criticisms are hinge upon a flawed understanding of family resemblance based on resemblance to paradigm cases that is not consistent with Wittgenstein's text (or even with Weitz's). Gaut agrees that such an interpretation cannot be plausible and offers his own interpretation of family resemblance to explain how some essence-less entities can be categorised under one concept. He explains that his account is inspired by Wittgenstein's and Searle's characterisations of proper names but that it does not depend on the truth of their account of proper names.[4]

Instead of focusing on paradigmatic examples, Gaut suggests that we can point to the conditions that are sufficient to consider something art. In contrast to monist or essentialist definitions of art, Gaut does not aim to propose a set of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for art. He gives a list of features, but because he doesn't claim that they are necessary for all artworks, he refers to them as 'criteria' to avoid confusion.[5] These criteria do not only include perceptible properties but also contextual criteria of art. Gaut's list includes both functional and procedural criteria, and he claims that all of them 'count toward' the art status of a work:

> (i) possessing positive aesthetic qualities (I employ the notion of positive aesthetic qualities here in a narrow sense, comprising beauty and its subspecies); (ii) being expressive of emotion; (iii) being intellectually challenging; (iv) being formally complex and coherent; (v) having a capacity to convey complex meanings; (vi) exhibiting an individual point of view; (vii) being an exercise of creative imagination; (viii) being an artefact or performance that is the product of a high

[3] Gaut, Berys. "'Art'as a Cluster Concept." *Theories of Art Today* (2000): p. 25.
[4] Ibid. p. 38.
[5] Gaut, Berys. "The Cluster Account of Art Defended" *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 45, no. 3 (2005): p. 273.

> degree of skill; (ix) belonging to an established artistic form; and (x) being the product of an intention to make a work of art.[6]

This is not a traditional definition of art; if some of these criteria apply, it may be enough to count something as art, and none of the criteria is necessary for being art. Therefore, Gaut can, without difficulty, concede that some artworks are not beautiful, some artworks are not expressive, some artworks are not formally complex and coherent, some artworks do not belong to a standard genre, and so on. Although he maintains that there is no necessary condition for the concept of artwork that is not anodyne and trivial, he makes an exception for the condition of "being the product of an action," which, in his view, is the only necessary and non-trivial condition.[7]

To explain the relation of these ten criteria to the concept of artwork, Gaut holds that the presence of these criteria counts toward something being an artwork, and the absence of them counts against something being one. Gaut knows that *counting toward* is a central notion in his account of art, and therefore tries to explain it with three points of reference:

> How is the notion of their counting toward the application of a concept to be understood? First, if all the properties are instantiated, then the object falls under the concept; that is, they are jointly sufficient for the application of the concept. More strongly, the cluster account also claims that if fewer than all the criteria are instantiated, this is sufficient for the application of the concept. Second, there are no properties that are individually necessary. ... Third,... there are *disjunctively* necessary conditions.[8]

Some cluster accounts specify how many of their criteria an artifact should satisfy in order to be called a work of art.[9] Also, a cluster account can give more weight to some criteria and less to others. Gaut rejects both of these strategies and asserts that any cluster account that tries to determine the number of the criteria would be vulnerable to counterexamples. According to Gaut, even if something meets more than half of the criteria,

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[6] Ibid. p. 279.
[7] Gaut, Berys. "'Art' as a Cluster Concept." *Theories of Art Today* (2000): p.29.
[8] Ibid. p. 27-28.
[9] For example, see: Dutton, Denis. "A naturalist definition of art." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 3 (2006): 367-377.

it does not necessarily follow that it is art. He does not commit to any number but concedes that if something satisfies all ten criteria, we can comfortably consider it art. Gaut considers it a virtue of his theory that it doesn't specify the number of criteria that must be satisfied for something to be an artwork.[10]

Instead of looking for a certain number of criteria, Gaut suggests that we consider a number of the criteria as disjuncts, and apply them according to each occasion. He explains: "one instead lists disjuncts and determines whether it is true of each disjunct that it suffices to make something art, makes something borderline art, makes the thing clearly not art, or is completely indeterminate. [11] To summarise, Gaut thinks it is up to us to use our judgment to choose criteria in any specific situation.

Gaut claims that his account is more adequate than any existing definition of art (note that Gaut does not consider himself to be providing a definition). He starts the discussion of the adequacy of his account by pointing out that there are some requirements for a "definition or characterization of a concept". He seems to believe that both definitional and non-definitional approaches are subject to the same adequacies in so far as they are models to explain the application of a concept.[12] According to my analysis, as far as definitions are concerned, the main adequacies are intensional and extensional, and of course, it is also important that the definition be informative. Gaut considers different adequacies to test a "definition or characterization," which is that it should be "adequate to intuition" and "normatively adequate." He explains these adequacies as follows:

> [T]he account has to be broadly consistent with our linguistic intuitions, and must also, where it differs from some of those intuitions, explain why they are mistaken (it must provide a theory of error). Since there are disagreements about whether, for instance, conceptual art, 'primitive' art and popular music are really art, the account should provide a plausible theory of error about the intuitions that conflict with those that it favours.[13]

[10] Gaut, Berys. "The Cluster Account of Art Defended" *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 45, no. 3 (2005): p. 280.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Gaut, Berys. "'Art' as a Cluster Concept." *Theories of Art Today* (2000): p. 30.
[13] Gaut, Berys. "The Cluster Account of Art Defended" *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 45, no. 3 (2005) p. 281.

He goes on to argue that different disjuncts of his account explain different intuitions about artworks, and for this reason, his account is superior to definitions such as aesthetic, historical, and institutional definitions of art.[14] Gaut believes his approach is informative enough to explain borderline cases like ready-mades. For example, in the case of conceptual works such as Marcel Duchamp's *Prelude to a Broken Arm* (1915), we can observe that the object in question satisfies a few of the criteria listed by Gaut; most would agree that it is "an exercise of creative imagination;" it can be considered "intellectually challenging" or as "exhibiting a point of view," and that it is "the product of an intention to make a work of art." However, *Prelude to a Broken Arm* does not have positive aesthetic qualities, is not expressive of emotion, is not formally complex and coherent, and most people will say that it does not have the capacity to convey complex meanings. According to Gaut, this would explain why *Prelude to a Broken Arm* is a borderline case.

Furthermore, he argues that his account provides greater "heuristic utility" compared to its rivals, that is, it is able "to figure in true or at least promising theories about the object."[15] In his view, aesthetics is not merely concerned with definitions, but also attempts to provide accounts or theories about the capacity of art to express feelings or attitudes, to represent ideas or objects in the world, and to employ symbolism. Gaut claims that the cluster account allows for a wide range of properties that are shared by art and other things. As he puts it: "Representational, expressive, and symbolic capacities are possessed not just by artworks, but by language, by bodily gestures, and by mental states."[16] These common grounds allow for representational and other theories of art to use the concept of artwork, characterised as a cluster, and for aestheticians to examine the links between aesthetics and other branches of philosophy.

In summary, then, Gaut is what I have referred to as a radical anti-essentialist because a) he denies that the identification of art depends on a definition of art and b) he denies that art has an essence, as he insists that a definition of art with necessary and sufficient conditions is impossible. In the next section, I evaluate his account and examine its ability to withstand some of the objections from prominent philosophers of art.

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[14] Ibid pp. 281-284
[15] Gaut, Berys. "'Art' as a Cluster Concept." *Theories of Art Today* (2000): p. 31
[16] Ibid. p. 41.

5.1.2. THE CLUSTER ACCOUNT OF ART: ANALYSIS AND OBJECTIONS

First, it should be mentioned that Gaut is aware that an argument from induction cannot be sufficient for concluding that the project of defining art has failed. After all, a thousand failed definitions of art do not yield the conclusion that there can be no true definition of art in the future. However, he believes that the mere success of a cluster account in explaining our philosophical dilemmas about artworks provides good reasons to falsify the claim that art is definable. "[T]he truth of the cluster account entails that art cannot be defined."[17] If he succeeds in showing that the concept of art should be understood in terms of a cluster account, he hits two birds with one stone; he proves that the cluster account works and that a definitional approach that seeks to identify necessary conditions does not.

I agree with Gaut that the success of the cluster account would imply that art cannot be defined in terms of necessary conditions that are jointly sufficient. In other words, if the cluster account is true, an intensionally adequate definition is off the table. However, the truth of the cluster account does not preclude the possibility of an extensionally adequate definition. As we will see in the next sections, proponents of disjunctive definitions do not aspire to capture the essence of artworks but instead propose definitions for "work of art" that aspire to be extensionally adequate.

It is important to note that the truth of the cluster account does not logically rule out an intensionally adequate definition. Logically speaking, even if the criteria of the cluster account are correct, there can still be a definition that identifies the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions that are not mentioned in Gaut's list of criteria.[18] However, such a definition is highly improbable, since Gaut lists almost all central conditions of the most influential definitions of art in his criteria.

Second, I agree that cluster accounts that specify the number of criteria for artworks are vulnerable to counterexamples. If Gaut were to set a number, the bar would probably be too

[17] Ibid. 278.
[18] Meskin, Aaron. "The cluster account of art reconsidered." The British Journal of Aesthetics 47, no.4 (2007) p. 398

high or too low. For example, if he claimed that a work must possess at least eight of the criteria, many artworks would be excluded, and if he lowers the bar to five, it will include many works that are evidently not art. Consider a game of chess or a smartphone - these can easily check off more than half the items on the list. A game of chess can be formally complex and coherent, an exercise of creative imagination, intellectually challenging, a performance that is the product of a high degree of skill, and aesthetically pleasing. Some would even say that a chess game can exhibit an individual point of view. Likewise, many smartphones have aesthetically pleasant and expressive properties and are formally complex and coherent in their features; also, high levels of skill, genius, and creative imagination are required to design and produce them. Nonetheless, we do not consider chess games or smartphones to be artworks. It might be objected that phones are mechanically produced, and there are thousands of copies of them. However, artworks such as sculptures, photographs, or movies are mechanically produced, and artworks such as novels, poetry, film, and music are copied and reproduced in large numbers.

Third, Gaut does not explicitly state that his account aims to be extensionally adequate. On the one hand, one could argue that lacking extensional adequacy would not be fatal to it, given that his cluster account is not a definition. Thus, Gaut could argue that he is simply offering a theory of art that offers insights into understanding the concept and making better sense of questions related to them. On the other hand, sometimes Gaut's claims imply some sort of extensional adequacy. By proposing counterexamples to them, Gaut criticises other cluster accounts which specify the number of criteria. In other words, he considers those accounts implausible because they are not extensionally adequate. However, if lacking extensional adequacy is problematic for other cluster accounts, his account does not do any better in that regard. He suggests that his account has the capacity to be used in disagreements about the art status of some objects or performances. For example, he writes: "cluster theories make substantial claims by specifying what the properties are that are relevant to determining whether something is art."[19] Furthermore, while explaining the adequacy of intuition, Gaut mentions that:

[19] Ibid. pp. 27-28.

> "if the account claims that some object satisfies the concept, but it intuitively doesn't (or vice versa), then that is one strike against the account. Particularly important test cases here are those that are problematic for rival accounts of the concept."[20]

There are several combinations of his conditions that are not exclusive. As I explained in the case of chess games or smartphones, they satisfy the majority of the criteria in the cluster account. Does this *count towards* them being works of art? Gaut's answer is no. However, according to him, this should count as a strike against his account. The cluster account does not have the explanatory power to distinguish between artworks, non-artworks, and borderline cases because, as Thomas Adajian points out, in any of these cases, some of the ten criteria are met while others are not.[21]

Aaron Meskin criticises Gaut by noting that it is problematic to say that these criteria 'count toward' the concept of art because it is unclear what Gaut means by it. In explaining what it is for a cluster account to be true, Gaut asserts that: "A cluster account is true of a concept just in case there are properties whose instantiation by an object counts as a matter of conceptual necessity toward its falling under the concept."[22] Here, Gaut appeals to the notion of 'conceptual necessity' in order to explain the notion of 'counting toward' and Meskin finds this problematic because Gaut denies that the definitional approach can be successful. Appealing to conceptual necessity is what definitions of art do. Defining a concept involves looking for necessary conditions. However, as mentioned earlier Gaut denies that there are any necessary conditions for a work of art, with the exception of 'being the product of an action'. Therefore, his appeal to conceptual necessity is problematic; as Meskin puts it:

> Since the intuitive idea of there being properties that count as a matter of conceptual necessity toward the application of the concept art is perfectly consistent with the success of the definitional project, Gaut must appeal to a very specific notion of counting toward.[23]

Meskin concludes that since Gaut does not clarify what he means by 'counting toward' his account remains incomplete. I find this a sound and plausible criticism. Gaut seems to

[20] Ibid. p 30.
[21] See Adajian, Thomas. "On the cluster account of art." The British Journal of Aesthetics 43, no. 4 (2003) p. 282.
[22] Gaut, Berys. "'Art'a a Cluster Concept." *Theories of Art Today* (2000): p. 26.
[23] Meskin, Aaron. "The cluster account of art reconsidered." The British Journal of Aesthetics 47, no. 4 (2007) p. 390.

have a definitional mindset in spite of claiming to be anti-definition. Meskin asks Gaut to explain which calibre of properties counts towards something being art. Gaut, who claims to be an anti-essentialist, appeals to the 'conceptual necessity' of properties. Therefore, his answer to this question would be, mutatis mutandis, an essentialist one. Meksin ends his article with this insightful diagnosis:

> Although Gaut wants nothing to do with definition, he is still in the business of providing 'art theory' in the broad (Weitzean) sense; that is, still pursuing an account of the metaphysics of the category (or application conditions for the concept). Moreover, his appeal to 'conceptual necessity' suggests that he remains concerned to provide an account that underwrites certainty (at least in some cases) that something is a work of art. I suggest that both of these concerns are misplaced.[24]

Finally, another objection made against the cluster theory of art by Stephen Davies and Robert Stecker is that contrary to what he wants, Gaut's theory can be formulated as a definition of art.[25] Let's suppose that Gaut only introduced three criteria for his cluster theory; then, it can be said that X is art if, and only if, it has the criteria 1 or 2 or 3 or 1&2 or 1&3 or 2&3 or 1&2&3. Davies criticises Gaut on the grounds that Gaut is anti-definition but proposes "a complex, disjunctive, but otherwise orthodox, definition, so long as those disjuncts are specified at an appropriate level of abstraction."[26]

I do not think that Davies' criticism is plausible because even if Gaut's theory can be reduced to a definition, it is by no means an orthodox definition. Note that a disjunctive definition is different from the traditional definitions of art. The most important difference between them is that this kind of definition is not essentialist because it does not suppose a core of properties shared by all artworks. As I explained earlier, this difference stems from the logical form of such definitions. On the one hand, a conjunction of three conditions is true only if all three conditions are true. On the other hand, a disjunctive of three conditions can be true even if only one of the conditions is true. Cluster accounts and disjunctive definitions have something in common. They both deny that art has an essence that is shared by all artworks. The problem with viewing Gaut's theory as a disjunctive definition is that it

[24] Ibid. p. 400
[25] Stecker, Robert, "Is It Reasonable to Attempt to Define Art" in N. Carroll (ed.) 2000, pp. 45–64.
[26] Davies, Stephen. *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*. Clarendon Press, 2007. p. 41.

will be a very long disjunction consisting of 1024 disjuncts, which may have consequences for the informativeness of a definition. I do not believe that such a criticism poses a serious threat to Gaut's theory, and he himself agrees that his account can be called "a highly disjunctive and variegated definition."[27]

On this note, Dominic Lopes proposes that one difference between definitional theories of art and non-definitional ones is that the latter are usually disjunctive: "Theories are definitions if they give individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. They are not definitions if they provide disjunctive lists which are either closed or open to future revision."[28] It seems that by disjunctive lists that are closed, Lopes has in mind what I have referred to as disjunctive definitions of art, such as the ones proposed by Stecker and Davies (which I discuss in the next two sections), whereas open disjunctive lists may be cluster theories, such as the one that was discussed here. Nonetheless, the important point to note here is that Lopes draws attention to the shift from the essentialist approach to defining art to a pluralist and non-essentialist one. In what follows, I will investigate two full-fledged versions of disjunctive definitions of art that, unlike Gaut's, are not highly disjunctive.

5.2.1 STECKER'S DISJUNCTIVE DEFINITION: HISTORICAL FUNCTIONALISM

In contrast to Gaut, Robert Stecker is optimistic about defining art and thinks that the project of defining art is on the doorstep of achieving its purpose. According to him, there is general agreement about many controversial issues, and we are closer than ever to finding a true definition of art.[29] Stecker does not consider himself an essentialist, and his definition does not have the shape of what is usually referred to as a 'real definition', that is, a definition that is essence-revealing or intensionally adequate, and that is expected to consist of conditions that are necessary and jointly sufficient. Stecker denies that the concept of art has an essence. However, he holds that defining art is still possible and useful. He claims that art "is not so uniform as to yield an essence of art and not so shot through with inconsistency as to resist

[27] Gaut, Berys. "The Cluster Account of Art Defended" *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 45, no. 3 (2005): 273-288. p. 285.
[28] Lopes, Dominic. "Nobody Needs a Theory of Art." *The Journal of Philosophy* 105, no. 3 (2008): 109-127. p.112.
[29] Stecker, Robert. *Aesthetics and the philosophy of art: an introduction*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010. p. 120.

any attempt to make sense of it."[30] The definition suggested by him is hybrid and disjunctive. Therefore, he abandons the search for intensional adequacy but claims that we need a definition of art to identify art.

I agree that a disjunctive definition has certain advantages over traditional approaches, and Stecker's enthusiasm is understandable given that the possibility of hybrid definitions has never before been explored in any serious manner. However, I doubt we could reach a general agreement that disjunctive definitions are our best bet for defining art. Stecker's enthusiasm about disjunctive definitions of art is not generally shared. Many aestheticians do not attempt to define art and prefer to spend their effort on other subjects in aesthetics. Still, even among those who do try to define art, many seek a definition of art with a functionalist approach. As Daniel Wilson points out:

> William Tolhurst (1984), Richard Eldridge (1985), Richard Lind (1992), James C. Anderson (2000), Gary Iseminger (2004), and Nick Zangwill (2002; 2007) all support functionalist definitions of art that emphasise either the valuable aesthetic experience, or the production of aesthetic properties.[31]

This happens partly because a functionalist definition of art provides better grounds for a theory of art in other venues, such as a theory of the value of art, and partly because it appeals to some intuitions, such as the suspicion that many conceptual works should not be branded as art.

Stecker suggests a definition that is partly functional and partly procedural, and he refers to it as *historical functionalism*:

> An item is a work of art at time t if and only if (a) either it is in one of the central art forms at t and is intended to fulfil a function art has at t or (b) it is an artefact that achieves excellence in fulfilling such a function (whether or not it is in a central art form and whether or not it was intended to fulfil such a function).[32]

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[30]Ibid.

[31] Wilson, Daniel, Artistic Value and Art's Definition, The University of Auckland, 2015. Wilson himself supports an aesthetic functional definition of art in his thesis.

[32] Stecker, Robert. "Historical Functionalism or The Four Factor Theory." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 34, no. 3 (1994): 255-266. p. 256.

Either of the conditions above is sufficient to call something art, and neither of them is necessary. Also, they are supposed to be exhaustive, which means Stecker thinks there are no other ways of being a work of art. In some respects this definition is similar to Levinson's historical definition of art, according to which artworks are artworks in virtue of their ties to earlier artworks. However, historical functionalism has a distinctive way of identifying artworks. Unlike procedural definitions, this definition does not have difficulty with the first works of art, given that its first condition includes artworks that do not take place in an established practice of art-making. Condition (a) combines two conditions that are jointly sufficient. We can illustrate what Stecker means with Condition (a) by using an example. Consider a collection of handprints made in the Late Stone Age on the wall of a cave, such as the ochre prints at the Cuevas de las Manos upon Rio Pinturas in Argentina (see Figure 4). According to Condition (a), each one of these handprints is a work of art, today. The reason is that they satisfy both clauses of Condition (a); (1) they are made in a recognized art form of today, namely painting; (2) their makers, beside other things, had the intention of representing something, and representation is a standard function of art today.

Figure 4: Red Ochre Handprints – Hands at the Cuevas de las Manos upon Rio Pinturas, in Santa Cruz Province, Argentina[33]

[33] Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain

According to Condition (a), if the work is a painting, an installation, a photo, a statue, a dance, a *papier collé*, a piece of music, a poem, or whatever that is recognized as part of an established art form today, and it is made with the intention of fulfilling an artistic function, such as being expressive of emotions or aesthetically pleasing, then, that work is a work of art. By contrast, Condition (b) allows artifacts that are not part of the established art forms to be art, under special circumstances. For example, according to Stecker's disjunctive definition, ordinary teapots are not artworks, but a beautiful Korean ceramic teapot made in the 17th century with natural colours that stay vivid and alive through the passage of time, is an artwork. This teapot is a work of art because it achieves excellence in artistic functions such as being aesthetically pleasing. The same can be said for handmade rugs with beautiful patterns and made with outstanding skill and design. Also, a work in historiography that has excellent literary value can be considered a work of art, according to Condition (b).

5.2.2. THE ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL FUNCTIONALISM

I think it is a strong point in favour of historical functionalism that it allows practical artifacts, such as rugs, pots, cakes, and furniture, to be artworks if they reach a level of excellence. However, the main question here is why is it that a bad *papier collé* can be art, but a piece of carpentry or pottery has to achieve a level of excellence to be art? Stecker says the answer lies in the institutional aspects of his definition. The Artworld in our times is arranged somehow so that making *papier collé* is a recognized art form, and hence a bad *papier collé* can still be art. Stecker acknowledges that the concept of central art forms in his definition is inevitably an institutional idea. He tries to explain what makes an art form a central art form in the following passage:

> [W]hatever the details, the answer is, at its core, institutional. Items within central art forms are standardly subject to certain sorts of treatment. The specific treatment depends on the art institutions of the day and the culture. Currently, this would involve being subject to specific modes of presentation to a public, to certain sorts of

> critical appraisal and audience appreciation, and to a historical connectedness to earlier items[34]

In other words, he says the reason that the practice of making teapots or some piece of furniture is not a central art form is cultural. 'We' just do not consider pottery, cookery, cooperage, or rug-making 'standard art forms', therefore, an artifact made in one of these forms has to be excellent to be art. By contrast, a simple handprint can be a work of art because of our way of treating paintings in today's societies. (It is implicit in his words that Stecker's idea of 'central art forms' is similar to the concept of fine arts.)

The disadvantage of his approach to central art forms, as Stecker himself recognises, is that some artworks do not achieve or display excellence in an artistic function, and neither are part of a central art form. This is more likely to be true in the case of revolutionary works – works that are not in one of the central art forms at that time. Ready-mades can be used as an example to show the trouble with historical functionalism. For the sake of argument, we can assume that there is a general agreement about the standard art forms and consider the concept of 'excellence in achieving an artistic function' unproblematic. At the beginning of the 20th century, conceptual artworks and ready-mades were not a central art form yet. Duchamp proposed *Fountain* as a work of art in 1916. Were we to identify his work by employing Stecker's disjunctive definition in 1916, we would be inclined to deny the art status of *Fountain.* The reason is that ready-mades were not an established genre at the time, and that *Fountain* appears to lack any sort of 'excellence in achieving an artistic function.' Stecker himself points out that his emphasis on the 'central art forms' can be problematic and suggests that this problem can be solved by showing how non-central art forms derive from central art forms. He writes:

> papier collé derives from painting, ready-mades from sculpture, happenings from drama. So perhaps we can get away with an emendation. Instead of talking exclusively about central art forms in the first disjunct of the definition, we need to

[34] Stecker, Robert. *Aesthetics and the philosophy of art: an introduction*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010. pp.115-116.

also include others recognizable as art forms through their derivation from the central ones.[35]

This emendation is not very promising for addressing the ambiguity of the concept of the art form. An art form is a historical and cultural construct. Why can papier collé and ready-mades be derivations of the central art forms at the time of their creation, while embroidery, carpentry, pottery, and so on cannot? Maybe the answer is that Fountain was ostensibly presented as a work of sculpture, and eventually accepted as such. However, in doing/being so, it also pushed the boundaries of sculpture in ways which subsequent artists took up and elaborated on, so that eventually they developed conceptual art. Once conceptual art becomes an art-kind, it is possible for us to look back and re-classify Fountain.[36]

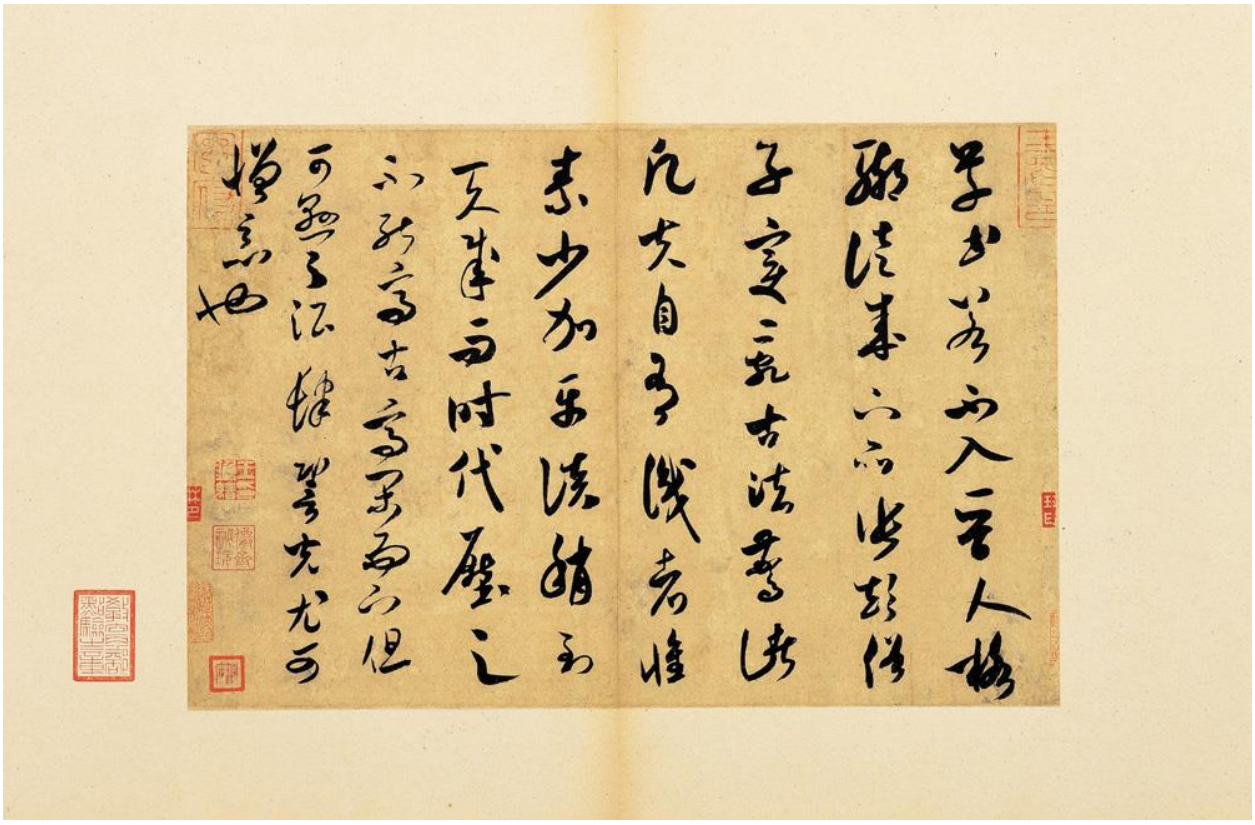

Figure 5: Mi Fu-On Calligraphy, circa 1097-1099[37]

I think Stecker's idea of central art forms is shaped around the Western concept of fine arts – which is a recent classification harking back to the 18th century. He then introduces

[35] Ibid. p.116.
[36] Personal correspondence with Michel-Antoine Xhignesse, for a more in-depth analysis of this matter see: Xhignesse, Michel-Antoine. "What Makes a Kind an Art-kind?." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 60, no. 4 (2020): 471-488.
[37] Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain

non-central art forms to cover conceptual and avant-garde artworks. Because Stecker's examples of central art forms all include reference to works of fine art or conceptual art, it is not clear whether he would include art forms such as Chinese calligraphy (see Figure 5), Japanese ikebana, or Islamic illuminated manuscripts as standard art forms.

A further, potentially more serious problem for Stecker is that many crude paintings and sculpturescan be art according to this condition. For example, representation is a long-lasting artistic function. So, when children make a figurine with clay or draw a house and their family members with representational intentions, they create works of art because they are made in recognised and central art forms such as painting. This has the implausible implication that millions of (albeit bad) artworks are produced daily by children around the world. Although he does not discuss it in length, Stecker seems to be aware of this problem when he writes:

> I sometimes think that the first disjunct of the definition ought to have another condition adding a further restriction on when an item belonging to a central art form is an artwork. This condition would state that the maker of the item in question not only must have certain intentions, but must have sufficient competence in the form in question for the intentions to be taken seriously.[38]

If we accept this emendation, it allows us to say that most children in kindergartens and elementary schools do not have 'sufficient competence' to create a work of art. Hence most paintings made by them do not qualify as art.[39] It is reasonable to say that if one wants to create art, having an art-related intention is not enough; one also needs to have a certain level of understanding and awareness about that intention. I find this a plausible solution; however, this solution will bring new problems with it. What does it mean to have sufficient competence?

To illustrate this problem it is useful to consider the example of ready-mades again. I have a bed in my room with nothing special about it; I can declare it an artwork just with the intention of it being intellectually challenging and amusing. I may even reference Tracy

[38] Stecker, Robert. "Historical Functionalism or The Four Factor Theory." The British Journal of Aesthetics 34, no. 3 (1994): p. 258.
[39] That is probably why Levinson chose to talk about 'non-passing intentions' in his historical definition of art.

Emin, whose installation, *My Bed*, sold at a Christie's auction for 2,546,500 pounds, and name it *My Bed after Tracy Emin*. (A similar case is that of Sherrie Levine, who made a bronze statue similar to the urinal that Duchamp signed as his artwork, and then named it *Fountain After Duchamp*.) As noted earlier, Stecker concedes that ready-mades are a recognised art form today. The question, then, is: Does writing a PhD thesis on the definitions of art make me sufficiently competent in conceptual art to turn my bed into an artwork, simply by willing so? If we accept Stecker's emendation about derivative art forms, my action to regard my bed as an artwork satisfies both clauses of Condition (a). My bed might be a banal and clichéd work of art, but according to historical functionalism, it is a work of art. It would be difficult to deny that my theoretical knowledge of art does not render me sufficiently competent to create a ready-made. As we saw earlier, historical functionalism has trouble recognising the *Fountain* as art in 1917, but now that we do accept ready-mades as an art form, too many things may become art (even if we specify a level of competence in an art form).

Another difficulty for historical functionalism arises from the fact that identifying the extension of each art form, either central or derivative, is not an easy task. In other words, defining art forms or identifying their instances using historical functionalism is not exempt from the usual philosophical difficulties associated with defining artworks. In the case of my bed, someone with an institutional mindset may object that for something to be a ready-made it is necessary that it be accepted as art by an art public. Or in the case of paintings, someone with an aesthetic mindset may object that something that falls short of a certain amount of aesthetic merit cannot be an artistic painting. These are plausible objections that show that in order to be adequate, a definition of art that passes the buck to the art forms needs a discussion about the extension of those art forms. Furthermore, Stephen Davies argues that even if we could define art forms and identify their extensions, these extensions put together would not be the same as the extension of the term artwork. The reason, Davies reminds us, is that many objects that fall under the extension of an art form are not considered works of art. He argues that pictures such as "[m]aps, architect's plans, advertisements in the form of or containing pictures, political cartoons,"[40] are not instances of art, even though pictures are

[40] Davies, Stephen. "Trying to Define Art as the Sum of the Arts." *Pazhouhesh Nameh-e Farhangestan-e Honar* (*Research Journal of the Iranian Academy of the Arts*) 8 (2008). pp. 12 -23.

a standard art form; likewise, many pieces of music such as "nursery rhyme songs, national anthems, and songs like "Happy Birthday" or "Auld Lang Syne""[41] are not instances of art, even though songs are a standard art form.

Stecker tries to address this problem by distinguishing an art form from a medium. According to him, the words we use to tag art forms such as dance, architecture, and music are homonyms of the words we use to refer to mediums in which artworks can be created. Only a portion of the things produced in a medium make their way to the instances of the art form with the same name. He believes that this is dependent on institutional considerations:

> Crucial to making something an *artwork* are the intentions with which it is made and the aims achieved. Crucial to the creation of an *art form* is the existence of institutional settings to organize the availability of such works to interested audiences and to interpret and evaluate them.[42]

It is important to note that this distinction presupposes a definition of art. In other words, Stecker can distinguish between the medium through which an artwork is created and the art form within which the artwork falls if he has already proposed an adequate definition for artworks. However, as we saw, he needs to define what an art form is to make sense of his definition. Therefore, I conclude that the dependency of his definition on art forms and, vice versa, the dependency of art forms on a definition undermines the plausibility of historical functionalism.

I should add that there is still no consensus, even among philosophers, about central art forms. The art status of practices such as conceptual art, some pop music, architecture, digital photography, and computer-generated artworks, are highly controversial among experts. As a result, terms such as 'specific modes of presentation' and 'certain sorts of critical appraisal' are too vague to explain the problem we face here. A definition of art that relies on the idea of art forms is expected to at least provide some clue about the art status of these controversial art forms. However, Stecker does not want to get his feet wet and avoids the problem altogether.

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Stecker, Robert. *Aesthetics and the philosophy of art: an introduction*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010. P 285.

Apart from the ambiguity in the concept of central art forms, there is ambiguity in another important notion used by Stecker, namely the notion of artistic function. He does not provide enough explanation to clarify what makes a function an artistic function. An artistic function, at the present time, could include representing nature, creating beautiful forms and compositions, telling a story, evoking certain emotions, inviting others to contemplate on a subject, amusing the audience, encouraging people to do the right thing, glorifying a victory, praising a person, educating children, and the list can go on and on. Stecker himself considers an objection to historical functionalism that targets the notion of artistic functions. According to this objection, artworks may have accidental functions, such as a statue being used as a doorstop. Historical functionalism needs to distinguish between the accidental and artistic functions of artworks. Again, Stecker's response is not very informative:

> The objection does force us to revise the definition in order to make explicit which functions are relevant to arthood. We can do so as follows: let C be the set of central art forms at time t; let F be the set of functions standard or correctly recognized for an item belonging to C, then w is a work of art at t if and only if (a) w belongs to form C, and the maker of w intended it to fulfil a function in F, or (b) w is an artefact that achieves excellence in fulfilling a function in F.[43]

Although this formulation is true, it is uninformative because it barely tells us anything about artistic functions. The objection asks, how we can use historical functionalism to distinguish between artistic and accidental functions? This question cannot be adequately answered with a formulation that contains no information about the content of artistic functions. Stecker's response is simply that we should distinguish between artistic functions and accidental ones, but without giving any explanation as to how this can be done. It seems to me that, once again, Stecker fights shy of the problem. As a result, his definition remains obscure. The solution that Stecker proposes reminds me of the words by Wittgenstein: "Philosophers are often like little children, who first scribble a jumble of lines on a piece of paper and then ask grown-ups 'What is that?'"[44]

[43] Stecker, Robert. "Historical Functionalism or The Four Factor Theory." The British Journal of Aesthetics 34, no. 3 (1994): 255-266. p. 262.
[44] Wittgenstein, Ludwig, manuscripts 213-430, in Kenny, Anthony's *The Wittgenstein Reader*. John Wiley & Sons, 2005. p59.

Of all the problems that I have raised, ambiguity and not being informative are the main problems with historical functionalism. In particular, the institutional aspects of Stecker's definition are in need of development and clarification. As I have explained, part of the difficulty here lies in the notions of art form and artistic function. Without a theory of art, probably an institutional one, that explains the characteristics of central art forms, non-central art forms, and artistic functions, historical functionalism fails to be informative.

5.3.1 DAVIES' DISJUNCTIVE DEFINITION AND THE FIRST ARTWORKS

One issue that is closely related to defining art is the origin of art. What are the roots of art-producing behaviour? It seems that institutional and historical definitions do not have the theoretical framework to answer such questions. In contrast to procedural theories, aesthetic theories of art have a promising explanation for the origins of art-making. Stephen Davies proposes an aesthetic account of the emergence of art, which can be summarized as follows. Prehistoric humans were attracted to beautiful and symmetrical things. They skillfully crafted beautiful artifacts that are similar to the objects we call art today. Art can be a byproduct or spandrel in our natural selection, but whatever it is, we are certain that different tribes from different continents have practices and rituals bound to their identity that can be included under the umbrella term 'art' today. These rituals are very similar in the majority of cultures; there is dance, singing, or music at the time of a wedding or after a baby is born; there is storytelling with themes such as love, bravery, greed, eternity, and so on, that is often accompanied by paintings, masks, and performances; there are special places and arenas for gatherings, prayers, mourning for the dead, and so on, with which comes the art of architecture and landscape design. Homo Sapiens arose between 300,000 and 250,000 years ago, and we have evidence of artworks even before Homo Sapiens.[45] These pieces of evidence point to the universality and similarity of these practices, despite the cultural differences. Davies believes that the origin of art is likely to be natural rather than cultural or conventional:

[45] The Venus of Berekhat Ram, discovered in the hills of north Israel, dates back to 230,000-700,000 BCE. It is likely that this piece of representational art was made by extinct species of Genus Homo like Neanderthals or perhaps Homo erectus.

> It is possible to discern the basis for a proto-aesthetic in these judgments, a biologically conditioned propensity to find some things naturally beautiful or appealing and others ugly or scary. And this tendency comes to us as part of our biological endowment, however we overlay it with traditions of cultural refinements.[46]

Davies has been an influential figure in the project of defining art, and his interest in the evolutionary perspective is manifest in his recent works, in particular *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution*. Davies asks why Western travelers were able to appreciate Eastern and tribal artwork, without knowing much about their societies and conventions. Understanding cultural and conventional affairs, such as a foreign language, requires time-consuming and painstaking pedagogy and training. When it comes to foreign art, however, understanding and appreciating many Eastern or African artworks has proven to be accessible even to untrained Westerners.[47] Davies' argument can be set out as follows:

1. Long-term education and training are necessary for the appreciation of conventional phenomena.
2. If art has a conventional origin, appreciating the artworks of other cultures would need long-term training.
3. Appreciation of artworks made by non-Western societies is within the reach of Westerners without long-term education.

Therefore: Art is not a phenomenon with conventional origins.

It is important to note that Davies' claim is not that when outsiders catch sight of a work of art from another culture, they can immediately appreciate it in the way the natives do. He is simply saying that the outsiders can more or less understand that the object in question is an artwork, and with a few hints and general information, they can pick up a lot about the artistic value of the object in question. For example, if they hear an instrument they have never seen before, they will usually realise they are listening to music. They can, to some level, appreciate the skill required to play the instrument. With more contextual information, they may be able to appreciate it in more depth. As Davies puts it, the outsiders

[46] Davies, Stephen. "Life is a Passacaglia." *Philosophy and Literature* 33, no. 2 (2009): 315-328. p. 316.
[47] Davies, Stephen. "Non-Western Art and Art's Definition", in *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*. Clarendon Press, (2007) 51-67.

"do not require formal training, to identify the work that is their target and then to comprehend it deeply, they need to know about its genre, about styles and conventions of the time, about related and similar pieces, and so on."[48]

Davies rejects the view, held by some anthropologists, that non-Western artifacts are art only from the perspective of Westerners.[49] Although he supports the view that fine arts is a classification of art born in Europe around the 18th century, he denies that art is limited to Western societies, given that artworks cover a wide range of practices and crafts all around the world. Davies concludes that the universality of art shows a common element in the artworks of different cultures and societies. This common denominator is the aesthetic element. There is simply no culture without aesthetic works of art. The first wave of artworks must have been aesthetic, and by the passage of time, different Artworlds have been developed under the influence of cultures and societies. In other words, Homo sapiens are interested in aesthetic properties due to their evolution by natural selection.[50]

His emphasis on the aesthetic origin of art does not mean that he denies that first works of art could have symbolic aspects. Also, it does not mean that Davies has accepted an aesthetic definition of art. He tries to define art with a disjunctive formula that is similar to Stecker's, but that provides more explanation of the aesthetic function of artifacts:

> I propose that something is art (a) if it shows excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals, and either doing so is its primary, identifying function or doing so makes a vital contribution to the realization of its primary, identifying function, or (b) if it falls under an art genre or art form established and publicly recognized within an art tradition, or (c) if it is intended by its maker/presenter to be art and its maker/presenter does what is necessary and appropriate to realizing that intention. Though the definition is disjunctive in form, (a) does the important work of getting the art-ball rolling. (b) and (c) are to be

[48] Davies, Stephen. "Life is a Passacaglia." *Philosophy and Literature* 33, no. 2 (2009): p. 320.
[49] For examples of such ideas in anthropology see:
Maquet, Jacques. *Introduction to Aesthetic Anthropology*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1971.
Graburn, Nelson. Introduction. In N. Graburn (ed.), *Ethnic andTourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. pp. 3–4.
Kasfir, Sidney. African Art and Authenticity: A Text without a Shadow. *African Arts*, (1992) 25: 41–53.
[50] Davies, Stephen. "Life is a Passacaglia." *Philosophy and Literature* 33, no. 2 (2009): 315-328.

fleshed out from the actual historical development of different ways of treating the various initial arts and artworks.[51]

This definition is remarkably similar to historical functionalism. Both definitions are disjunctive and can explain artworks created without an art-making practice, which means that they have the important advantage of explaining the emergence of the first artworks and identifying them as works of art in the first place. Also, both definitions rely on the concept of standard art forms and the artist's intentions. However, Davies' definition has several advantages over historical functionalism, which I will explain in the next section.

5.3.2. THE ANALYSIS OF DAVIES' DEFINITION

In what follows, I discuss what I consider to be the three most important ways in which Davies' account is stronger than Stecker's and then consider whether these improvements render Davies' definition adequate.

First, a strong point in this definition is that it proposes a plausible account for aesthetic qualities in artworks; if the aesthetic qualities of an artifact change the practical purpose of the artifact, it means that aesthetic quality is dominant in it. For example, if a teapot has a few simple patterns, that probably is not enough to make it an artwork. However, if the teapot is ornamented in such a way that its function changes to a ceremonial function, it is plausible that the teapot is a work of art. Davies says: "Where the practical function is mundane and remains dominant—as is so for cars, furniture, clothes, buildings, and the like—probably only the most superb examples are accorded art status."[52] Davies admits that he cannot offer a gauge that exactly measures excellence in realising significant aesthetic goals, but he thinks this vagueness does not impede the usefulness of a definition.

Second, Davies makes it clear that in order to create an artwork, it is not enough to intend to create a work of art. The creator needs to realise her intention through "necessary and appropriate"[53] actions. Let's return to my counterexample in the previous section

[51] Davies, Stephen. "Defining art and Artworlds." The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 73, no. 4 (2015): pp.377-378
[52] Ibid. p.379.
[53] Ibid. p. 377.

involving me turning my bed into a ready-made work of art. We can see that Davies' definition can respond to it better than historical functionalism. There needs to be more than intending to turn my bed into a work of art with the intention of it being, among other things, intellectually engaging and amusing to create a ready-made. However, if I can convince the officials in the School of Arts at The University of Waikato to exhibit my bed in a public area that is usually used for exhibiting artworks and then do what is necessary to create an interactive situation with the audience through my installation, I have probably been successful in creating a work of art in the genre of ready-mades. That being said, my work can still be a bad work of art for different reasons, such as lack of originality, lack of imagination, being poorly executed, and so on.

Third, Davies offers an account that aims to explain how different Artworlds exist. He argues that if a definition of art allows for several separate Artworlds, it needs to explain what makes all those Artworlds instances of the same kind. As explained at the beginning of this section, Davies argues that art-making is a universal activity rooted in our evolution. However, as different groups and communities of humans develop different societies, their costumes and practices of art-making change and transform to the extent that it creates fairly independent sets of practices and values that outsiders cannot easily appreciate. These independent entities can be called Artworlds. Davies refers to his account of the Artworlds as the cladistic account.[54] Cladistics is an approach to classification in biology that focuses on the common ancestors of organisms. A clade is commonly defined as a group consisting of "a last common ancestor and all its descendants."[55] Once again, Davies goes one step further than Stecker by explaining what an Artworld is and how it can be identified. Davies is not the only one who argues that art has aesthetic roots and sociological aspects. Carroll, among others, has a similar approach. As Davies points out, Carroll believes that historical narratives can explain different practices of art-making, and that the first artworks should be explained in terms of their aesthetic aspects.[56] Although they have similar approaches,

[54] Ibid. p.380.
[55] Wikipedia contributors, "Cladistics," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Cladistics&oldid=1088398830 (accessed June 7, 2022).
[56] Carroll, Noël. "Art, Practice, and Narrative." in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays.* Cambridge University Press, (2001) 63-74.

Davies' account is more sophisticated because he frames the problem in terms of Artworlds and approaches it by considering the evolutionary aspects of art-making in human societies.

We are now in a position to consider whether Davies' definition is adequate and informative. As explained before, some definitions aspire to be intensionally adequate. These definitions are typically conjunctive and consist of necessary conditions that are jointly sufficient. However, Davies' definition is disjunctive, which means that he does not aspire to capture the essence of art. We can therefore consider him a moderate anti-essentialist, like Stecker. We are then left with two other measures: extensional adequacy and informativeness. Is Davies' definition extensionally adequate? And is it informative? These are the questions that I will answer in what follows.

Let us first consider Condition (a), in which Davies uses the term aesthetic in its broad sense. It would be a mistake to think that the 'aesthetic goals' mentioned in this condition are limited to the form of artworks. He uses 'aesthetic goals' in a much broader sense and intends to cover many things that usually do not come to mind when the term 'aesthetic' is used. One may ask: what does he mean by "realizing significant aesthetic goals?" And here is Davies' reply:

> Certainly more than formal beauty or unity in variety, though including those. Expressions of powerful emotions, compelling narrations, realistic or evocative depictions, dexterous or difficult to realize actions, vivid enactments of historical or imagined scenes, and complex abstracta, all executed with exceptional expertise, are also on the list.[57]

In my view, by including the performance of "dexterous or difficult to realize actions" in this list, the condition fails to be exclusive of non-arts. Davies believes that if it is executed with 'exceptional expertise', the performance of such actions can be an aesthetic goal. According to Condition (a), if a significant aesthetic goal contributes to the realisation of the primary function of performance or artifact, then that performance or artifact must be art. It follows from this that performing a kata in karate or judo should be considered a work of art because, on the one hand, it involves both dexterous and difficult to realise actions. On the

[57] Davies, Stephen. "Defining art and Artworlds." The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 73, no.4 (2015) p. 378

other hand, these actions contribute vastly to the core function of a kata, which is, among other things, showing agility, technique, power, tranquility, proficiency, and control over the body and its movements. The same applies to figure skating. Nevertheless, Davies does not include such instances of martial arts or figure skating as artworks, and claims that martial "arts" and ice dancing are borderline art forms.[58]

Daniel Wilson argues that the emergence of spontaneous art forms such as the Japanese tea ceremony, also known as *Chado*, remains unexplained by Davies' definition. According to him, Condition (a) is not well suited to explain *Chado*. He believes that the cladistic account of the Artworlds means that new art forms should either exist in a pre-Artworld setting or should be a reaction to the existing art forms. He writes:

> While a tea ceremony would plausibly satisfy (a), this condition is primarily meant to initiate an Artworld. After an art tradition is initiated in a culture, only disjuncts (b) and (c) of the definition do any further work. When a culture already has art forms, not everything that exhibits aesthetic aims is art in virtue of satisfying (a).[59]

Wilson's point is that if something new is created in a society that has an established Artworld, Condition (a) does not apply to it because this condition is supposed to account for the first art in any art tradition. I do not think this is true, but to demonstrate this we need to represent Wilson's argument in more detail. After arguing that Condition (a) cannot account for the instances of *Chado* as art, he argues that *Chado* cannot be considered art in the light of condition (b), as well, since it cannot be considered a derivative of performance art forms such as Japanese theatre. According to Wilson, *Chado* has no precedent in the Japanese Artworld, and it has emerged mainly from two sources: Zen Buddhism and the glamorous tea festivals in Japan. So it comes down to Condition (c), which is the intention condition. Wilson argues that this condition entails "a conception of a homogenous collection of artistic practices that simply did not obtain in sixteenth century Japan."[60]

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[58] Davies, Stephen. "Trying to Define Art as the Sum of the Arts." *Pazhouhesh Nameh-e Farhangestan-e Honar (Research Journal of the Iranian Academy of the Arts*) 8 (2008). pp. 12-23.
[59] Wilson, Daniel. "The Japanese tea ceremony and pancultural definitions of art." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76, no. 1 (2018): p.37.
[60] Ibid. p.40.

I find Wilson's argument about Conditions (b) and (c) interesting and plausible. However, Wilson does not give a convincing reason for rejecting the possibility of *Chado* being a work of art under Condition (a). He argues that the cladistic account should be interpreted as follows: there are artworks without an established Artworld that can be considered art via their aesthetic merits; these are primitive artworks, and their makers certainly did not intend to 'make art' as we understand it today. He concludes that after an Artworld is established within a culture, only Conditions (b) and (c) are supposed to explain why something is art. It is not clear why Wilson claims that Condition (a) works only when an Artworld is not established. This claim seems unwarranted to me. However, I think it indicates the ambiguity in Davies' account. As I mentioned, instances of martial arts or figure skating can be works of art if we consider Condition (a) at face value. The fact that Davies does not consider them works of art suggests that Wilson's interpretation of Condition (a) may be close to what Davies has in mind. Davies may have an institutional theory of arts in mind that modifies what can be considered art under Condition (a). Regardless of whether this is the case, I think this condition is ambiguous and needs more illustration from Davies; otherwise, it can be interpreted in a way that makes it vulnerable to counterexamples.

Let us now consider Condition (b). It is reasonable that if something "falls under an art genre or art form established and publicly recognized within an art tradition", we consider it a work of art. However, in the absence of an explanation of the conditions under which something is an art form, the condition is incomplete. Depending on their notion of art, people differ in their judgements of what falls under a specific art form. Condition (b) therefore falls prey to problems that are similar to the ones I discussed in the previous section about art forms. In short, these problems are twofold. First, if the assumption is that we need a definition of art to identify artworks, it is plausible that we need the same definition to identify which artifact falls under an art form. Second, it is not an easy task to identify the art forms themselves. The concept of 'an art form' is no less complicated than the concept of 'a work of art'. As Davies himself writes: "there may be no principled manner for settling what

should be admitted to the list of art forms."[61] As a result of these considerations, I remain pessimistic about the informativeness of Condition (b).

Finally, an important question about Condition (c) is, 'What is necessary and appropriate to make a work of art happen?' Davies leaves it unanswered, and people have different views in this regard. Again, I would argue that if the assumption is that we need a definition of art to identify the instances of artworks, then, in a similar way, we need a definition of art to ascertain what is necessary and appropriate to make a work of art happen.

In this section, I considered Davies' definition of art and compared it to Stecker's definition in detail. I conclude that although Davies' definition is more sophisticated than that of his colleague, it still falls short of an adequate definition of art. Furthermore, both definitions are partly obscure and ambiguous, and therefore fail to be sufficiently informative. In the next section, I will investigate another pluralist definition of art, referred to by its author as the 'Buck passing theory of art'.

5.4. THE BUCK PASSING THEORY OF ART: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON DEFINING ART?

5.4.1. WHAT IS THE BUCK PASSING THEORY?

As we saw in Chapter 3, Carroll argues that most writers who tried to determine what art was in the twentieth century sought a reliable method to distinguish artworks from other things; this search was, to a considerable extent, the result of avant-garde movements such as Dadaism. Dominic Lopes follows the same line of reasoning. In the second chapter of *Beyond Art*, he argues for the thesis that "it weighs substantially in favour of an informative theory of art that it beats its competition in equipping us to deal with the hard cases."[62] On the one hand, he emphasises the effects of conceptual artworks and ready-mades on the project of defining art. On the other hand, he claims that the project has reached a methodological

[61] Davies, Stephen. "Trying to Define Art as the Sum of the Arts." Pazhouhesh Nameh-e Farhangestan-e Honar (Research Journal of the Iranian Academy of the Arts) 8 (2008). pp. 12 -23.
[62] Ibid. p. 46.

impasse as functional and procedural theorists appeal to different intuitions about those conceptual and avant-garde works, which he refers to as 'the puzzle cases':

> … recent art theorists endorse incompatible types of theories because they rely (1) on different intuitions about the puzzle cases and (2) on different criteria of theory choice, where (2) is also determined by (1). That is a genuine impasse. The impasse does not impeach functionalist or proceduralist theories of art — it is methodological, not probative.[63]

Lopes approaches the problem of defining art by looking into the history of aesthetics. His theory is distinctive in that he takes a step back and asks what 'art' refers to in different 'theories of art.' In other words, in trying to define 'art', are we seeking a definition of artworks or art forms? Philosophers who define art do not usually wrestle with this question and assume that a definition of art is equal to a definition of artwork. Lopes, however, differentiates between a theory of *art* and a theory of *the arts* (art forms). According to him, all the definitions we have investigated so far are categorised as theories of art because they all aspire to define what a work of art is. That is clear enough, but what does Lopes mean by a theory of the arts?

[63] Ibid. p.119.

Figure 6: Isenheim Altarpiece, Painting by Matthias Grünewald and Nikolaus Hagenauer, Chapel of Unterlinden Museum[64]

In reply to this question, he goes back to thinkers he refers to as the early moderns, and his examples include Charles Batteux, Denis Diderot, Immanuel Kant, and Hegel. He argues that the early moderns did not try to define a work of art but to determine what makes an activity one of the art forms; as a result, when Batteux argued that the uniting principle of all arts is that they imitate the beauty in nature[65], he was talking about art forms, not artworks. In

[64] Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain
[65] Batteux, Charles. *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2015.

other words, Batteux intended to define practices such as painting, music, dance, and poetry. This distinction explains, Lopes continues, why many artworks that did not imitate the beauty in nature, such as Grünewald's Crucifixion (see Figure 6), were not discussed as counterexamples to Batteux's theory. He also claims that before these modern thinkers, there was no concept that matches the concept of fine arts.[66] I will come back to these issues soon after I present a summary of Lopes' argument in favour of his theory.

Like many aestheticians discussed before, Lopes conflates theory and definition. Lopes suggests that we can and should define an artwork with reference to art forms. Nobody needs a definition of art; instead, we should focus on defining art forms such as music, painting, and poetry. Such a definition passes the buck from individual artworks to the art forms. He explains that buck-stopping theories can be formulated as "*x* is a work of art = *x* is . . . "[67] , whereas buck passing theories of art have the following form: "*x* is a work of art = *x* is a work of *K,* where *K* is an art."[68] On another occasion, he formulates the latter as follows: "item x is a work of art if and only if x is a work in activity *P* and *P* is one of the arts."[69]

The central claims in Lopes' position can be summarized as follows: Lopes claims that early moderns did not seek a definition for a work of art; they were rather interested in categorising certain activities within the arts. (In other words, they were interested in distinguishing different art forms) He claims that, before the early modern thinkers, there was no concept of art that corresponds to our idea of fine arts.[70] Following Carroll, he adds that some twenty-century philosophers tried to define art due to the avant-garde movements of the time, such as Dadaism. He concludes that the definitions proposed thus far have fundamental disagreements about the status of avant-garde works, which acted as the driving force of the project from the start. Finally, he suggests that if we let go of the project of defining a work of art and embrace the buck passing definition, we can better handle the avant-garde and the challenges it presents.

Lopes argues that the buck passing theory provides better grounds for empirical studies compared to buck stopping theories. This point is made on the commonly shared assumption

[66] Lopes, Dominic. *Beyond art*. Oxford University Press, 2014. pp. 24-30.
[67] Lopes, Dominic. *Beyond Art*. Oxford University Press, 2014. p. 13.
[68] Ibid. p. 14.
[69] Ibid. p.109.
[70] Lopes, Dominic. "Nobody Needs a Theory of Art." *The Journal of Philosophy* 105, no. 3 (2008) pp. 112-113.

that a theory of art should facilitate empirical studies about art. In other words, if philosophers of art want their definitions to be applicable in fields other than philosophy, their theories should have some ramifications in other fields, such as history or sociology. However, he asserts that no one needs a theory of art, as opposed to theories of the various different arts. As he puts it: "empirical art studies do not concern a category made up of all and only artworks, so a buck stopping theory of art is not needed to underpin research outside philosophy."[71] He claims that a buck passing theory of art has much to offer the empirical studies in social sciences, history, and so on. Here, the assumption is that philosophers can and will successfully develop informative definitions for art kinds or forms such as photography, literature, and poetry. When that is done, those definitions will be helpful for empirical research about instances of these kinds. Finally, Lopes reminds us that both procedural and functional definitions are useful for defining art forms; therefore, his theory is not as radical as it seems.[72] In what follows, I will investigate the credibility of these claims.

5.4.2. THE OBJECTION FROM HISTORY

First, I will investigate the claim that the concept of a work of art is a modern one. Lopes' primary reference for his claim that the concept of fine arts, as we know it today, has no precedent before modern times is Paul Kristeller, whose writings on Renaissance humanism have been significant and inspiring.[73] Kristeller's two linked essays, jointly entitled *The modern system of the arts*, have been cited many times by aestheticians. Kristeller argues that before the 18th century, the activities we call fine arts were not classified together. That is why he considers the fine arts system a modern one. He argues that Medieval and antiquity thinkers did not have such a concept when they used similar words like *techné* (τέχνη) and *ars*. He writes: "for Aquinas shoemaking, cooking and juggling, grammar and arithmetic are no less and in no other sense *artes* than painting poetry and music."[74] Most introductions to aesthetics start with Plato's mimetic art theory, which was developed further by Aristotle. However, Kristeller holds that mimetic theory fundamentally differs from Batteux's theory.

[71] Ibid. p.65.
[72] Ibid. p.127.
[73] Lopes, Dominic. "Nobody Needs a Theory of Art." *The Journal of Philosophy* 105, no. 3 (2008) pp. 110-113.
[74] Kristeller, Paul Oskar. "The modern system of the arts: A study in the history of aesthetics part I." *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1951): p.509.

Here are his main points about what can be found in the writings of Aristotle and Plato on *mimetic* arts:

> …it should be noted that the scheme excludes architecture, that the music and dance are treated as parts of poetry and not as separate arts, and that on the other hand the individual branches or subdivisions of poetry and of music seem to be put on a par with painting or sculpture… Finally, imitation is anything but a laudatory category, at least for Plato, and wherever Plato and Aristotle treat the "imitative arts" as a distinct group within the larger class of "arts," this group seems to include, besides the "fine arts" in which we are interested, other activities that are less "fine," such as sophistry, or the use of the mirror, of magic tricks, or the imitation of animal voices.[75]

The critical question here is whether Kristeller is right about these points. I think he is not completely justified in some of these claims and will explain why in the following. To begin with, Kristeller's claim, namely that the mimetic theory cannot accommodate architecture as an art, is not necessarily a deal-breaker. Batteux himself does not include architecture in fine art. Batteux differentiates *fine arts* from *mechanical arts* and holds that the purpose of the first is to provide pleasure and joy, but the second is designed to serve our needs. According to him, architecture and eloquence have elements shared by both categories and are something in between:

> The third category includes the arts whose purpose is simultaneously to provide both utility and pleasure. These are eloquence and architecture. They arise from need and are perfected by taste. They occupy a middle ground between the two other types, providing both pleasure and utility.[76]

Also, it should not be surprising that poetry, dance, and music are grouped together in the writings of Plato and Aristotle, as these art forms were usually presented to the audience in a combined manner during performances such as theatre or musicals. Even today, these art forms typically accompany each other in concert halls and so on. Poetry, dance, and music

[75] Kristeller, Paul Oskar. "The modern system of the arts: A study in the history of aesthetics part I." *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1951): p.504.
[76] Young, James O. "Batteux: *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*." (2015). p. 3.

seem to have a close bond for Batteux, as well. He writes: "People would dance while the voice chanted, as today they dance to an instrumental accompaniment. The spoken words had the same rhythm as the dance steps. Poetry, music, and dance present to us representations of events and human emotions."[77] In another passage, he writes: "the principal goal of music and dance must be imitation of feelings or emotions while the main goal of poetry is imitation of actions. However, since emotions and actions are nearly always united in nature, they should also be found together in the arts."[78] Therefore, I do not see a fundamental difference between how Batteux sees these art forms and how Plato and Aristotle saw them.

It is critical to differentiate between two claims here. The first is that thinkers of the Medieval times and Ancient Greece had a broader concept of art than fine arts. The second claim is that before modern thinkers like Batteux, there was no concept corresponding or similar to the concept of fine arts. I follow James O. Young in this matter, where he argues that the first claim is plausible but not the second. Young agrees with Kristeller that words such as *techné* and *ars* encompass many crafts and skills. He reminds us that even today, the concept of art has implications reaching far beyond fine arts. "No one believes, even today, that the fine arts are the only arts. Even today we speak of liberal arts, decorative arts, the art of cookery, and the art of war."[79] However, the second claim is where Young departs from Kristeller, as he considers *mimetic* arts the predecessor of the fine arts. He writes: "The imitative arts were poetry, painting, music, sculpture, and dance in Aristotle and Plato, just as they were in Batteux."[80] Young is not the only one who believes these five art forms were established as *memetic* arts in antiquity and were separated from other crafts, such as shoe-making. Francis Stephen Halliwell, a professor of Greek and classical studies, writes: "That music is, in some sense, a mimetic art, alongside poetry, painting, sculpture, and dance, was the prevailing, though not unquestioned, orthodoxy of the ancient tradition from at least the time of Plato onward."[81]

Last is the claim about the term "mimetic art" not being laudatory for Aristotle and Plato and being shared with less fine activities. Like other claims above, this claim has some

[77] Ibid. p. 147
[78] Ibid. p. 131
[79] Young, James O. "The Ancient and Modern System of the Arts." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 55, no. 1 (2015) p.10.
[80] Ibid. p.16.
[81] Halliwell, Stephen. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems,* Princeton University Press, 2009. pp. 235-236.

truth to it. Imitative arts are not the only activities that involve imitation. Other activities, such as the one that Kristeller mentions, are mimetic, according to Plato and Aristotle. However, Kristeller is wrong if he means that mimetic art was not a distinguished category simply because other things can be mimetic. Aristotle considers *mimesis* a necessary condition for all artworks. This condition does not exclude all non-artworks, but, according to him, all artworks share it. I do not see how this is relevant to the claim that the ancient concept of mimetic art does not correspond to the modern concept of art. Whether or not Aristotle was successful in providing an adequate definition that is both necessary and sufficient is another matter. From what has remained of his works, experts have tried to extract Aristotle's theory of art. Here is what Halliwell calls the foundation of Aristotle's aesthetic model:

> According to this model, mimesis involves a communicative process in which the significance of an artwork is realized only through the response of one who traces and is moved by the pattern of experience embodied within it. Mimesis fulfills itself in the mind's active encounter with, its cognitive and emotional grasp of, a possible reality configured in an artistic form.[82]

If Halliwell is right, there are even more similarities between Aristotle's theory of art and the aesthetic theory of art, as both involve the cognitive and emotional reaction of the audience. The fact that the ancients used the term mimesis to describe things that are not artworks does not provide sufficient reason for concluding that they did not have a concept that corresponds to (what Batteux refers to as) fine art.

Furthermore, the absence of a single name or word for a concept in a language does not mean the concept is absent from that language because it may be the case that a combination of words used together covers that concept. Davies rejects this idea while arguing for non-Western cultures having a concept of art: "It may be that a culture employs a complex phrase instead of a single word. That we use 'second cousin once removed,' not a solitary term, does not mean that we have no concept of that familial relationship."[83]

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[82] Ibid. 249.
[83] Davies, Stephen. "Non-Western Art and Art's Definition", in *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*. Clarendon Press, (2007) p.55.

I conclude that Kristeller's claims about imitative arts are not entirely true. While it might be the case that most people who lived during the Middle Ages were not familiar with the concept of mimetic arts, there is undeniable evidence that Batteux's fine art and Aristotle's mimetic art are very similar and that the latter was a model for the former.[84] Kristeller's conclusions about this matter are not consistent with what we know of Aristotle, Plato, and Batteux. That being said, some of Kristeller's observations are valuable, and I will come back to him in the next chapter. We can now return to Lopes and his use of these ideas.

Lopes adds something to Kristeller's argument by claiming that Batteux intended to define activities that qualify as art forms, not artworks. If Kristeller were right, the claim that early moderns did not intend to define 'art' would have more weight. If this were true, one only needs to take another step to concede that defining art only comes to light around the second half of the 19th century, and the hard cases are the driving force of this intellectual endeavour.[85] This means there was no theory of art (as artworks) until the latter half of the 19th century. From here, Lopes draws another conclusion that the hard cases are the ultimate criterion for judging definitions of art. After all, if the primary goal of the buck stopping theories was to explain the hard cases and those theories reached an impasse, it makes sense to look for alternatives. Unfortunately for Lopes, however, one of his fundamental premises about the project of defining art is at odds with historical evidence.

It is critical to note that he uses the same premise in other arguments in favour of his theory. An example is when Lopes admits that his definition is silent about the common denominator of art forms. However, he admits that even the buck stopping definitions do not answer this question. He claims that the question, 'why should we categorise painting, dance, poetry, conceptual arts, and other art forms in one category?' is left unanswered by both kinds of definitions. With this strategy, Lopes defends buck passing theories of art by claiming that the buck stopping theories cannot do any better. Again, it seems to me that he is wrong to claim that the early moderns and their predecessors did not try to provide a common denominator for art forms. Several pieces of evidence show they did develop

[84] A similar system of arts has been discussed by Renaissance theorists such as Leon Battista Alberti who was an advocate of modelling arts and art theory after antiquity. See: Blunt, Anthony. *Artistic theory in Italy, 1450-1600*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 1962. pp. 17-21.

[85] Some hard cases of the 19th century can be Ubu Roi by Alfred Jarry, Poèmes Ironiques by Emile Goudeau, and tribal and 'primitive' art.

informative theories. The mimetic theory of art is a counterexample to Lopes' claim. As Young argues, buck stopping theories have had an answer for this question: "If systematic informativeness is an important desideratum of a satisfactory theory of art, then buck stopping theories will have a crucial advantage over a buck passing theory. …Theories of art have been systematically informative since antiquity." [86] Therefore, the buck passing definition of art is less informative compared to the established examples of the buck stopping definition. In what follows, I will investigate his answer to the problem of the hard cases, which is closely related to the above point about systematic informativeness.

5.4.3. PUZZLE CASES AND THE CATEGORY OF CONCEPTUAL ART

Lopes attempts to solve the problem of puzzle cases by reminding us that most of them can be classified under conceptual art. Therefore, all we need is to define this art form and include it in our list of arts. Can his suggestion about passing the buck to a conceptual art form be the solution to the puzzle cases? In the second chapter of *Beyond Art*, Lopes argues for the thesis that "it weighs substantially in favour of an informative theory of art that it beats its competition in equipping us to deal with the hard cases."[87] Let us investigate the capability of the buck passing theory of art to deal with hard cases.

First, without a definition of conceptual art, the buck passing theory is no better than its rivals for locating puzzle cases. We do not have a definition of conceptual art yet, and it does not seem to be easy to provide such a definition. More importantly, the suggestion that hard cases like *4'33''* should be categorised under conceptual arts and not under other art forms, such as music, is not new.[88] Both functionalists and proceduralists are aware of this issue. The disagreement between functionalists and proceduralists is not a result of them mislocating a conceptual work under other art forms. One critical question, however, is whether or not conceptual arts should be considered one of the (fine) arts. If the answer is yes, there arises another troubling question: which conceptual works should be considered

[86] Young, James O. "The Buck Passing Theory of Art." *Symposion* 3, no. 4 (2016) p. 429.
[87] Lopes, Dominic. *Beyond Art*. Oxford University Press, 2014. p. 46.
[88] For example, see the introduction in Goldie, Peter, and Elisabeth Schellekens. *Who's Afraid: of Conceptual Art?*. Routledge, 2009.

arts? A buck passing definition of art will not have an advantage over the buck stopping definitions if it does not explain why conceptual arts should be considered one of the (fine) arts. On the contrary, the buck stopping theories seem to have an advantage when it comes to this matter. For example, an aesthetic definition of art can deny membership of fine arts to conceptual artworks if they lack the aesthetic requirements; an institutional definition can approve the membership of conceptual artworks based on their place in the current Artworld.

The above point about the common denominator of art forms brings us to a similar objection that can be developed by asking, 'Which sort of things can be considered art forms?' Lopes answers that the candidates should be appreciative kinds.[89] However, we can push further and ask, 'Which sort of appreciative kinds qualify as art forms?' This is a crucial question because many appreciative kinds, such as bird breeding and culinary art, are not considered (fine) art kinds. Lopes does not have a plausible answer to this question, making his theory uninformative.

Another objection that shows Lopes' theory is not informative can be shown by asking: 'What makes a painting a work of art under the art form of painting?' As we know, some paintings and statues are not considered artworks. Lopes answers the question by saying, "Works in an art are not merely works in an associated medium. They are works that exploit a medium in order to realize artistic properties and values."[90] Again, this seems painfully uninformative and circular as he appeals to "artistic properties and values" to clarify what can be categorised under an art kind. Ironically, he needs some kind of buck stopping definition of art to defend his buck passing theory. It turns out that some people may still need a theory of art, and not surprisingly, these people include philosophers of art like Lopes.

5.5. CONCLUSION

I assessed the adequacy of three types of pluralist accounts of art. These theories account for the vast diversity of artworks by acknowledging that some artworks call for an aesthetic explanation, and some require an institutional genealogy. I argued that these accounts could

[89] Lopes, Dominic. *Beyond Art*. Oxford University Press, 2014. p. 153.
[90] Ibid. p. 144

be categorized as moderately anti-essentialist because they do not assume that art has an essence. Intensional adequacy is dependent upon discovering the essence of the kind. Therefore, pluralist thinkers, being anti-essentialist, do not aspire to intensional adequacy. Setting intensional adequacy aside, we are left with two other measures to investigate the adequacy of these definitions. The first is extensional adequacy, and the second is informativeness. I have shown that the main issue with pluralist accounts is that they avoid counterexamples by being somewhat vague or lacking in specificity, and that unsurprisingly, this comes at the cost of failing to be informative.

In the first section of this chapter, I argued that Gaut owes us an explanation for why he believes that specifying the number of criteria, or prioritizing some over others, will make his account vulnerable to the counterexamples. I argued that this indicates that Gaut, mistakenly, considers his account as extensionally adequate. The cluster account cannot distinguish artworks from non-artworks. However, if Gaut does not claim that his account is extensionally adequate, the cluster account can be a plausible candidate for a theory that wants to explain uses of the concept of art in language.

In section 2, I argued that Stecker's disjunctive definition leans heavily on institutional concepts such as standard art forms and artistic functions. Considering there is no widespread consensus about these notions, Stecker needs (but fails) to give more detailed explanations. Similarly, I argued that historical functionalism is not informative enough to distinguish between artistic functions and accidental functions. Finally, the dependency of historical functionalism on the idea of art forms and, vice versa, the dependency of art forms on a definition is a serious problem for this view.

In section 3, I argued that Davies gives a more plausible disjunctive definition than Stecker, but still fails to provide a sufficiently informative definition for identifying art. His account is more informative than Stecker's in an important respect, which is that Davies argues that art-making is a universal activity that has its roots in our evolution. His Cladistic report suggests that different Artworlds can be grouped together because of their relation to a common ancestor. This common ancestor is an aesthetic Artworld that can be inferred from the natural inclination of humans to aesthetic properties. That being said, his definition is not

exclusive to what he calls borderline art forms, such as martial arts and figure skating, and, similar to historical functionalism, it remains uninformative about the art forms.

In section 4, I argued that the buck passing theory of art encounters serious difficulties that can only be resolved by providing a buck stopping definition. I investigated two objections to this theory. First, the objection from history, and second the objection based on hard cases. Within the first objection, I showed that Lopes is wrong to assume that there was no concept of art before modern times, parallel to the concept of fine arts. Also, his assumption that the project of defining art only started in the second half of the 19th century is not plausible. In the second objection, I focused on the impasse of the buck stopping theories that, according to him, can be solved by passing the buck to the conceptual art form in question. I argued that Lopes simplifies the problem by assuming that the impasse is about the categorisation of the hard cases under conceptual art. I claimed that the real disagreement among buck stopping thinkers is about whether conceptual art should be part of the fine arts. Furthermore, Lopes has three main problems. First, he does not provide a definition for the art forms he wants to pass the buck to. Second, he does not provide a plausible theory that explains which appreciative kinds are art forms. And third, he does not have enough resources to explain, which objects that fall within an art form are artworks and which ones are not. I concluded that, like other pluralist accounts, the buck passing theory of art falls short of being adequate.

CHAPTER 6 WHY DEFINITIONS OF ART ARE UNSUCCESSFUL: CONCLUSIONS AND SPECULATIONS

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that all of the main types of definition of art are unsuccessful. At this point, one could propose a new definition, perhaps one that draws on and tries to fix one of the existing definitions. Instead of doing this, I reconsider the very project of defining art and ask whether it is still worth pursuing. It is important to see whether we can identify reasons for this failure. In this concluding chapter, I will discuss some features of art, and the history of art, which explain why definitions of art are unsuccessful and why we do not need such a definition.

The success of project of defining art depends on several basic questions that are often neglected in the literature on the topic. Some theoretical and conceptual distinctions must be made if we expect this debate to be fruitful. In section 1 of this chapter, I show why the concept of art is complicated and theory-laden by giving a brief historical review of the categorisation of arts. This is important as it sheds light on why we have mixed feelings about the art status of some artifacts and activities. After that, I criticise definitions of art for neglecting to acknowledge the sheer complexity of the subject of art and not clarifying their subject.

In section 2, I will consider an important theoretical distinction between the broad concept of art, which includes many practical objects, and much narrower concepts, such as fine arts. In section 3, I explain what motivational adequacy is and conclude that based on my research, defining art is not motivationally adequate. Two main applications that philosophers often mention to highlight the importance of defining art are setting a theoretical foundation for empirical studies and settling legal disputes about art. I argue that neither of these two objectives is attainable by a definition of art. In section 4, I highlight the

main points that can be derived from each of the five previous chapters. And, in section 5, I briefly reflect on the longevity of the project of defining art and conclude that it has roots both in philosophical practice and in contemporary academic structures.

6.1. CATEGORISING ART: FROM LABOUR TO DIVINITY

Several people during the past few years have asked me what the subject of my PhD is. They have been from various backgrounds, such as philosophy students, librarians, bureaucrats, tradesmen, factory workers, and retired homemakers. My answer has been simple: it is about defining art. Almost every time, their response to my answer somehow shows that they think of a highly valuable enterprise when they think about art or artworks. At first glance, a definition of art seems attractive because we assume it promises to distinguish valuable works from the kind of ordinary and kitsch artefacts which do not deserve our special attention.

People usually associate artworks with a sense of wonder and awe. These feelings make sense when we consider the knowledge, skill, and powerful imagination involved in some artworks, such as the paintings on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Nonetheless, not all artworks are like the Sistine Chapel paintings, and very few artists earn such societal respect that they could, like Michelangelo, be referred to as *The Divine One*. In what follows, I will explain why our image of the artist and art is shaped the way it is and how it may affect the discussion about defining art.

There are many copies of Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, one of the most read books in The Middle Ages after The Holy Bible. In a particularly beautiful and illuminated French manuscript from the 15th century, we find a miniature called *Philosophy Presenting the Seven Liberal Arts to Boethius* by the French illuminator Coëtivy Master (see Figure 7). The miniature depicts the liberal arts personified as young women and lists them as Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Music, Geometry, Arithmetic, and Astronomy. In ancient Greece, the liberal arts were called so because they were considered necessary in the education of free citizens. This education was usually denied to female citizens. Therefore, women or enslaved people rarely had the chance to be a practitioner of liberal arts, "for the

distinction between the liberal and mechanical arts was that the former were practised by free men, the latter by slaves."[1]

Figure 7: Philosophy Presenting the Seven Liberal Arts to Boethius, Leaf: 6 × 17 cm [2]

This situation changed in the Renaissance, at least for men. Unlike craftsmen, such as carpenters and metalworkers of the time, visual artists of the Renaissance were educated. Many Renaissance artists were polymaths with an amazing knowledge of geometry, chemistry, physics, architecture, music, and so on. Alberti, da Vinci, Monteverdi, and Michelangelo are a few famous examples, but even an 'ordinary' painter or sculptor of the time needed a vast array of knowledge and education to achieve what they did. However, in theory, visual arts were still considered mechanical and manual, sitting below the liberal arts like music and poetry. Visual artists had a long intellectual battle to prove themselves to be more than artisans. They wanted "recognition as educated men, as members of humanist society"[3]. I will not explore the interesting history of their theoretical and practical struggle for enfranchisement except to note that painting, sculpture, and architecture were finally accepted as liberal arts around the second half of the 16th century. This paved the way for them to be classified as fine arts later on. As Anthony Blunt points out:

> The artist was now faced with a wide public consisting of educated people, not merely of Church officials and a few princes, which he attempted to attract by his art;

[1] Blunt, Anthony. *Artistic theory in Italy, 1450-1600*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 1962. p. 49.
[2] Getty Museum Collection. Ms. 42, leaf 2v (91.MS.11.2.verso)
[3] Ibid. p. 55.

> and in this spirit of competition he began to carry out works other than those directly commissioned. We are here at the beginning of those modern ideas which make the artist a creator who works for himself alone, but in the Cinquecento these views were only in their infancy. The artist was still closely tied to his public, and most of his work was commissioned. The days of exhibitions were yet a long way off.
>
> But once the old organizations were abandoned as out of date, it became clear that artists needed some sort of institution for guarding their interests and training young artists. Consequently in the second half of the sixteenth century there began to grow up those academies which were later to form the whole structure of artistic education. [4]

The same set of ideas flowed through the French society of the time. *The Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, founded in 1648 in Paris, was one of the three academies that merged together to form *The Académie des Beaux-Arts* in 1816. The other two academies were the Academy of Architecture and the Academy of Music. *The Académie des Beaux-Arts* formed the primary model of education in arts in many other countries for the years to come. Accordingly, the French idea, *l'art pour l'art*, meaning *art for art's sake*, appeared in the literature around the 1800s.[5] With the prevalence of the concept of fine arts, visual artists found much praise and recognition. After all, we call these arts 'fine' for a reason, and this is not the only laudatory name proposed for this category. Other names, such as 'beautiful arts' and 'polite arts', were sometimes used but did not hold out until today like 'fine arts' did.[6]

In Chapter 5, under 'The objection from history', I argued that the concept of fine arts is not unprecedented and has its roots in Aristotle and Plato's ideas about mimetic art. This does not mean that the concept of mimetic art has always been as prevalent as fine arts in our time. As Kristeller has shown, many societies, including both Western and non-Western societies, did not find the distinction between fine arts and practical arts worthy of attention until modern times. For example, before the policies implemented by the government of Iran to modernise society in the 19th century, the category of mimetic arts probably did not exist

[4] Ibid. pp. 56-57.
[5] Lamarque, Peter. "The uselessness of art." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68, no. 3 (2010): p. 205.
[6] Shiner, Larry. *The invention of art: A cultural history*. University of Chicago press, 2003. Part 2.

in Persian culture. This changed under the influence of European languages, mainly French, and today the Persian word هنر [Honar], which was previously used to imply skill and knowledge, usually refers to fine arts, and هنرمند [Honarmand] refers to artists such as actors, musicians, novelists and so on.

From the Renaissance to the 19th century, art was mostly defined with reference to beauty in nature, and beauty was in turn described by qualities such as harmony, proportion, and symmetry, which were to be perfected in the hands of the artist. Theorists such as Alberti argued that painters, sculptors and architects should observe nature with a scientific eye and have a thorough knowledge of the materials and production processes of their art forms.[7] Visual artists have a high place in this picture because it is up to these artists to have the imagination to recognise the beauty in nature and have the knowledge and skill to manifest it through their chosen medium. However, it is within the theory of Romanticism that artists sit at their theoretical peak. The image of artists as pure souls who, with their genius and skill, create and actualise the highest levels of excellence is an undeniable part of Romanticism. The view that artists in general, and poets in particular, have occupations that are among the pinnacles of human activities is stressed by many intellectuals in the Romantic movement who believed that artists have an extraordinary ability to see beyond the mundane state of affairs.[8]

This mythological image of the artist did not originate with the Romantics. As far as written evidence is involved, we can go back to Ancient Greece, where in his treatise *Phaedrus*, Plato associates *Theia Mania*, or divine madness, with four activities, including poetry.[9] Additionally, it is a plausible theory that some cave paintings were treated as portals into another world with the help of shamans or artists.[10] Nevertheless, it is with the Romantic ideology alongside the concept of fine arts that the image of the artist with a halo around his head finds its proper manifestation in modern and contemporary culture. Shroder writes, in this regard, that "[t]he belief that the artist is an ideal type, a full realization of the human

[7] Ibid. pp. 17-21.
[8] See Shroder, Maurice Z. *Icarus: The Image of the Artist in French Romanticism*. Harvard University Press, 1961. Chapter I. The Romantic Image of the Artist.
[9] The other three are prophetic, initiatory, and erotic madness.
[10] For an example, see Lewis-Williams, David J., and Jean Clottes. "The mind in the cave—The cave in the mind: Altered consciousness in the Upper Paleolithic." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 9, no. 1 (1998): 13-21.

potential, lay at the heart of the Romantic ethic."[11] The expression theory of art further supplements and strengthens this ideology by giving the artists the autonomy to free themselves from the imitation of nature. The Romantic idea of the artist has been vastly influential for the past two centuries, with the result that we are born into this ideology, and its premises feel natural to us. Romanticism had a vast influence on art forms and the way we think about them; as Carroll puts it: "Many twentieth-century art movements, from German Expressionism to Modern Dance, can be seen as direct descendants of Romanticism."[12]

The system of fine arts was accompanied by changes in organisations such as art academies and the social order that is related to them. Thinkers such as Larry Shiner and Terry Eagleton argue that the concept of fine arts is ideological. I agree that this concept, like many other concepts, has its ideological roots. Fine arts can be described as bourgeois because of their ties with the upper and middle classes. "Bourgeois" and "ideological" sometimes have negative connotations among people who use these terms, such as left-leaning thinkers. I do not agree with the approach that if something has ideological roots, it means that it should be abandoned.[13] Being bourgeois does not necessarily imply being obstructive or harmful, and the system of fine art was not, in general, obstructive and harmful.

I think there is an unprecedented thoroughness in the theory of fine arts and the systematic (ideological) way of forming schools, galleries, theatres, and museums around it. This systematic change is not limited to arts, and happened in many realms of social order in the modern world, where the influence of Western technology and culture on the rest of the world is undeniable. Around the turn of the twentieth century, many non-Western societies that aspired to adopt a more Western way of life were ready to accept several facets of its ideology, including the fine arts. This is the time when many Asian powers sought to become modern and were implementing reforms in tandem with modernism—though I assume they did not outright reject their own art traditions. They adopted the model of fine arts and established art academies, resulting in many people benefiting from this ideological model. For example, in the 1860s Alfred Jean-Baptiste Lemaire a French military composer, was

[11] Ibid. p. 1.
[12] Carroll, Noël. *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*. Routledge, 1999. p 60.
[13] For an example see: Clowney, David. "Definitions of Art and Fine Art's Historical Origins." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69, no. 3 (2011): 309-320.

hired by the ambassador of Iran in France to establish a military orchestra in Iran. He composed the first Iranian national anthem and spent the rest of his life (till 1907) in Tehran, coaching and educating many musicians.

Ironically, as this system was flourishing in the non-Western world, the early twentieth century movements such as Dadaism targeted the heart of fine arts in the West. Dadaists and conceptual artists repudiated many norms and standards of fine arts. They tried to be the opposite of the fine, serene, beautiful, and harmonic. They wanted to show their audiences the crooked, the weird, and the absurd. Since the early years of the 20th century, the Dada movement and conceptual works like ready-mades claimed their territory of arts.

Many experts were against the admission of things such as *Fountain* into the circle of arts, which is why *Fountain* was not even admitted to the exhibition of *Société des Indépendants*, an obscure organization of which Duchamp himself was a founding member.[14] Duchamp, who was not happy with the rejection of his work, left *Société des Indépendants* and managed to seize some attention in the Artworld by co-founding a journal;[15] *The Blind Man* was an art journal, published for only two issues in New York in 1917. Duchamp posed as a critic in his own journal in order to publish about his own work, which was rejected and never exhibited. After *The Blind Man* Duchamp established another journal, *Rongwrong*, that was issued only once. In the beginning, ready-mades did not enjoy much publicity. As Duchamp puts it: "I have never been able to do anything that was accepted straight off, but to me that wasn't important."[16] Initially, it was not easy for conceptual artists like him to herald the importance of their work. However, they gained more recognition later on. With a little help from art theorists, a snowball effect began to take place, and conceptual arts changed our understanding of art forever.

Today, almost no art theorists dare to deny that *Fountain* is a work of art. Even Beardsley, the most well-known proponent of the aesthetic definition of art, accepts it as a work of art on the grounds of its aesthetic qualities, such as being witty.[17] Most

[14] Cabanne, Pierre, and Marcel Duchamp. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. Trans Ron Padgett. New York: Viking Press, 1971. p. 54
[15] Ibid. p. 55.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Beardsley, Monroe. "An Aesthetic Definition of Art, What Is Art?" In Lamarque, Peter, and Stein Haugom Olsen, eds. *Aesthetics and the philosophy of art: the analytic tradition, an anthology*. John Wiley & Sons, 2018.

contemporary art experts and relevant art organisations accept conceptual artworks as artworks. With the acceptance of ready-mades and conceptual works in the art realm, the concept of art as a skilful craft loses its long-lasting authority over the Western Artworld. Today, one no longer needs to have training in visual arts, architecture, music, or anything like that to be recognised as an artist. Here rests the truth of institutionalism, namely that anything can be art if the Artworld decides it is art.

Art galleries, dealers, critics, academies, private collectors, auction companies, and many other players have their share of this market. When it became apparent that conceptual works could be valuable in the art market, many collectors, museums, and galleries started gathering and documenting them. No matter how anti-capitalist the intentions of the artists were or how much they wanted to be anti-establishment, this new establishment could absorb them and attach a price tag to them. That is how a work entitled *The Artist's Shit*, by Piero Manzoni, gained so much value in the art market. He produced 90 tin cans with a label in four languages that read:

> "Artist's Shit
> Contents 30 gr net
> Freshly preserved
> Produced and tinned
> in May 1961"

In my opinion, this is the bluntest attack on the halo of the artist in the 20th century. Manzoni ridicules the collectors and art institutions of the time for their fetishist and consumerist attitude towards artists. In a letter to a friend, he wrote: "...if collectors want something intimate, really personal to the artist, there's the artist's own shit, that is really his."[18] However, like any other market, the actions of the participants in the art market are determined mainly by the forces and companies that affect the price of the commodities. Two examples of these powerful companies are Sotheby's and Christie's. One of those cans was sold at Sotheby's for 97,250 pounds in 2007 and another at Christie's for 182,500 pounds in 2015. I think the persistence of seeing the artist with a halo has a role in the extravagance of

[18] Battino, Freddy, Piero Manzoni, and Luca Palazzoli. Piero Manzoni: catalogue raisonné. All'Insegna del Pesce d'Oro, 1991. p. 144.

these numbers. Some people benefit from this image, and some people fall prey to its pitfalls, and I suspect the second group are mostly young and struggling artists.

How, then, is this history relevant to the project of defining art? There is an important point that can be derived from the above discussion. Considering the complicated history of art forms and different classifications of art, theorists who want to define art must clarify what sort of art they have in mind. The first step is to acknowledge that the concept of art is laden with theories and myths. Artworks can be classified according to many different norms and standards. Theorists tend to forget that we use different classifications for arts, such as performing arts, folk arts, fine arts, decorative arts, and so on. This passage from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* about the 'traditional categories of art' is an example of different ways that artworks can be classified:

> Traditional categories within the arts include literature (including poetry, drama, story, and so on), the visual arts (painting, drawing, sculpture, etc.), the graphic arts (painting, drawing, design, and other forms expressed on flat surfaces), the plastic arts (sculpture, modeling), the decorative arts (enamelwork, furniture design, mosaic, etc.), the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), music (as composition), and architecture (often including interior design).[19]

Despite these variations, contenders in the project of defining art jump to the business of giving definitions as if we all know what they are talking about. The truth is that we do not know, and neither do they. That is why Kendall Walton writes: "It is not at all clear that these words – 'What is art?' – express anything like a single question, to which competing answers are given, or whether philosophers proposing answers are even engaged in the same debate."[20]

In Chapter 2, I argued that we can define cultural phenomena according to the long-lasting structures that are shaped around them, even if they do not have an essence. My example was the concept of the 'Working class'. Such concepts refer to a phenomenon that has been stable enough to form a set of structures and norms around them. However, we

[19] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "the arts." Encyclopedia Britannica, February 10, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/topic/the-arts.
[20] Walton, Kendalll. "Aesthetics-What? Why? and Wherefore?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 2 (2007): 147-161.

should be cautious of the spatiotemporal limits of these norms and structures. There can be periods in history when there is no such thing as the Working Class. Therefore, if a thinker decides to develop a theory about the working class or to define this concept, it stands to reason that they should clarify which part of the history of humankind and which region they are talking about. Similarly, aestheticians should be expected to clarify the historic boundaries of their definitions and the art forms they have in mind when they want to define art.

Some aestheticians of the 18th and 19th centuries more or less agreed on the number and identity of the art forms, and targeted a specific system of art that Kristeller refers to as the Modern system of art. In these cases, it is easier to pin down the subject of enquiry. As I have explained, our understanding of art has changed a lot since then. Today, even if an aesthetician specifies that she wanted to define fine arts, more clarification is needed. Our understanding of fine arts depends on contingent classifications that can vary among experts. A definition of art might be useful as long as the heterogeneous roots of this concept are acknowledged and the relevant historical boundaries are set. This is something that philosophers of art rarely do. Unfortunately, their talk is usually limited to the history of aesthetics, with a handful of cherry-picked examples from the history of the arts. As a result, their definitions lack the necessary foundations to be applicable in identifying art, and fall short of being informative. This is partly due to the nature of the subject, but it is intensified by neglecting the historical boundaries of the subject.

Further, it is reasonable to expect the theorist to give an explanation of the purpose that is to be served by their definition. As we saw, Dickie denies that his definition is supposed to serve as a real definition. He also denies an epistemological role for his definition, thereby making extensional inadequacy irrelevant. However, he touches on these issues very briefly and only in part, and he only does so a good 30 years after offering his definition. This has caused a significant amount of unnecessary confusion and misunderstanding.

6.2. A DECISIVE DISTINCTION: 'ART' OR 'ART'?

The word 'art' can be used referring to many activities that require knowledge and skill in general. In this sense many activities that we do not consider 'artistic' can be called art. For example, we can speak about the art of war, the art of negotiation, the art of massage, the art of being happy, and so on. This sense of art is evidently broader than what we are looking for when we try to say what an artwork is. In this section, I focus on two other senses of the word 'art' which are related to my point in the previous section that a definition of art needs to clarify its boundaries.

It might be objected that the concept of art differs from the concept of the working class. Art is universal and goes as far back as the human species go. Therefore, theorists do not need to clarify the historical boundaries of their definition. For example, Davies explains the difference between the concept of fine Arts with a capital 'A' and the concept of arts with a small 'a'. He claims that the concept of art with a small 'a' is the genus for fine Arts, and argues that all cultures that have produced aesthetically pleasing objects have this concept of art.[21]

Now, one can use Davies' distinction and claim that if we are after a definition of art with a small 'a', we do not need to delineate the historical boundaries of the subject. If this is the project, philosophers of art need not engage with setting the historical boundaries of art because it is irrelevant to what they are trying to define. I agree with Davies that if we consider a sufficiently broad concept of art, art is universal. However, I have two points about art with a small 'a'. First, this broad concept of art is not exactly what contemporary philosophers, including Davies himself, talk about when defining art. Second, this concept is so broad that, even if it is successfully defined, the definition would not serve any purpose. In the following, I will explain these two points in more detail.

Davies would agree that the concept of art with a small 'a' covers not only fine arts but also other categorisations such as folk arts, performing arts, applied arts, and decorative arts, as well as crafts such as mosaics, enamel, weaving, knitting, and so on. I think a universal

[21] Davies, Stephen, "Non-Western Art and Art's Definition", in *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*. Clarendon Press, (2007) 51-67.

concept of art must include items such as the Duke of Wellington's sword, basketry with aesthetic qualities (see Figure 8), and ornamented pottery with beautiful curves.

Figure 8: Basket, exterior. Southern California. Deer grass, sumac, Juncus textilis. collected 1880s. 20cm high x 51cm diameter[22]

As discussed in the previous chapter, Davies includes a condition in his disjunctive definition that specifically relates to items with aesthetic properties. He believes that in all societies, making art starts with the production of aesthetically pleasing objects and then develops into more institutionalised forms of producing art. Let's have a look at this condition again:

> I propose that something is art (a) if it shows excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals, and either doing so is its primary, identifying function or doing so makes a vital contribution to the realization of its primary, identifying function.

The important term here is 'primary function'. Davies talks about this primary function or purpose in other instances, too. For example, in his *Non-Western Art and Art's Definition,* he writes:

[22] The University of Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History, Catalog #2-967.

> In discovering whether a people possess the concept of art, what matters is not that they separate art from other important concerns but that they make items presenting humanly generated aesthetic properties which are essential to the main purposes served by those items.[23]

The problem is that if we only consider "aesthetic properties which are essential to the main purpose" of the item, we are not talking about art with a small 'a' anymore, because the purposes of a great portion of artworks with a small 'a' are primarily practical. Many songs, stories, vessels, books, wood carvings, and weapons with aesthetic properties beyond their practical level are included in this category. For example, many beautiful swords and suits of armour belonged to kings and other members of royalty. These items exhibit an amazingly beautiful and elegant execution of craftsmanship to reflect the high status of their owners. An example is the Duke of Wellington's sword, which is a beautiful and deadly weapon. These items are primarily designed to be practical. Being comfortable and allowing more mobility adds to the value and practicality of a suit of armour; having a good grip does the same for a sword. The makers of these items were able to combine all these practical qualities with aesthetic qualities such as being beautiful, elegant, and expressive. We find this praiseworthy and admirable. Producing practical objects that serve their practical purpose very well and are also beautiful and admirable has always been an important part of artistic activity with a small 'a'. Now, it seems undeniable that the primary purpose of a King's armour or sword is to protect his life on the battlefield, and that everything else is secondary to that. Similarly, the primary purpose of a beautiful basket woven of deer grass, sumac, and juncus by a Native American is often to hold things inside, and beauty does not play an 'essential' role in its 'primary identifying function'. Countless other examples like these can be found in various cultures and traditions. Nevertheless, according to Davies we have to exclude such items from the arts given that their primary purpose is practical rather than aesthetic.

My second point is that a definition of art with a small 'a' would be so broad that it hardly serves any purpose. I think Tolstoy has this concept in mind when he writes:

[23] Davies, Stephen, "Non-Western Art and Art's Definition", in *Philosophical Perspectives on Art*. Clarendon Press, (2007) p. 62.

> We are accustomed to understand art to be only what we hear and see in theatres, concerts, and exhibitions; together with buildings, statues, poems, novels.... But all this is but the smallest part of the art by which we communicate with each other in life. All human life is filled with works of art of every kind – from cradle-song, jest, mimicry, the ornamentation of houses, dress and utensils, up to church services, buildings, monuments, and triumphal processions. It is all artistic activity.[24]

This quote from Tolstoy brings us to a crucial point about the meaning of art and artistic activity. It is easy for us to consider a church congregation's singing as an artistic activity, but few of us would refer to these performances as works of art. Why is that? I do not have a definitive answer, but this conflict is related to my earlier point about the history of the concept of art. On the one hand, we have this idea of art as something extraordinary, and on the other hand, there is a sense of artistic activity that is ingrained in many of our ordinary, and usually collective, activities.

The following examples can be used to illustrate our contrasting feelings about art. My landlord is a middle-aged accountant who has been playing the drums for a couple of decades. He is a member of a rock band that practices a few times a week in his garage. Not surprisingly, they mostly cover the hit songs of the 1970s and 1980s, such as *Hotel California* by The Eagles or *The Winner Takes It All* by Abba. Should a definition of art include what is performed in that garage?

Now, consider pairs of dancers who practice Salsa or Tango twice a week in a local bar; many of them are good at what they do, and their performances are a joy to watch. Can we say that their performances qualify as artistic? Are they works of art? The answers to these questions depend on how they are framed. If we frame them so that they tap into our Romantic concept of art, the answer is no, but if they are framed so that they tap into our ordinary and usually collective understanding of artistic activity, the answer is yes.

Many philosophers of art try to include ordinary instances of art in their definitions. For example, Beardsley accepts that many "tawdry and negligible objects,"[25] including paintings

[24] Tolstoy, Leo. *What is art?*. Standard Ebooks, 2021. p. 60.
[25] Beardsley, Monroe. "An Aesthetic Definition of Art, What Is Art?" In Lamarque, Peter, and Stein Haugom Olsen, eds. John Wiley & Sons, 2018. p. 29.

by children, can be art if they are produced with aesthetic intentions. I assume his stance is the same about performances of music and acting that are not exhibited in a theatre hall. Also, bad artworks need to be accounted for by an adequate definition of art. As discussed in Chapter 5, many unsophisticated instances of fine arts, such as poorly executed dance, music, and painting, can easily find their way into the definitions of art proposed by Stecker and Davies.[26] The Museum of Bad Art (MOBA) in Boston is an interesting example.[27] According to its curators, it seeks "to celebrate the labor of artists whose work would be displayed and appreciated in no other forum."[28] These artworks include figurative paintings with flawed techniques and obvious attempts to avoid the difficulties of depicting body parts such as hands. On the one hand, it seems that an adequate and objective definition of art should include these instances, but on the other hand, many of us do not feel comfortable referring to them as works of art.

A crucial question, then, is: What purpose does an adequate definition of art with small 'a' serve? That is, why do we need a universal definition of art in this broad sense, one that covers all ordinary artistic activities as well as all instances of mediocre art? As we saw in the previous chapter, Lopes argues that nobody needs a definition of art. With the assumption that Lopes is not talking only about fine arts, I agree with him on this point. Sometimes philosophers raise concerns about the need for categorising artworks that seem irrelevant to the actual states of affairs. For example, Wilson expresses the need for the categorisation of art by writing: "If we are to examine non-Western cultures, how might we explain why their practices of carved figures are artistic, while their practices of canoe carving are not?"[29] I am not sure whether it will ever be necessary to give such an explanation in practice. Including a canoe or a figure under the category of a work of art does not add much to our knowledge about these objects; nor does it help us appreciate and understand them better. Expressing the problem in this way is putting the cart before the horse. It is in the light of other information and associations that we may categorise a wood carving as a work of art. One central piece of information about a carved figure that most people will instantly recognise is that it is a statue. A Westerner might then think of all the functions that statues could have in their

[26] They do not allow such an easy admission for other art forms such as embroidery or wood carving.
[27] These interesting collections can be seen online: http://museumofbadart.org/
[28] Frank, Michael, J. Sacco, Louise Reilly. *Museum of Bad Art: Masterworks.* Berkeley: Ten Speed Press. 2008. vii.
[29] Wilson, Daniel, *Artistic Value and Art's Definition*, The University of Auckland, 2015. p.1.

society, such as commemoration, ornamentation, advertisement, display of power, etc. In light of this information and associations, they might then find their way towards asking the right questions about a carved figure in a non-Western society and eventually reach a better understanding of the carved figure. This process does not seem to require a definition of statue, let alone a definition of art.

Similarly, it is difficult to think of a plausible reason why we need a tool to distinguish all those songs, dances, baskets, flower arrangements, paintings, enamel works, mosaics, stained glasses, rugs, stand-up comedies, tapestries, pillars, medallions, embroideries, jewellery, potteries, motion pictures, rappings, carvings, and so on, from other things. Nevertheless, philosophers of art have provided some clues as to why a definition of art is needed. In what follows, I will briefly introduce the concept of motivational adequacy, and then I will investigate some of the reasons philosophers of art provide for why a definition of art is required.

6.3. WHY DEFINE ART?

In a recent article, Justine Kingsbury and Jonathan McKeown-Green provide some criteria for the adequacy of a definition. According to them, extensional adequacy asks whether the definition is jointly necessary and sufficient regarding its extensions, and criterial adequacy asks if the definition identifies the essential properties of a kind. These two criteria are what I referred to, respectively, as extensional and intensional adequacies throughout this thesis. Kingsbury and McKeown-Green also enumerate a third adequacy, which they refer to as motivational adequacy, that asks whether it is reasonable to define this thing.[30] This adequacy points to a foundational belief that defining things should benefit us in some way.

Motivational adequacy is more open to interpretation than extensional and intensional adequacies. Unlike these two, motivational adequacy is not marked in logic books and has not been widely discussed in the philosophy of language or metaphysics. However, philosophers often talk about (or allude to) motivational adequacy in the course of discussing

[30] Kingsbury, Justine, and Jonathan McKeown-Green. "Definitions: Does disjunction mean dysfunction?." *The Journal of Philosophy* 106, no. 10 (2009): 568-585.

the definition of art. For instance, as mentioned earlier, Robert Stecker has written an article entitled "Is it reasonable to attempt to define art?"[31] Also, philosophers consider being informative as a condition of an adequate definition. As I see it, being informative is closely connected to motivational adequacy. Uninformative propositions can turn a philosophical debate into a pointless argument that serves no purpose.

As Kingsbury and McKeown-Green note, "Whether a definition is motivationally adequate depends on the role it plays in our categorizing or theorizing."[32] Therefore, it is safe to say that if a definition is informative enough to play a role in categorising things that we need to categorise, it is motivationally adequate. In what follows, I review two main reasons for defining art that are given by prominent philosophers engaged in this project.

6.3.1. DO WE NEED A DEFINITION OF ART FOR EMPIRICAL STUDIES?

There is a shared assumption among many philosophers who define art that a theory of art should facilitate empirical studies about art. As we saw in previous chapters, what aestheticians call a theory of art usually includes a definition of art. Lopes, Beardsley, Carroll and many aestheticians involved in defining art have stated the need for a theory of art as a precursor to empirical studies about art. It is reasonable to assume that for a theory of art to be relevant to other studies, it should have some ramifications in other fields, such as history, anthropology, and sociology. Beardsley, for example, maintains that a definition of art would be useful to philosophers of art, art critics, and historians of art because it clarifies the subject of their enquiry. He emphasises that anthropologists, in particular, need a definition because: "When we observe someone carving wood or moving about in a circle with others, we must ask whether the activity is religious, political, economic, medical, etc. – or artistic"[33]. Carroll takes the same path, claiming that economists need a concept of art that is clarified by

[31] Stecker, Robert. "Is It Reasonable to Attempt to Define Art?", in N. Carroll (ed.), *Theories of Art Today*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, (2000): 45–64.
[32] Ibid. p. 568
[33] Beardsley, Monroe. "An Aesthetic Definition of Art, What Is Art?" In Lamarque, Peter, and Stein Haugom Olsen, eds. John Wiley & Sons, 2018. p. 23.

philosophers in order to "know how to evaluate empirical claims" about art.[34] Although he does not explicitly say that they are specifically related to defining art, the following remarks reveal his assumption that identifying the extensions of art plays a central role in our art-related affairs:

> Thus, clarifying our concept of art is not merely a matter of dry, academic book-keeping. It lies at the living heart of our artistic practices, since categorizing candidates as artworks puts us in a position to mobilize a set of art responses that are the very stuff of our activities as viewers, listeners and readers.[35]

I agree that a definition or a theory of art needs some application in other fields to be useful and not a matter of "dry, academic bookkeeping". However, I am not convinced that empirical studies are actually in need of a definition of art or an identifying method. Philosophers such as Beardsley and Carroll seem to presuppose the second claim without providing convincing arguments. I agree with Lopes when he writes: "... empirical art studies do not concern a category made up of all and only artworks, so a buck stopping theory of art is not needed to underpin research outside philosophy."[36] This line of reasoning is not new and has been stated before by anti-essentialists. Kinnick, a radical anti-essentialist, puts it as follows: "Only a man corrupted by aesthetics would think of judging a work of art as a work of art in general, as opposed to as this poem, that picture, or this symphony."[37]

I do not deny that aesthetics and philosophy of art have affected other fields of enquiry. However, I am not convinced that this influence is connected to the project of defining art. As explained in Chapter 1, there is a difference between a theory of art and a definition of art, and using these interchangeably has been the source of some theoretical inaccuracy. I explained that a theory of art should provide insight into and information about the production or appreciation of artworks, but that it can do so without also providing a way to identify them. In contrast, definitions of art usually focus on identifying/categorising artworks, and if they include any insights or information about artworks, these are secondary in importance to extensional adequacy. In the early stages of the 20th century project of

[34] Carroll, Noël. *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*. Routledge, 1999. p.6.
[35] Ibid. pp. 6-7
[36] Lopes, Dominic. *Beyond Art*. Oxford University Press, 2014., p.65.
[37] Kennick, William E. "Does traditional aesthetics rest on a mistake?." *Mind* 67, no. 267 (1958): 317-334. p. 329.

defining art, the view was that if a definition is extensionally and intensionally adequate, it will automatically result in valuable insights about artworks because it unveils the nature of art. As we observed, this ideal remains unfulfilled. Recent approaches to defining art, such as the disjunctive approach, do not even aspire to be essence-revealing or, as a logician might say, intensionally adequate.

I propose that whatever insights definitions of art can offer for empirical fields of study such as anthropology or economics can also be gained from a non-definitional approach in terms of a theory of art or of art forms, such as painting, music, and so on. After losing hope in the possibility of achieving intensional adequacy, the main function of a definition of art is to be informative enough to be used as a tool for the identification of artworks. Everything else that a definition of art might offer can be achieved without defining art. Unlike a definition, theories of art usually require a close examination of the history of art forms such as painting or music, and can be limited to specific periods, such The Late Middle Ages, and the like. Furthermore, these theories need to include or be based on technical knowledge about the processes that the relevant art forms employ to succeed in accomplishing their aims during a specific period.

In the next section, I consider a view put forward by some who support the project of defining art, namely that we need a definition of art in order to settle legal disputes about art.

6.3.2. DO WE NEED A DEFINITION OF ART FOR LEGAL DISPUTES?

Philosophers often refer to legal disagreement about works of art to highlight that the term ‘art’ is not self-evident or straightforward and that it needs to be analysed and clarified by providing a suitable definition. In the following, I consider a few of the concerns expressed by aestheticians and investigate some of their claims. In doing so, I use a real example of a legal definition of visual artwork.

As with many problems in the philosophy of art, Beardsley is among the first to mention the importance of defining art from a legal perspective. He writes: “Even the practical legislator or administrator may have use for a definition, in deciding, for

example, which imported objects to exempt from duties, or which allegedly artistic projects should be funded by the National Endowment for the Arts"[38] Carroll expresses a similar view:

> Without some sense of how to classify certain objects and performances as artworks, the Museum of Modern Art wouldn't know what to collect, the National Endowment for the Arts wouldn't know to whom to give money, nor would the United States government know which institutions deserve tax relief for the preservation of our artistic past.[39]

In order to emphasise the importance of defining art, Wilson similarly mentions a legal dispute in the European Commission about customs duties related to certain art installations by Dan Flavin and Bill Viola in 2010.[40] There is no shortage of examples like these that aim to show the importance of defining and identifying art. I do not deny that lawmakers need definitions to have guidelines in settling disagreements about issues such as copyrights. However, I do not believe that any of these disputes call for a definition of art with a small 'a'.

To have a better understanding of actual legal situations surrounding artworks it is useful to consider a legal definition of art. The following is a definition of visual art provided by The Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990 (VARA) under section 101 of The United States Copyright:

> A 'work of visual art' is —
>
> (1) a painting, drawing, print or sculpture, existing in a single copy, in a limited edition of 200 copies or fewer that are signed and consecutively numbered by the author, or, in the case of a sculpture, in multiple cast, carved, or fabricated sculptures of 200 or fewer that are consecutively numbered by the author and bear the signature or other identifying mark of the author; or

[38] Beardsley, Monroe. "An Aesthetic Definition of Art, What Is Art?" In Lamarque, Peter, and Stein Haugom Olsen, eds. *Aesthetics and the philosophy of art: the analytic tradition, an anthology*. John Wiley & Sons, 2018. p. 23.
[39] Carroll, Noël. *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*. Routledge, 1999. pp.5-6.
[40] Wilson, Daniel. *Artistic Value and Art's Definition*, The University of Auckland, 2015. p.1.

(2) a still photographic image produced for exhibition purposes only, existing in a single copy that is signed by the author, or in a limited edition of 200 copies or fewer that are signed and consecutively numbered by the author.

A work of visual art does not include —

(A) (i) any poster, map, globe, chart, technical drawing, diagram, model, applied art, motion picture or other audiovisual work, book, magazine, newspaper, periodical, data base, electronic information service, electronic publication, or similar publication;

(ii) any merchandising item or advertising, promotional, descriptive, covering, or packaging material or container;

(iii) any portion or part of any item described in clause (i) or (ii);

(B) any work made for hire; or

(C) any work not subject to copyright protection under this title.[41]

The definition given by VARA is too long to quote here in its entirety, and as is the case with legal acts, it contains many other definitions, such as definitions of joint work, literary work, audiovisual work, performance, architectural work, sound recordings, international agreement, and so on. Furthermore, VARA is only one of the laws that are relevant to works of art, and other laws can complement it for further clarification.

The first thing about this definition that captures my attention is that it defines a work of visual art by referring to different mediums such as sculpture, painting, drawing, print, and photographic image. However, contrary to what philosophers like Lopes propose, VARA does not provide further definitions of individual art forms like drawing, painting, and printing but rather considers these terms to be self-explanatory.

This legal definition has a clear aim: to be used as a reference in protecting the copyright of visual artists. The conditions of this law do not take note of what a philosopher might call the essence or even the extension of all visual artworks. This is evident from the part where VARA excludes motion pictures or other audiovisual works; or when it considers

[41] Code, U. S. "Title 17–Copyrights." *Legal Information Institute. Cornell Law School. 17 U.S.C. § 101 - U.S. Code - Unannotated Title 17. Copyrights § 101. Definitions*.

the number 200 as a decisive point in its application. Motion pictures are part of visual arts, and of course, if a work of visual art has 201 copies, it is still a work of visual art. However, VARA would not apply to any of these examples. This comes from the authoritative and institutional nature of laws. VARA is a stipulative definition. It is not a problem for a legal definition to have ad hoc peculiarities like these, because laws are proposed and passed with reference to considerations that go beyond the general philosophical definitions of art.

Legal definitions have purposes and objectives that are not necessarily in tandem with intensional and extensional adequacy. The idea that lawmakers need a philosophical definition of art to carry on with their business contrasts with the real state of affairs because philosophical definitions are insufficiently informative to play a role in legal disputes. This should not be surprising, as a definition of art with a small 'a' has to be so broad and general that it loses applicability in concrete situations. It would be great if philosophers could propose a definition of art that was informative enough to settle legal disagreements about art. However, by considering the vast extent of artworks, when we consider the philosophical definitions of art that we have investigated in this thesis, it seems highly unlikely that they can result in a reference point for legal disputes. Therefore, appealing to legal disputes to justify the motivational adequacy of a definition of art remains unjustified.

It might be objected that even if the definitions of art proposed by philosophers do not play a categorising role in legal disputes, in the long run, philosophical theories of art can influence laws such as VARA. I concede that philosophical literature can and should influence other fields of enquiry. It is plausible that art theories may affect laws. Philosophical discussions about the concept of art can have ramifications and implications worthy of attention in other enquiries. However, this does not indicate or support the motivational adequacy of a definition of art. Again, I propose that whatever insight a definition of art can have for influencing laws can be stated in a non-definitional theory of art. Unlike a definition, a theory does not need to be intensionally or extensionally adequate.

6.4. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

6.4.1. CHAPTER 1.

6.4.1.1. Definitions have a complicated and long history in the philosophical tradition, and our understanding of them is heavily affected by Aristotle's discussion of definition and essence. An informative definition can be judged according to different adequacies; however, extensional adequacy seems non-negotiable for most philosophers. Accordingly, the main goal of a definition of art is to distinguish between art and non-art.

6.4.1.2. A definition of art and a theory of or about art are not necessarily the same thing. The main purpose of a definition of art is to identify artworks. However, the main purpose of a theory about artworks is, I proposed, to explain the processes of production and appreciation of some artworks. Unlike a definition, a theory is usually focused on some portion of artworks, such as modern dance or photography, and need not be inclusive of all artworks.

6.4.2. CHAPTER 2

6.4.2.1. Anti-essentialism is misunderstood and unfairly criticised by philosophers of art. Radical anti-essentialists hold that (1) art has no essence and (2) a definition of art is not required to identify art. Neither Wittgenstein nor anti-essentialists like Weitz or Kennick felt the need to identify the extension of artworks by philosophical means. They did not propose family resemblance as a method to identify artworks.

6.4.2.2. Extensionally adequate definitions can be spelled out for essence-less entities as long as their contingent historical boundaries are acknowledged. If art or 'an artwork' is an essence-less entity, an extensional definition of this term needs historical clarification and contextualisation.

6.4.3. CHAPTER 3

The procedural definitions put forward by Danto and Dickie are reactions to radical anti-essentialism and aim at discovering the essence of art. Their definitions fall short of being informative mainly because they depend on the idea of the Artworld without adequately explaining what Artworlds are. They are both vulnerable to counterexamples; however, Dickie admits that his definitions are not intended to be extensionally adequate and,

therefore, cannot be used to identify artworks. Dickie's change of position with regard to extensional adequacy comes from the circularity that is more evident in his latter definition.

6.4.4. CHAPTER 4

6.4.4.1. Levinson aspires to reveal the essence of art with his historical definition. He focuses on the intentions of artists and presupposes the idea of the Artworld. His historical definition relies on the idea of 'correct ways or modes of artmaking' but does not explain how are we supposed to identify these 'ways' or 'modes'. As a result, the definition remains uninformative and extensionally inadequate, like institutional definitions of art. Apart from being uninformative, Levinson's definition has difficulty explaining the emergence of the first artworks and can be criticised as being too inclusive.

6.4.4.2. Carroll focuses on extensional adequacy while being agnostic about the essence of art. His proposal about identifying narratives and his claims about avant-garde art being the propeller of the project of defining art are plausible. His explanation relies on the objectivity of historical narratives which he justifies with plausible arguments.

6.4.5. CHAPTER 5

6.4.5.1. Both cluster accounts and disjunctive definitions deny that art has an essence. Therefore, they do not aspire to be intensionally adequate. Gaut's cluster account seems plausible, provided Gaut does not claim that his account is extensionally adequate.

6.4.5.2. Similar to Levinson's historical definition and Carroll's identifying method, Stecker's disjunctive definition depends on Dickie's institutional theory of art. Notions such as standard art forms and artistic functions remain unexplained in Stecker's historical functionalism. Davies' account is more informative than Stecker's because it considers the evolutionary origins of artistic activity. However, it suffers from the same theoretical problems which result in it being uninformative.

6.4.5.3. Lopes' suggestion that we should define art forms instead of art remains unfruitful for three main reasons. First, an extensionally adequate definition of an art form like painting should distinguish between paintings that are artworks and paintings that are not. Second, there is no consensus about what the art forms are. If we need a definition to determine what

is an artwork, we will need a similar definition to determine what is an art form. Third, practical artworks such as the Duke of Wellington's sword remain unexplained by Lopes' account.

6.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have argued that none of the definitions investigated in this thesis are informative enough to identify examples of art with a small 'a'. In addition, I argued that such a definition is unnecessary in other fields that have something to say about art, such as law, history, anthropology, and so on. Dismissing the project might seem inappropriate because philosophers have spent a great deal of effort in defining art. Considering the big picture, one might ask why they remain intent on defining art, or on critiquing definitions of art by introducing counterexamples, if any definition will be ineffectual and practically useless. I do not have a clear answer to this question, but I should mention that there has been a considerable reduction in interest in the project of defining art. During the second half of the 20th century, the two topics in aesthetics with the largest number of publications are defining art and interpreting art, with a discernable decline in interest in both these topics in recent years. However, many philosophers still publish on definitions of art.[42]

It is not unusual for philosophers to discuss a subject and then, after years of debate and disagreement, arrive at a roughly general agreement to abandon the question. This might happen for various reasons: for example, the question itself can be problematic because it rests on assumptions that are not feasible; or the subject of the question may be too broad to be formulated as a single problem in a single question; or it may be the case that other disciplines can provide better answers to that question. For example, questions such as 'What is change and how does it happen?' were central in ancient philosophy, but they no longer attract much attention from philosophers. The main reason for this is that sciences such as chemistry and physics provide explanations for change that outrun philosophical investigations. I suspect questions such as 'What is knowledge?' and 'What is the soul?' are also among the ones that most contemporary philosophers avoid because of the history and

[42] For some recent examples see Wilson, Daniel. "The Japanese tea ceremony and pancultural definitions of art." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76, no. 1 (2018): 33-44, in which he introduces a counterexample to a disjunctive definition; Hazelwood, Caleb. "Practice-centered pluralism and a disjunctive theory of art." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 61, no. 2 (2021): 213-227, for a defense of a disjunctive definition of art.

background of these questions in philosophical debates. Fortunately, these instances do not create an awkward situation for philosophers, as the freedom to question any subject is a non-negotiable in philosophical practice. Even today, it is perfectly acceptable for a philosopher to re-examine the above mentioned questions and spark new discussions about them. Therefore, one reason that philosophers have engaged with the question of 'What is art?', despite the indications that an answer does not have much merit, could be the natural inclination of philosophers for reiteration and re-examination of given answers to an existing question.

Finally, on a more cynical note, another factor that I suspect has a role in prolonging such debates is the measurement of academic achievement by the number of publications. With the increasing number of graduates, developing an academic career has become strongly dependent on the number of publications in peer-reviewed journals. The more publications and citations, the better the chances are for academic recognition. Therefore, it should not surprise us that, like other academics, philosophers prefer to prolong a discussion as long as they can receive responses and citations from their colleagues. Some people might think of philosophers as driven solely by reason and with an unstoppable appetite for objectively analysing the plains of understanding. However, like the Romantic image of the artist, this image of the philosopher is somewhat idealistic, perhaps even fictional.

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