

THE LOGIC OF THE CONCEPT OF ART

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## CHAPTER I

This thesis is concerned with a central problem of traditional aesthetics, for in it we try to say once again what Art is. We approach the question, however, with the aid of the methodological insights that have come from what is variously called Anglo-American Philosophy, Ordinary Language Philosophy, Linguistic Philosophy and Linguistic Analysis. It is our purpose, that is, to elucidate the concept of art, and to arrive at a philosophical description of the logic of that concept. More specifically, we attempt to reveal the rules that structure those activities, verbal and non-verbal, by means of which we denote art. The first two chapters are concerned with some preliminary methodological clarifications, first of the relationship of this thesis to the history of aesthetics, and secondly of our technical use of the term "concept". In the subsequent chapters, we turn our attention to the problem of discerning just how it is that we do refer to art.

The traditional approach to the question, "What is Art?" has been by way of an attempt to develop a definition or theory of Art. Conclusions in aesthetics have eventually boiled down to purportedly informative and true statements of the form, "Art is X", where "X" has been replaced by locutions of various kinds, ranging from putative formulations of the essence of Art to statements of

what are claimed to be the necessary and sufficient conditions for a thing's being or being recognized as a work of art. In this thesis, we are not concerned to raise difficulties for individual definitions or groups of definitions of Art; rather, we are interested in certain assumptions implicit in the definitional approach, assumptions which we do not share. Because they have played such a large rôle in the history of aesthetics--and analogous ones in the history of philosophy in general--it is important that we make clear precisely how the assumptions of our predecessors differ from our own. The first two chapters, then, lay the groundwork for conclusions different in nature from those of a traditional Aesthetic.

One of the assumptions of the aesthetic theorists is that their definitions are informative, and hence true or false. They are, moreover, true or false statements about the world; aesthetic theorists attempt to define Art, not "art", the word in English. Thus when they say, "Art is X", they are not to be interpreted as citing a linguistic or conceptual fact. An aesthetic definition, then, in some sense is purported to report a fact about the world. Now, such a fact is a somewhat strange fact in that it must be assumed by the theorist that the world could not have been otherwise. It is clear, I think, that the aesthetic theorist could not allow that there are even conceptually possible counterexamples to his definition of Art. If it were possible to conceive of a work of art that did not have the property or properties the aesthetic theorist has claimed are definitive of Art, then he would not be able to claim that he had discovered just what it is that makes

a thing a work of art. To put it succinctly, the "is" of the aesthetic definition is the atemporal "is", meaning "was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be".

In turn, it follows that "Art" is taken by the aesthetic theorist to designate an atemporal metaphysical object--a grade of Spirit, or an essential property shared by all works of art, or a class or set of objects which has certain necessary and sufficient conditions. This assumption is sometimes made to appear more acceptable by the capitalization of "Art", which suggests that the word is being used as a proper name for an object. Even if the theorist says that he is not defining Art, but the word "art", if his approach is by means of a rational reconstruction of language, then the semantics to which he is committed dictate that "art" designates art, a class or set of objects, and in this kind of context, with its claims to informativeness, a class or set is just as much a metaphysical entity as is a grade of Spirit. It is because of this shared basis that the aesthetic theories as diverse as Croce's intuitionism and Charles Morris' semiotic approach to aesthetics<sup>1</sup> can be grouped as a common theoretical or definitional approach.

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Implicit in the definitional approach is the idea of the mind somehow being "over against" reality, and essentially isolated from other minds. The task of the philosopher is to capture the nature of the projection of reality onto the "screen" of his mind, whether the projection be a block of colour (an intuited essence) or a latticework (a logical structure that can be imitated or "pictured" by a formal language), and to communicate this definition by instituting in the mind of the reader or listener either a patch of the same colour or a structure isomorphic to his own. As will be seen in the next chapter, we reject this kind of assumption.

The assumption of the metaphysical objectivity of Art is a methodological assumption. It is not something that the aesthetic theorist discovers about Art; rather, it is brought to aesthetics a priori. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with a priori commitments in aesthetics. We all approach aesthetics with certain pre-dispositions. Although the choice of a methodology seems to be based on something like what Aristotle calls "intuitive reason", the grasping of what seem to be obvious first principles without demonstration, it does not follow that we can not have good reasons for preferring one methodology over another. We can not prove, in any strong sense of the word, the correctness or validity of a methodology, but we can argue pragmatically that our methodological commitments are more adequate than others in terms of their ability to deal clearly and comprehensively with the data we must take into account. We can challenge alternative methodological commitments in two general ways. The strongest challenge is a demonstration of a logical contradiction among the key concepts or one that they entail when the methodology is used in a particular area, that is, in the application of the key concepts. In the latter case, we have not necessarily disproven the usefulness of the methodology in all areas of philosophy, although we have successfully challenged any claim its proponents might make as to its universal fruitfulness and applicability. Not so strong, but often quite forceful, is a challenge based on a demonstration of the lack of comprehensiveness of the method. What we do is make observations of what actually happens in the world, and see which methodology has the most adequate resources for giving an account of all the



relevant observations. If a philosopher can not "make possible" what is actual, then surely he is wrong. Frequently, too, the attempt to extend a methodological line to take care of "recalcitrant phenomena" leads to the contradiction we are seeking.

This is not the place to go into all the difficulties an Ordinary Language Philosopher could raise against a definitional approach in aesthetics. We will, however, cite one such difficulty, partly as an example of the kind of challenge we have in mind, and partly because the argument that follows clearly indicates an important distinction between factual and conceptual problems.

When the philosopher asks, "What is Art?", he does not expect the same kind of response as does a child who asks the same question. The child has perhaps just come across the word "art", or has heard it used several times and does not know what it means since he does not know what art is. Since he has not the resources to answer his question, he wants information. We cannot give him all the information we have about art; that would make him impatient. What we try to do instead is to indicate some typical examples of art that he can use as a basis for increasing his own understanding.

The philosopher, on the other hand, already has such information, and much more besides. His question is not a "discovery" or factual question, but a conceptual one. This is an important dis-

inction. The inadequacies of aesthetic theorists and the quarrels between them would seem to indicate that the human race, or at least that part of it that writes philosophically about art, has very little idea of what art is. But when the aesthetic theorist prefaces his Aesthetic with the question, "What is Art?", he already knows what art is. Otherwise he would not be able to even start to answer his own question. Any suggestion on his part that he is trying to discover what Art is, that he is approaching the problem as open-mindedly as a child, without presuppositions, preconceptions or pre-conditioning, is nothing but a rhetorical pretense, a stylistic ruse. We are not saying that there is no great problem facing the philosopher of art. There is, but it is not the factual problem of the child, trying to see what art is. Kennick<sup>3</sup> captures the aesthetic philosopher's difficulty accurately when he compares him to St. Augustine faced with the question, "What is Time?" Both can say, "If I am not asked, I know; if I am asked, I know not." Kennick goes on to say:

there is neither anything mysterious nor anything complicated about works of art which makes the task of answering the question, "What is Art?" so difficult. Like St. Augustine with Time, we do know quite well what Art is; it is only when someone asks us that we do not know. The trouble lies not in the works of art themselves but in the concept of art.

The task is not to see what art is, but to say what art is.

While this observation of Kennick's does not refute the definitional approach in aesthetics, it does pose problems for it.

<sup>3</sup>  
 "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?", Mind, LXVII (1958), p. 320.

It is very difficult to see how the aesthetic theorist can avoid the implication of this observation, that the kind of information he can give about art, which he formulates into a definition, is to a large extent dependent on such factors as the time he is writing, his education and exposure to art, etc. In other words, his claim to be able to define Art for all time will have to be investigated again with more attention to the limitations that are implicit in such an endeavour. In what follows, we concentrate on the limitations imposed by the fact that art changes.

We thus question the theorist's assumption that "Art" designates one object, an atemporal metaphysical object. In fact, we question that assumption at great length in the rest of this thesis. But it must be made clear from the beginning what the basis of this challenge is. When we claim that the denotative logic of the concept of art (a phrase whose meaning is spelled out below) is best elucidated by means of an "open-texture" model, we are denying that a definition of art is possible. We are not making this claim on the basis that we can better see what art is; we are sure that there are many aesthetic theorists who have far more insight into art than we do. But, we are equally sure that by explicating the concept of art as an open textured concept, we can far better say what art is--that is, we can give a clearer, more comprehensive and coherent account of what actually happens when men deal with art than would follow from any definitional approach. To make this claim, however, is to imply that it is not necessary that aesthetics be definitional or theoretical, that is, that there are methodological alternatives to informatively

defining art. We thus treat the idea of informative definition differently from the way the theorist treats it. The theorist, as we pointed out above, is committed a priori to informative definitions; for him their cogency is an obvious methodological assumption. For us, however, informative definitions are just one of a number of alternative models for the explication of denotative concepts. Other available models include various kinds of family resemblance models and systematically equivocal models. A definitional model is not here ruled in or out on a priori grounds. Rather, we argue that a definition of art is impossible because the theoretical aesthetician is barred, in principle, from giving such a definition, and that the two thousand years of failure of theoretical aesthetics comes from the failure to recognize the importance for aesthetics of the nature of change in the concept of art. In other words, what underlies our challenge to theory in aesthetics is a methodological shift that treats as a posteriori an issue on which for the theorist there is no debate. We in turn have our own a priori commitments, contained primarily in the next chapter; the proof of our pudding, too, lies in the eating of it--that is, in the use to which it can be put.

Summary In order to clarify in a preliminary way our relationship to the history of aesthetics, we have examined some of the methodological assumptions of traditional aesthetic theorists. Since we do not share these assumptions, we have tried to clarify the basis on which a methodological shift can be evaluated, with special reference to aesthetics. That basis is a pragmatic one: a particular kind of

success is the criterion of excellence of a method. We have then contrasted our attitude to informative definitions with that of the traditional theorist. The next subject for preliminary clarification is our technical use of the term "concept".

## CHAPTER II

One of the terms that is used repeatedly in what follows is "concept". It is a term that has received much currency lately, and because it has so many philosophical connotations, it is extremely important to be very clear about how it is being used. In this chapter we deal with four issues to indicate the nature of our concept of a concept.

For the purposes of this thesis, concepts are not to be thought of as mental entities. Rather, they are to be thought of as the groups of rules that structure systematic contexts of human<sup>4</sup>activity. In some of the contexts that reveal the use of concepts, the activity of only one person is involved, and there is a temptation to treat the concept involved as a mental entity, as "his" concept. But since the context which involves only one person is in principle repeatable, either involving the same person or other persons--

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<sup>4</sup> I see no reason why a general account of concepts would have to restrict the notion to contexts of specifically human activity; systematic animal behaviour also reveals the use of concepts, although plant and non-organic activity does not. Some kinds of human concepts, however, are essentially different from the kinds of concepts shared by humans and animals since some human activities, including most of what we would normally call "thinking", have properties that shared kinds of concepts do not have. The restriction of the notion of concept in this thesis to human activity is thus somewhat arbitrary; based on what seems prime facie to be true, that only human beings, and not animals, have a concept of art, the restriction is made for the sake of an easier exposition of how we will use "concept" in the phrase "concept of art".

otherwise there would be no possibility of a system of contexts, and hence no concept--mental entities locutions leave a residue of insoluble problems because of the inability of such locutions to supply the resources for an adequate description of, in the first case, memory, and in the second, community of activity. Furthermore, such systems of contexts are a special case. Many, if not most of the systems of contexts that embody concepts can be fully described only with reference to more than one person. Of special note here is the concept of linguistic activity. The use of mental entities locutions in the description of these latter kinds of systems of contexts would give rise to the theoretical difficulties of solipsism and the dangers of an Idealistic reductionism. This threat of philosophical nonsense can be avoided by recognizing that our starting point is in media res and demands the affirmation of the cogency of interpersonal locutions for the description of concepts. In other words, locutions which imply that more than I myself exist are from the beginning assumed to need no independent justification. The acceptance of the interpersonal nature of concepts means that we are not Cartesians.

The first thing to keep in mind, then, is that concepts are interpersonal, although individual persons use them. The next thing we need to clarify is what we mean by saying that when we describe a concept, we are describing groups of rules that structure systematic contexts of human activity. The statement that such-and-such is a concept-rule is an empirical generalization based on the observation of human activity. When we say, for example, that the concept of art has an open texture, we are saying that an empirical examination of

the contexts in which we denote art has revealed that this activity has certain logical or formal features which we call its "open texture", a phrase whose meaning is explained below. In other words, the use of "rule" in this context is similar to the use of "law" in the phrase "scientific law", and not to the use of "law" as a rough synonym for "statute" (cf. "by-law"). There are three reasons, however, for not saying that concepts are groups of scientific laws.

In the first place, scientific laws form sets that give necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of such and such phenomena. Not all of the groups of rules that make up concepts, however, are sets. In some of the systems of contexts we examine, we find only necessary, or only sufficient conditions for the activities we describe. In still others, we find activities that, while rule-governed, are not condition-governed in the above sense at all. That is to say, some systems of contexts reveal kinds of regularities that definitional--i.e. necessary and sufficient conditions--locutions do not have the resources adequately to describe. Thus, groups of scientific laws do not have the degree of logical flexibility that groups of rules have.

Secondly, the only kind of context in which scientific laws are found is a descriptive context. Objects pay no attention to the law of gravity; they just fall. But we not only describe concepts, we also use them; it does not just happen that we behave in certain systematic ways. But the use of a concept by a person does not necessarily mean that there was a conscious awareness on his part of either the concept or of his use; most frequently we employ rules



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automatically, habitually, or, to use Wittgenstein's word, blindly.

We use a particular word or perform a particular act because it is obviously and unreflectively the correct thing to do there and then. However, and this is crucial, we could be wrong, we could be mistaken in our attempt to use the rules, while a stone can never be wrong in falling. Rules can be broken, but scientific laws, if they are correctly given, can not.

The third reason for refusing to call concepts groups of scientific laws, closely related to the second, is that scientific laws should never be treated as if they have any prescriptive or teleological force, whereas concept-rules are so treated when we are attempting to teach the rules of a concept or to correct a mistaken use. We say that the rules tell us or make us do this rather than that, to use "picture" when referring to some paintings, and never when referring to books (very roughly). One goal of teaching and learning the rules, which is the basis of the prescriptive force we give them, is correct speech, which means speech by means of which we can communicate with others.

For these three reasons, then, that the groups of rules that make up concepts are not all sets, that concept-rules are used, and can be used mistakenly, and that concept-rules can be taught, we distinguish between the generalizations that are the result of the observation of conceptual activity and those that result from the

the observation of non-conceptual activity.

A third point about our use of "concept" is that it would be misleading to say that concepts are applied to objects. To say that is to suggest again that concepts are mental entities, and that the mind is "over against" reality. Rather, concepts are used to deal with reality in various ways, and the part of reality a concept is used to deal with is its subject matter or data. Denotative concepts (eg. colour concepts) and the denotative parts of more complex concepts reveal constitutive interactions between either individual minds or groups of minds and a pluralistic universe that lends itself to many different kinds of departmental organization. What I have in mind is something like this. We can constitute or organize reality into many different kinds of objects. There are, of course, ordinary objects like tables and chairs and pens and balls of wax. But we can also see the world in terms of physical objects (forces and stresses, bits of matter in measurable motion, etc.), chemical objects (molecules, co-valent bonds, etc.), economic objects (demands, upward pressures on prices, etc.), sociological objects (classes, etc.), political objects (parties, mandates, etc.), psychological objects (conditioned responses, neuroses, etc.), philosophical objects (volitions, percepts, work of art, aesthetic experience etc.), and in terms of many other kinds of objects. Some ways of seeing things are more successful than others, depending on our interests. The material out of which we constitute an account of reality in terms of a conceptual scheme does not come out of nothing (solipsism); nor does it all come out of the same thing (reductionism). It comes out of other relatively

unconstituted material which is the relative data. The subject matter  
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 for any concept is always only relatively unconstituted.

Now, we deal with reality by means of habitual responses to relevantly similar situations. Habits are established in virtue of the wants and needs of a person or group of persons living in a complex environment. We have many such conditioned interests--wants and needs teleologically related to objects--which we seek to satisfy. The interest in survival is almost universal in man; the interest in enjoying Picasso is far less wide-spread. The continued and unquestioned use of a concept is prime facie evidence that the habitual activity it is based on is efficacious for dealing with reality to the satisfaction of certain interests. For this reason, word usage, for example, does not need a philosophical justification in terms of a prior theory of language; the fact that a word is used--not just once, by one person, of course--is sufficient justification for its correctness, even if it is used irrationally. Inconsistent usage is bad usage from a certain point of view, but is not necessarily incorrect usage. Over time the inconvenience of illogical usage in rational contexts--its

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Although this all sounds very Kantian, two major differences between this and Kant's conceptualism are: here, there are no sense impressions, nor are there any analogues of sense impressions in some kind of absolutely simple, given data; secondly, there are no analogues for the Kantian Categories, that is, there are no metaphysically privileged concepts. It might be argued that our position on concepts implies a phenomenon-noumenon distinction; that may be so, but if it ~~is~~ <sup>does</sup>, it is based on the contingent fact that so far the human race has only used a small portion of the possible modes of organization of reality. A third difference is that Kant's conceptualism is good only for knowledge by acquaintance, that is, for knowledge of objects, whereas for us denotative concepts are only one kind of concept.

inability to foster clear communication--tends to break it down. In the meantime, all we can do is point out the inadequacies of certain usages and recommend clearer ones.

There is one conditioned interest in man that gets us out of the determinism that seems to follow from the above paragraph. Sometimes our rules are inadequate for dealing with what we have an interest in dealing with; it is not obvious what is the correct thing to do or say; our habitual patterns of activity fail to supply the expected satisfaction. In such cases the human demand for understanding--a combination of curiosity and frustration--is activated. The rules we know do not work, so we look for new ones to replace them. The search for understanding is thus radically destructive of selected habits. As individuals and in groups we break down our conditioning and re-condition ourselves or allow ourselves to be re-conditioned to have new habits, new rules, that is, new concepts. Personal conditioning can break down in no time at all, although we can be "pig-headed"; group conditioning crumbles more slowly; linguistic conditioning has great inertia. Certain kinds of cultural conditioning survive for millenia; witness the continued appeal of the Homeric poems; but if our cultural interests changed, there is no reason to suppose that they must continue to appeal.

Fourthly, there might be some question about what constitutes a system of contexts of human activity. By what criterion, it may be asked, do we pick out this group of regularities and not that as a basis for a description of a concept. With specific reference to what follows in this thesis, it might be asked by what criterion we

distinguish between what we call the "aesthetic form of life", a group of activities rule-governed by the concept of art and related concepts and sub-concepts, and other forms of life.<sup>7</sup> In reply to this question, it must first be pointed out that the clear statement of such a criterion would be the result of our and many other similar researches into how in fact aesthetic concepts are used, and not a starting point for these researches. Since we are concerned only with a small part of one aesthetic concept--that is, with the denotative part of the concept of art--it is not within the scope of this thesis to arrive at a clear statement of such a criterion. Short of that, and in the meantime, our procedure is justified on the following grounds. We noted above that the use of a concept does not necessarily imply a conscious awareness by the user either of the concept (the rules he is using) or of his use of the rules. A point closely related to this is that an ability to use a concept does not imply the ability to describe the concept at all clearly. To be able to do the latter requires study of how the as yet undescribed concept is in fact used. Now, I know how to use the concept of art in a great many contexts, which is not claimed to be any great achievement. Learning how to speak English was one of the many ways by which I came to accomplish this. I know that I use the concept correctly because when I interact with art in the presence of others, I do not get quizzical looks and

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. W.B. Gallie, "Art as an Essentially Contested Concept", The Philosophical Quarterly, VI, 1956, p. 101; note that Gallie seems to mean "definition" where he uses "concept".

objections to my activities, I do not get irrelevant and incomprehensible answers to my questions; in other words, my activities are understood and acceptable. I thus already know what the criterion is, even though I am not able to say what it is. I can not state it, not because it is unstatable, but because I have not yet clearly discerned what it is I and others are doing in the aesthetic form of life. Thus the demand for a criterion, clearly stated at this point, is based on a misunderstanding of the empirical nature of these investigations.

Summary In summary, then, four main points have been investigated in order to clarify how the term "concept" is used in this thesis. First, concepts are not to be thought of as mental entities; they are interpersonal groups of rules that structure systematic contexts of human activity. Secondly, the observation and description of concepts has some similarities to the search for scientific laws; there are, however, certain crucial differences between concept-rules and scientific laws, the examination of which gave us a criterion for distinguishing conceptual from non-conceptual contexts. In the third place, conceptual activity is for the most part conditioned or habitual interaction with reality, the main exception to this last being those activities we call the search for understanding. Finally, we pointed out that when we can correctly use a concept, we sometimes cannot say what correct usage is, and that aesthetic criteria and absolutely general aesthetic distinctions are properly conclusions, and not the starting point, of philosophical investigation of art.

### CHAPTER III

As we have indicated above, we do not intend to give a complete explication of the concept of art in this thesis. To do that would involve an explication of all those systems of contexts in which we deal with art, a very large task indeed. Here we are concerned with one small but important part of the concept of art, that is, with the denotative part of the concept. More concretely, we will try to elucidate the logic of those systems of contexts in which we refer to a work of art in general, in which we indicate or denote works of art or art in general, in which we make it clear that we consider an object to be a work of art. This is how the traditional question, "What is Art?" becomes reinterpreted with our methodological commitments. This chapter is intended to lay some of the groundwork for our later examination of that question.

The first thing we note about how we denote art is the we very seldom say of an object, "X is a work of art". "It is a work of art" would seem almost never to be an answer to a "What is it?" question. Only when we have a rather special set of circumstances in which it is understood that "What is it?" means "Is it a work of art or of handicraft?", ". . . or of propaganda?", ". . . or of history?", ". . . or a forgery?", ". . . or garbage?", or some such alternation would we say, "It is a work of art". But even though this particular locution is seldom used, we do have a host of ways of indicating that we are dealing with reality in aesthetic terms--that is, that we are using

the concept of art to deal with an object or group of objects. When<sup>8</sup> we treat something as a work of art, we are "saying" that it is art, even though we may not say it out loud, or even verbally. Hence there are many activities that must be taken into account in an explication of the logic of the denotative part of the concept of art, some of which are aesthetic denotations, and in others of which such a denotation is implicit. For ease of explication, we can distinguish between verbal and non-verbal aesthetic denotations.

<sup>9</sup> To begin with the latter, consider the case of a stone that has a peculiar crystal formation such that when cut in a certain way and polished, the figure of a bird in flight is clearly visible. Now if this polished stone is placed in a science museum, then it is being treated as a specimen, and the comments on and explanations of the bird form will be scientific in nature--geological or chemical. If, on the other hand, the same polished stone is placed on a pedestal in an art gallery, we will treat it differently, and our comments on it and reactions to it will be in terms of its beauty and mysteriousness and perhaps cosmic meaning. In other words, when we put it in an art gallery, we are "saying", and are understood to be "saying", "This

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<sup>8</sup> When we treat something as a work of art, we are not treating it as if it were or like a work of art when it is not one. As an example of the latter kind of usage, consider the sentence, "He treats his Volkswagon as if it were (like) a Cadillac". When we treat something as a work of art, as far as we are concerned, it is art. But there are limits on what we can correctly treat as art.

<sup>9</sup> An actual case; also cf. Paul Ziff, op. cit., pp. 615-616.



stone is a work of art" perhaps even more clearly than would be the case if we used the words. If we used the words, we might be asked, "What do you mean?", whereas when we put it in the gallery, it is clear what we mean. Thus to place an object on display in an art gallery is to denote it as art, is to say, "It is art". And, of course, this is the way we denote a great deal of art. Paintings, sculptures, mobiles, tapestries, African masks and so on at great length are displayed in art galleries, and also in parks, in university and city hall open spaces, in our homes. Furthermore, we clean these kinds of objects and try to preserve them; we buy and sell them, and give them as gifts; we do not demand as much utilitarian value from them as we do for example from an ordinary dinner fork (although it is to be noted that "Art for art's sake" is a very recent slogan, and that for most of history art has been expected to have some function, whether social and political (Plato, U. S. S. R.), psychological-therapeutic (Aristotle on tragedy), religious (medieval art), didactic (Neoclassical period), or even decorative (Egyptian burial art).)

It would clearly be inappropriate to display an unprotected Cézanne painting in a park, just as a large Henry Moore sculpture has no place in a home. We treat different kinds of works of art in the ways that are appropriate to them. Treatment in some ways is appropriate for some kinds of art, but inappropriate for others. This notion of appropriateness is even more clearly applicable when we shift our

attention from plastic to other art forms. We do not, for example, display works of literature; rather, we read and reread them, we publish them and reprint them, we place them on reading lists of university literature courses, we make them into films, and so on. We then show the films to audiences. Presentation to an audience is an appropriate way of denoting several other art forms--music, ballet, opera, drama, and poetry (in readings). This again does not exhaust the ways we denote these art forms; we record and replay music, we treat drama and poetry as literature, we film ballet and opera for theatres and television, etc. It is to be noticed that attendance at a performance or gallery is just as much an aesthetically denotative activity as a more instrumental function in the presentation. It is also interesting to note that we talk about the production of a performance, but the reproduction of a piece of plastic art and the reprinting of a work of literature (which is not the same as a reproduction, which attempts to preserve the visual appearance of the object; a reprint need preserve only the order, not the typographical shape, of the words.) Here again the notion of appropriateness is functioning.

We can not here go into the truly immense number of ways of non-verbal aesthetic denotation. As philistine as it sounds, even the prices we are willing to pay, high ones for art and low ones for decoration or entertainment, mark an important group of contexts in which we denote art. The point that is important at this stage is that in our subsequent elucidation of the logic of the concept of art, we will frequently use non-verbal activities as a source of data and examples. Because of the vagueness in language, and because linguistic

activity is just one of the many kinds of activity rule-governed by concepts, it will sometimes give a clearer picture to appeal to the use we make of art rather than "art".

The distinction we have made between verbal and non-verbal denotations of art is artificial, made for the convenience of exposition. Just as there are many non-verbal ways of denoting art, there are many verbal ways which are intimately woven into the latter. Here again, the notion of appropriateness is applicable, although some verbal activities are very widely appropriate. For example, we criticize all works of art (and other things as well, such as automobiles, bridges and rainbows) but we criticize in many different, regionally appropriate ways. We can talk about the formal qualities or the imaginativeness or the originality or the banality or the symbolic meaning or the style or the period or the expression of emotion or the technique or the medium or the artist's intentions or the place in tradition or art history of a work of art, and so on at great length. Some kinds of critical activities are appropriate to some kinds of art, others to others; some kinds of activities are appropriate to some interests, others to others. In all these activities there is, if not an explicit, at least an implicit denotation of art. To talk about the meaning of a film is to treat it as art; to say that it has no meaning worth speaking about (which is different from saying that it is meaningful because it has no meaning), but was just enjoyable, is to treat it as mere entertainment.

One of the more important aesthetic verbal activities is classification. On an atomistic level, each work of art has an

individual name, although the ontological status of the individual the name names varies from one art form to another. For example, "The Man in the Golden Helmet" refers to the original Rembrandt painting in the Louvre, although the same name is also used to refer to reprints and copies of the original. It is problematic to specify to what "King Lear" or "Le Sacré du Printemps" refers, but these are not the problems that we wish to get involved in; suffice it to say that we do usually know how to use the names of works of art. The most general aesthetic classification, of course, is art or work of art. Between the level of the individual name and the most general classification, there are a great many different ways works of art can be classified, depending on their characteristics and our interests, and each work of art can be treated as an example of many different kinds of art. We have a very general material classification into plastic, performative and literary art forms, within which there are many subdivisions. We have geographical and temporal classifications, again with many internal subdivisions. Technique, style, artist, period, movement and many other characteristics and interests can form the basis for arranging works of art into various relationships.

It is to be noted that to classify an object as, say, Romantic, is ipso facto to classify the object as art. In other words, the activity of classification we are considering is an implicit activity of aesthetic denotation. Secondly, it is important to notice that the conditions embodied in various modes of classification vary. Some classifications have necessary and sufficient conditions; to be a Picasso painting, it is necessary and sufficient that the object be

a painting done by Picasso. Others have only necessary conditions; for example, music must be ordered sound, literature must be ordered words, sculpture must be three-dimensional. Still others have neither necessary nor sufficient conditions; the classifications Romantic, sentimental, tragic, delicate, as well as many others, can not be spelled out in such terms, but are better treated in terms of strands of similarities.

The importance of the existence of so many aesthetic classificational activities is that it shows us again that denoting art is not a simple activity of saying "X is a work of art". When asked to give an example of a work of art, we are just as liable to say, "A painting" or "A musical composition" or "A poem" as we are to reply by naming a specific work of art. An elucidation of the logic of the denotative part of the concept of art will have to take this kind of fact into account.

Summary The main purpose of this chapter has been to show that the denotation of art takes place in many ways. We have also tried to show the complexity and variety of the kinds of context structured by the denotative rules of the concept of art. The preliminary clarification (perhaps "complication" would be a better word) sets the stage for us to return to the question, "What is Art?"

#### CHAPTER IV

If anything is clear from the last chapter, what the denotative logic of the concept of art is, is not. The rules by which we explicitly and implicitly denote art are many and varied, and it is not clear from the cursory analysis they have been given if there is any logic to their use, much less what it is. The problem with which we are faced is this: to help us to cut through the complexity, we must try to find a conceptual model or framework which will so simplify, condense and clarify the classification of the contexts in which we refer to art that we are able to give a philosophical description of the denotative logic of the concept. Our model should be such that it has the resources rich enough that we can deal comprehensively and consistently with the whole range of our observations of the use of aesthetically denoting rules. The model that has been traditionally assumed to be the obvious one to use has been one that employs theoretical or definitional locutions, that is, that employs the language and concepts of essences and necessary and sufficient conditions. To be adequate, a definition would have to be such that the description of anything that actually is a legitimate way of denoting or referring to art, explicitly or implicitly, could not conflict with the definition or any statement the definition entails. This project, however, has resulted in two thousand years of failure of aesthetics to provide an adequate definition of art. The "true definition", or even a close

approximation of it, has never been found; all the definitions have eventually run aground on the shoals of a contradiction with the facts of our experience in the aesthetic form of life. If we can see how this happens--and even better, how it must happen--then perhaps we will have a clue that will enable us to choose better sorts of  
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 locutions for dealing with art.

The aesthetic theorist claims to present an informative definition of Art. To see what he can in fact claim, let us suppose that it were possible for someone to examine all of the things referred to as art, that is, all contemporary aesthetically denotative contexts. Further, let us suppose that he discovers that there is a property X (simple or complex) shared by all works of art. The property in question does not have to be a natural one; all that is required is that a person with normal sensory and mental facilities (including some degree of "taste") is, after some education, readily able to identify the presence or absence of the property by the inspection of putative works of art. Would the researcher then be able to claim that Art is X? The answer depends on how we interpret the "is" of his statement. If he means by "is", "is now considered to be", and if, ex hypothesi, his research is completely adequate, then his statement is true. In

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We began, of course, to establish a conceptual scheme in Chapter II. The conceptualism outlined there is, in a very loose sense, a sort of axiom system, or, better, a sort of group of hypothetical postulates or assumptions for this thesis, embraced because the success similar conceptualism has had in other areas promises that it may be fruitful here.

fact, he will have stated an empirical identity statement of the form, "Works of art are (considered to be) identical with those objects that have the property X". Now, however interesting this statement may be, it would not be at all useful for saying what works of art really are (whatever that means), since in order to make the statement, he would already have to know what objects are works of art. It would perhaps have the heuristic value of aiding in the re-identification of works of art, but a list would accomplish the same thing better. And he certainly would not be able to claim that it is in virtue of X that we know what is a work of art, since the property or properties in question were discovered as a result of the research, which means that the researcher himself already knew what things were works of art when he discovered the property or properties by an inspection of works of art, and not by an inspection of his own mind. In order to make the claim that it is in virtue of X that we know what is a work of art, he would have to show not only that all works of art have the property, but also that there is a causal relationship between the recognition of this property and our calling these objects "art". To show that, he would have to get into psychology, and perhaps sociology and linguistics, which again would only give him empirical facts to the effect that we do in fact refer to art in such and such a way, and not to the effect that we must refer to art in that way. If what he is looking for is the evidence for saying that in some logical sense it is in virtue of X that we know what art is, he can not find it.

If in saying "Art is X" our researcher takes on the mantle of the aesthetic theorist, then he will claim to be giving an informative



definition of Art, and not an empirical universal generalization about art. In other words, he means the "is" of the statement to be interpreted as meaning "was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be". His statement is most probably false. It would seem to be as sound an inductive generalization as can be made that as long as man continues to have artistic interests, art will continue to develop and change in unpredictable ways. The things men call "art" and otherwise denote as art at one point in time are not treated as art at another time; moreover, the ways they denote art change too. Trivially, of course, works of art are created at different points in time, so that, for example, da Vinci could not say that we call "art" such things as "The Man in the Golden Helmet" and "Gæurnica", because they had not yet been painted. But more important than this, there are not only new works of art, but also new kinds of works of art that unpredictably revolutionize the group of properties that we must, in our research, ascribe to art. <sup>12</sup>

Cubism, for example, was a style of painting that subverted the to that point almost completely universal representational property of painting. It could not be foreseen that Cubist painting would develop as it did; however, that some new style of painting should become established was inevitable--or at least almost inevitable. There was always the possibility, not actualized, and there continues to be the possibility, that all new works of art be clear-cut paradigm cases of works of art. But there is no reason for supposing that such

a thing will happen; the mass of inductive evidence is that it will not. The introduction of the film subverted the aesthetic information pool even more than the introduction of Cubist paintings because its dissimilarities to previously established art forms were even greater than those of Cubist paintings. Furthermore, there are objects and kinds of objects that were once considered works of art and art forms, but are no longer. The eclectic and expansive period in which we live has obscured the fact that we have, for example, completely stopped considering landscape gardening to be an art form, while it was so considered in the Eighteenth Century. This is not to say that we have stopped creating artistic landscape gardens as we have stopped creating Gothic cathedrals; more than this, we have stopped considering any landscape garden to be a work of art.

Thus any attempt to define art informatively would have to be based on information gained from an examination of the objects that have been considered art to date. But there is no guarantee that art will retain any of the features that it has had. Even the most general  
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feature of art has no guaranteed future. A radical revolution in the concept of art, of course, does not happen in a day. Continuity

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It has been pointed out to me that works of art must at least be works. If what is meant by that is that they must be artifacts, then it is not true. There is already an established tradition of treating natural objects (pieces of driftwood, stones, even sunsets) as natural works of art. Moreover, there is no reason why such a trend could not become paradigmatic, that is, central to the concept of art. If, on the other hand, what is meant is that works of art must be real (cf. the French, "objet d'art"), then of course the statement is true; but everything else is real too.

is maintained by the persistence of certain clusters of properties, or, to use the current catch-phrase, "strands of similarities", that overlap and intertwine for various lengths of time, linking the present to the past and the near past to the remote past in various ways, and with various geographical emphases. An elucidation of the logic of the concept of art must make reference to the time at which the data for the elucidation has been gathered, and assume that there is nothing final about the use of the concept at that particular time.<sup>14</sup> From a more general temporal vantage-point (i.e., taking the eyes of God on the concept of art), we can see that the elucidation of the concept of art must be dependent on a temporal axis. It is this kind of temporal dependence that makes the denotative logic of the concept of art "open-textured".

Art is not a unique concept in this respect. Another example of an open concept is the concept of science. The concept of science is determined in part at least by what scientists do, and scientists do different things at different times; nor can we predict what the scientist will do next, only that he will do something different from but similar to what he is now doing. The phlogiston theory of combustion was just as legitimately scientific as the gaseous theory that replaced it; Newton's laws of dynamics were just as legitimately

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The need to specify spatial co-ordinates for an elucidation of the concept of art is based on the practical impossibility of discovering all the uses of the concept at any one time; this is not an impossibility in principle the way trying to discover the uses of the concept for all time at any one place would be.

scientific as the Einsteinian ones that replaced them; introspection was just as legitimately a scientific approach as is behaviourism.

Again, consider the pre-eminantly philosophical question, "What is Philosophy?" The problem of discerning what a work of art is has a great many similarities to the problem of discerning what a work of philosophy is. When we examine the history of philosophy, we discover many different methods and many different areas of concern being called philosophical. Attempts to give a definition of philosophy do not do justice to the wide diversity of activities, practices, attitudes, works, ideas, etc., that we consider and have considered philosophical. And the future is open. Although we may prefer to do philosophy in one way rather than another on the grounds of fruitfulness or clarity, our reasons for such preferences are pragmatic ones. No one can give a set of proven valid principles for correctly philosophizing for all time and claim that philosophy can be done in no other way. Anyone who pretends to do so is justifiably criticized as dogmatic. This suggests that as philosophers we should observe a principle of tolerance which allows that others may have valuable, if vaguely expressed insights using methods that we ourselves do not choose to use. This is not to say, of course, that a philosopher can say anything he wishes; we have canons of rationality such as coherence, consistency, clarity, comprehensiveness and accuracy of observation and reporting, and the validity of presented and implied argumentation that govern all philosophical enterprises, and other rational undertakings as well. Philosophical tolerance does not entail philosophical anarchy.

By way of contrast, consider the concept of knowledge as it is entertained in epistemology. When we examine, say, the Theaetetus, Descartes's Meditations, and Our Knowledge of the External World--any works that are clearly works of epistemology would do--we assume that they are all concerned with the same thing--knowledge. The fact that Plato, Descartes and Russell knew different things because they were different people living at different times and in different places is irrelevant to a critical examination of what they say in so far as it is considered epistemology. The reason for this is that the problem of epistemology is to determine, not what is known, in an encyclopedic sense, but what is knowledge, or, how whatever can be known is known, or, again, what it is to know anything. Furthermore, the solution, if there is one that we can recognize, to the basic problems of epistemology will be a solution for all time, past, present and future. It is only by making such an assumption that we can use the comments of, for example, Austin, as a basis for the criticism of Plato's epistemology as we do. Otherwise, we would have to assume that they were talking about different things, and comparison would be futile. Similarly, the theorist of the concept of truth does not assume that the criteria of truth could be different for Plato and Tarski, or for an Englishman and a Chinese, unless with the pragmatists he confuses truth and confirmation.

That this kind of assumption--that is, the assumption that the concept of knowledge is not unclear as its borders extend into the future--is perfectly sound in epistemology is shown by the fact that although there is a history of ideas, which is essentially chronology,

recounting and perhaps giving a genetic account of the development of the content of human knowledge, and there is a history of epistemology, which deals with the development of man's ideas and theories about the nature of knowledge, there is no history of knowledge as such. The idea of a history of knowledge is an absurdity because there can be no history of something that does not change. There is no history of how people know, only of what people know. Now, on the other hand, there is first, a history of art (chronology, listing works of art in temporal order), secondly, a history of aesthetics, and thirdly, a history of style, of how art has been produced. In fact, there is nothing connected with art that is not part of its history, which means, that does not change. When we examine what we must take into account in aesthetics, we find that there is no a priori nor any a posteriori reason for assuming a fixed, atemporal subject matter. If we wish to assume that there must be such a subject matter if philosophers are to say anything importantly philosophical about art, then we are attempting to deduce what the nature of art must be rather than trying to find out what art is, in fact, like. We are thinking, not looking!

What emerges from this contrast is that the open texture of a concept is not a function of the openness of the range of objects it is used to deal with.<sup>15</sup> The denotative range of the concept of knowledge is open-ended, but the concept is closed; that is, we can not say in advance what will be the content of knowledge ten or one hundred years

from now, but we can say that we will still be using the same rules for knowing whatever it is we know that we now use, and always have used. But we will not necessarily be using the same rules for dealing with art in the future, including dealing with art by denoting objects as art. An open textured concept is one whose rules change through time in such a way that the subject matter of the concept changes too, with each influencing the other.

What is of fundamental importance, then, in the claim that the denotative logic of the concept of art has an open texture, is that what art is has changed, and will continue to change in unpredictable ways. There is nothing "essentially aesthetic" that is immune to change. Our next problem is to determine just how this change comes about. To this end, we will turn to "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics"  
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 by Morris Weitz.

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Others have recognized that the concept of art has an open texture without realising the importance of that feature. Paul Ziff, op. cit., makes many points similar to those that follow in the last two sections of his article. He sees the importance of revolutions in art for change in the concept of art (p. 618), that the change comes about by decision (p. 622), that the changing social implications of something's being considered a work of art are an important factor in such decisions (p. 624), and that "an aesthetician is not and certainly ought not to be expected to be a seer foreseeing the future of art" (p. 629). However, although Ziff ties himself to a theory of definition which is somewhat looser than that of the aesthetic theorists\* in that it allows either definition by necessary and sufficient conditions or "one in terms of various sub-sets of a set of characteristics, or, in less exotic language, in terms of similarities to what I have called a characteristic case" (p. 615), he is still committed to the definition of an object, and not the elucidation of a concept. Also, he is not clear about how aesthetic denotative decisions are made. For these reasons, he is unable to explicate the use of "art" whereby we refer to paintings and novels and poems etc. (cf. p. 618, where Ziff elucidates such a use as a disjunction, not a conjunction), and he is unable, in the end, to see how the philosopher of art can take an

The idea of a concept in "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics", being limited to linguistic activity, is somewhat different from the one presented in this thesis, but it is not so different from our conception of a concept that the article may not contain a valuable suggestion for us." Weitz' idea of what it for a concept to have an open texture is closely similar to ours. He says:

But the basic resemblance between these concepts [the concept of art and the concept of games, à la Wittgenstein] is their open 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. I can list some cases but I cannot list all of them, for the all-important reason that unforeseeable or novel conditions are always forthcoming or envisageable. (p. 151).

"Art", itself, is an open concept. New conditions (cases) have

JAAC, XV, No. 1, 1956, 27-35. Reprinted in Problems in Aesthetics, M. Weitz, ed., MacMillan (New York, 1959), 145-156. Subsequent references are to the latter. It should be pointed out that this article is one of our main links with aesthetic literature, and that this thesis can be read as an attempt to clarify, correct, and extend the Weitz position, although we go substantially beyond Weitz on practically every issue.

over-all view of the concept of art and talk clearly about change in the concept of art.

W. B. Gallie, op. cit., is also unable to give an over-all view of the concept of art, though for different reasons. Since he seems to mean by "concept" what other writers mean by "definition", his elucidation of the so-called "concept" of art is for all time. One might ask Gallie why there are only the five contesting aspects of art that he discovers (viz., an object, a spectator-critic, an individual artist, the tradition, and achieved communication; cf. p. 112); the answer is that through an historical accident, those five characteristics happen to have been the important ones for the last few hundred years; they are no more necessary to art than any other characteristic.



constantly arisen and will undoubtedly constantly arise; new art forms, new movements will emerge . . . (p. 152).

What I am arguing, then, is that the very expansive, adventurous character of art, its ever-present changes and novel creations, makes it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties. We can, of course, choose to close the concept. But to do this with "art" or "tragedy" or "portraiture" etc., is ludicrous since it foreclosed on the very conditions of creativity in the arts. (p. 152).

There are no necessary and sufficient conditions [for correctly uttering "X is a work of art" as a descriptive utterance] 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. I shall call these the "criteria of recognition" of works of art . . . None of the criteria of recognition is a defining one, either necessary or sufficient, because we can sometimes assert of something that it is a work of art and go on to deny any one of these conditions, even the one which has traditionally been taken to be basic, namely, that of being an artifact: Consider, "This piece of driftwood is a lovely peice of sculpture". Thus, to say of anything that it is a work of art is to commit oneself to the presence of some of these conditions. (pp. 153-154).

Weitz' comments would seem to be in need of some clarification.

First, it might be asked how an "unforeseeable" condition could be "envisageable". What is envisageable is not a novel condition in which the concept of art could correctly be employed, but that there should be such a novel condition. This assertion is based, as we noted above, on as sound an inductive generalization as we can make; there have always been more or less radical departures from traditional art forms. Secondly, Weitz' claim that the closing of an open aesthetic concept "forecloses on the very conditions of creativity in the arts" is a little obscure. Closing the concept or the open sub-concepts of art would not, pace Weitz, stop artistic creativity. For that to happen, artists would have to begin to listen to aestheticians, and for good reasons artists are notorious for not listening to anyone.

What a closure would foreclose upon would be the possibility of giving a comprehensive philosophical description of creativity in the arts. Given these clarifications, it would seem that Weitz' conception of a concept having an open texture is very close to our own.

On the matter of change, Weitz says:

A concept is open if its conditions of application are emendable and corrigible; i.e., if a situation or case can be imagined or secured which would call for some sort of decision [Weitz' emphasis] on our part to extend the use of the concept to cover this, or to close the concept and invent a new one to deal with the new case and its new property. If necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of <sup>18</sup>a concept can be stated, the concept is a closed one. (p. 151).

No "Is X a novel, painting, opera, work of art, etc.?" question allows of a definitive answer in the sense of a factual yes or no report. "Is this collage a painting or not?" does not rest on any set of necessary and sufficient properties of painting but on whether we decide--as we did!--to extend "painting" to cover this case. (p. 152).

. . . new art forms, new movements will emerge, which will demand decisions on the part of those interested, usually professional critics; as to whether the concept should be extended or not. Aestheticians may lay down similarity conditions but never necessary and sufficient ones for the correct application

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We omit here the following statement, with which we disagree:

But this [the closure of a concept] can happen only in logic or mathematics where concepts are constructed and completely defined. It cannot occur with empirically-descriptive and normative concepts unless we arbitrarily close them by stipulating the ranges of their use. (p. 151).

The concept of a Picasso painting is a closed concept, the necessary and sufficient conditions that structure our use of the paintings being that the object in question be a painting, and that Picasso painted it. Similarly, there are many other sets and classes in the world. This disagreement does not affect the crucial distinction between extending a concept by inspection with a definition in mind and extending a concept by a decision.

of the concept. With "art" its conditions of application can never be exhaustively enumerated since new cases can always be envisaged or created by artists, or even nature, which would call for a decision on someone's part to extend or to close the old or to invent a new concept. (Eg., "It's not a sculpture, it's a mobile.") (p. 152).

The extension of the denotation of the concept of art, then, is claimed to occur by means of a decision, not an inspection.

Weitz illustrates how he conceives such decisions to take place by considering how the concept of the novel, a sub-concept of art, is extended. When a question like whether Dos Passos' U. S. A. or V. Woolf's To The Lighthouse or Joyce's Finnegan's Wake (Weitz' examples) is a novel arises,

what is at stake is no factual analysis concerning necessary and sufficient properties but a decision as to whether the work under examination is similar in certain respects to other works, already called "novels", and consequently warrants the extension of the concept to cover the new case. (p. 151).

He visualizes the decision process in terms of the adding up of similarities between the new work and accepted examples (with their paradigmatic properties):

It [the new case] is like recognized novels, A, B, C . . . , in some respects but not like them in others. But then neither were B and C like A in some respects when it was decided to extend the concept applied to A to B and C. Because work N 1 (the brand new work) is like A, B, C . . . N in certain respects--has strands of similarity to them--the concept is extended and a new phase of the novel engendered. (pp. 151-152).

There are several shortcomings in Weitz' account of how the concept of art changes. First, he is vague about who the "we" who makes the decision is; does each individual make up his own mind that Finnegan's Wake is a novel, or is there some kind of group responsibility for the decision? In either case, how does the decision come to be embedded in word and concept usage? Secondly, Weitz does not make

it clear when such a decision would be called for. It is not the case that the appearance of every new work of art demands that a decision be made; Jaqueline Susanne's Valley of the Dolls and Arthur Hailey's Airport were, as a matter of fact, novels, and ipso facto works of art, from the moment of publication, if not from the moment of their original conception. Just what is it that makes what Weitz calls "a new case" problematic? A third problem is that in giving an account of a revolution in art or in artistic taste, it is often not so much a problem of describing a decision to treat a new work as art as one to include a new style or genre or art form--that is, a whole group of works--under the concept. It is not clear that the Weitz format would be adequate for the description of such a decision. Fourthly, we may wonder if since the kinds of concepts the concept of art is over against--craft, propaganda, entertainment, etc.--are non-aesthetic concepts, while those like novel, tragedy, etc. are over against other aesthetic concepts, there may be some special problems with a decision to extend the concept of art not shared by a decision to extend one of its sub-concepts. A fifth and final question is, what sort of reasons would "warrant" or justify the extension or refusal to extend a concept? These problems all centre on Weitz' use of the concept of decision. If the concept of decision is applicable in an account of change in the concept of art, then we should be able to spell out just how aesthetic denotative decisions take place. To do this, we examine the logic of the concept of decision in the next chapter.

Summary A re-examination of the claims of the aesthetic

theorist led to the conclusion that the future development of the concept of art is unpredictable, and thus the attempt at definition for all time must fail. We expressed this conclusion by saying that the concept of art has a open texture. We considered certain other concepts to show that the concept of art is not unique in its denotative open texture. We then picked up a suggestion of Weitz, that the difference between an open and a closed concept is based on the difference between extending them by inspection and extending them by decision. Some inadequacies of Weitz' position pointed to the need to clarify further the concept of decision.

## CHAPTER V

Central to the concept of decision is the idea that some things do not have to happen as they do, and that some kind of human agency can be a causal force in determining the actual outcome of some situations. The presence of alternatives for the future among which it is in our power to choose is a logically minimal condition of our calling a situation one in which a decision takes place. Thus the concept of decision is incompatible with the concept of complete determinism in which, to speak metaphorically, the alternatives choose themselves, or, in which there are no alternatives. But even though the concept of decision opens up the future, it does not open the flood-gates of metaphysical anarchy in which "anything is possible". The range of factual possibilities in a situation is narrower than logical possibility would allow--anything can happen as long as its description does not involve a contradiction--but wider than the absolutely narrow range of complete determinism--there is one, and only one, possible future of the world.

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Factual possibility is a concept that is heavily dependent

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Aristotle assumes this notion at times in the Nicomachean Ethics (cf. Bk. III, ch. 2, 1111<sup>b</sup>20-35, ch. 3, 1112<sup>a</sup>19-<sup>b</sup>12 and 1112<sup>b</sup>26-27, Bk. VI, ch. 1, 1139<sup>a</sup>2-14, ch. 5, 1140<sup>a</sup>32-33) and in Metaphysics (cf. Bk. IX, ch. 2, 1046<sup>b</sup>4-6, ch. 3, 1047<sup>a</sup>24-30, 1048<sup>a</sup>7-11, 15-24), but recently there has not been much interest in this concept, even though the notion of factual possibility would seem to be a very important philosophical notion.

on context (cf. the concept of logical possibility, which is not dependent on context at all, but on semantics). Consider the alternatives, for example, of walking to the store, driving to the store in a car, and dematerializing here and in a few seconds<sup>20</sup> rematerializing at the store. At the present, given certain background requirements such as that we have a healthy body capable of surviving the walk, that we have adequate roads, that we have an automobile in running order that we can drive--in general, that the situation is an ordinary one--the choice between the first two alternatives is a genuine one, and a decision could be made. On the other hand, the third alternative is just not genuinely open--not, in fact, possible--because we do not have the technology to bring about such an event as material transfer. This ~~is~~<sup>is</sup> the constriction that the context, or the "deterministic background" places on us; if the context were different, if, for example, our legs were crippled, on the one hand, or we had invented a machine for material transfer, on the other, then the range of factual possibilities would change. But given the context we have partially outlined, the future depends on our decision, which in turn depends on what is factually possible. Thus the deterministic background determines that certain alternatives are open, and others closed, and what will be the consequences of various possible decisions, and what will be the result if no decision

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We should perhaps qualify the last putative alternative with the rider that it is assumed that material transfer entails personal transfer.

or the decision to do nothing is taken. But it does not determine which alternative is chosen. That is up to us.

Sometimes personal decisions are made that do not involve treating all the factual possibilities latent in the given situation as alternatives for the decision. Consider the following kind of case: "Why did you decide not to go to Vancouver when it would not have cost you as much as it cost you to go to Montreal?" "I didn't decide not to go to Vancouver; I never even thought of it; it never entered my mind to go west." What this case and others like it reveal about our use of the concept of decision is that we do not think that someone can make a personal decision for or against an alternative unless he has considered it to be an alternative. An examination of the concept of weighing alternatives would reveal that there are a great many different ways of doing this, one of the less frequent of which is "marshalling the arguments". But we do not want to get into that here. The important point is that in order to decide to do something, we not only have to have it as an alternative, we have to see it as an alternative. This means that the decision to act in a certain way is not an implicit rejection of all other either logical or factual possibilities, but only of other entertained possibilities.

It also means that when no alternatives are considered, even though we may have an action, we do not have a decision. This latter case, however, is not a "forced decision", i.e. a case in which there are no alternatives to be considered, and no decision is possible. It could be called an "obvious action" because in this kind of situation, it is just obvious how one should act. In other words, in such cases



one acts habitually. Actions thus are based on the habits which form our activity in relevantly similar circumstances as well as on decisions. In the carrying out of an habitual action, just because it is done automatically, we do not stop to decide what to do. We just do what we usually do, what is the obvious thing to do. This tie-in among the concepts of decision and habit in connection with action can be seen in the fact that all are linked to the concepts of responsibility and will. And, following this line a little further, since both decision situations and situations we describe as the attempt to increase understanding (cf. above, p. 16) are instances of cases in which the adequacy of a description in terms of habitual activity alone breaks down, we should not be surprised if on occasion there turns out to be a close relationship between the two types of situation.

The prime facie difference between personal and group decisions is that while the former involve only one person, the latter involve more than one person. But the relationship between the two sub-concepts is not a simple one. A preliminary difference is this. In terms of what is needed for making a personal decision, I do not need any behavioural manifestation to be able to tell both that a decision has been made, and what decision has been made. Moreover, I can fail to give any behavioural manifestation of having made it, either intentionally or accidentally making it appear that I have decided

differently from the way I have in fact decided, or that I have not decided at all. Of course, there can be a behavioural manifestation of the making of a personal decision--eg. a snap of the fingers, a nod of the head, the words, "I have decided to . . .", etc.--and we frequently have good reason for believing that there is no dissembling. Eventually, I will have to act in the world in some way to carry out the decision. But I could make a decision, then change my mind or die and no one else could ever know that it had been made. Thus in the personal decision case, observable behavioural manifestation is not a necessary part of the making of a decision.

In the case of a group decision, the question of the need for behavioural manifestation has a different answer. Even if, as before, we are concerned to say, not how we can tell that a decision has been made, but what is involved in the making of a decision, it seems clear that since there is more than one person involved in the making of a group decision, there must be agreement between the persons involved that such and such are the alternatives, and that X alternative be chosen. That agreement can not be attained without what might be called a head-nodding communication, and, with apologies to parapsychology, it seems that communication is not possible without some kind of behavioural manifestation. It would seem, then, that personal decisions that are not acted upon can have no influence upon the direction of a group decision. What is important is what we do, not just what we think.

In highly constituted (usually political) group decision situations, it is quite clear what constitutes the agreement that

underlies a decision--a clear majority, or a two-thirds majority, or a unanimous vote, or whatever. A veto is an absolutely forceful disagreement. Also, in such situations procedure for the airing of alternatives is more or less institutionalized as debate. In less constituted group decision situations, however, the procedures for airing issues are less formally organized, although on occasion better understood, and what constitutes agreement is not so clear. Sometimes agreement is established solely by concerted action. In the case of the decision of a neighbourhood to riot,<sup>22</sup> for example, the airing of the alternatives may take place in many ways, from street-corner oratory--"We must take decisive action now" means that it is possible for us to break our habitual patterns, and there is good reason to do it--to newspaper reporting and editorializing to private conversations and arguments. The agreement may be simply the picking up of stones and the refusal to disperse of several persons, or even the failure on the part of some to stop others from picking up stones. In cases like these, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between the making of the decision and its execution.

A crucially important point that emerges here is that the behavioural manifestations that must be described in the complete description of a group decision-making process do not have to be

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It must be remembered that what is being stressed in calling such a situation a decision situation is that it did not have to happen the way it did, that there were alternatives to rioting, and that it was in the power of the neighbourhood, as a group, to determine the future.

manifestations of personal decisions. That is not to say that the description of personal decisions may not be very important in some cases; but I may agree with you without deciding to agree with you. Consider the following example. There is a vote in a legislative assembly which defeats a government bill; the crucial "Nay" was that of a Government Member who decided to break party ranks and to vote with the Opposition. Here is a political decision not to put certain legislation into law. Now, a description of the bare decision could consist in a statement of the motion, a description of what constitutes agreement in such a situation (the rules laid down in the constitution for the passage of bills), plus a record of the vote count. That is how the decision was made, but that is not a complete description; to give one, more of the background would have to be filled in, including the fact that a Member decided to break ranks. But, and this is the crucial point, it does not follow that there would be a description of a decision on the part of every other Member. Everyone else may have habitually voted the party line, even if each of them knows that in the long run, he has the power to cast his vote as he likes. If he does not take this power seriously as an alternative in the situation, then there has not been a decision on his part, even though he has acted. In a routine House vote, from the time the legislation is thought of to the time that it is implemented, there need be no personal decisions at all. As a matter of fact, there usually are so many complexities in the kind of situation we are discussing that there are many tactical decisions that are made; but they do not have to be made for there to be a decision.

What we are arguing against here is what might be called a "compositional" theory of group decision-making processes. The assumption behind such an approach is that a complex group decision situation, such as a riot, an economic demand, or an election, is completely described and explained by a composition of the descriptions and explanations of atomistic units of personal decisions (cf. the use by economists of the concept of a utile, a unit of demand). Thus, taking a riot to be a break-down of law and order, the riot is taken to be completely described when all of the individual decisions to break the law have been explained. A riot is thus treated as an irrational outburst of anarchy, with no over-all explanation. But what this approach fails to be able to account for is the concatenation at a particular time and in a particular place of a large number of breakages of the law. Given the compositional approach, "riot" becomes merely a grouping word for a bunch of personal decisions. But we use "riot" as a word for a sociological event, an entity. In order to fill in the deterministic background of such an event, we have to be able to refer to sociological causation, in this case to such things as slum housing, unemployment, lack of social mobility, poverty, frustration on a mass level, police activities and attitudes and social responses to them, etc. These forces, while they do not make a riot inevitable, make one possible. By the same token, the unemployment of a certain number of people can be explained by examining the individuals in question, but chronic and widespread unemployment among a specifiable social group, such as Blacks or Indians, needs a socio-economic explanation; and we can correctly treat such a situation

as being the result of a group decision on the part of the rest of society to discriminate against the minority group if we want to emphasize our belief that there does not have to be such unemployment, even if the discrimination is habitual. Thus the relationship between the concepts of personal decision and group decision is one of analogy, and not of composition.

Summary We use the concept of decision when we wish to point out or stress that human agency was a force in the eventual outcome of a situation, that there was freedom of choice against a background of determined factual possibilities. Not all action, however, is based on decisions; some action is habitual. A difference between personal and group decisions is that the making of the former can be private, while the making of the latter is always public. Group decisions are not always best understood as a composition of individual personal decisions.

## CHAPTER VI

At this point we should pause and review what has been established so far in this thesis. One of our purposes has been to cast doubt on the possibility of attaining a theory--in the requisite classical sense--of art. The specific weakness of a definitional approach, as we pointed out, is its apparent inability to deal with the fact of artistic change and revolution. Our other purpose has been to lay the groundwork for a philosophically viable alternative account of art. To this end we have tried to construct a conceptual framework that incorporates different methodological commitments from those that would lead us to try to give a definition of art. The main elements of the framework are embodied in the conceptualism outlined in Chapter II. We were then able to rephrase the traditional question, "What is Art?" to read, "What is the logic of the denotative part of the concept of art?" Interpreting the facts in terms of the framework, we could say that the concept of art has an open texture, by which we mean that the denotative rules of the concept of art change unpredictably through time, and that nothing guarantees the persistence for all time of any one of the rules. We were then left with the problem of specifying more clearly how change in the concept of art comes about; so we picked up a suggestion by Morris Weitz that if the concept of decision is made part of our conceptual scheme, then we could carry out that project. Before launching into a discussion of aesthetically

denotative decisions, however, we tried to clarify the concept of decision in terms of our previous commitments. We are now in a position to try to see just how the concept of decision relates to the denotation of art. A word of warning: because of the open texture of the concept of art, much of what we say in the rest of this chapter, especially when we try to spell out the logic of the concept of art in terms of concrete situations, must be ethnocentric<sup>23</sup> in character. An implicit distinction between logical comments that view the concept "with the eyes of God" and descriptive comments on the use of the concept at a particular (usually present) time must be kept in mind.

As we are concerned with change in the concept of art, we are in an important sense concerned with new works of art. There are several ways a work of art can be a new one. In one extreme, there are those works of art that are new to me. If, for example, I come across a Van Gogh painting that I have never seen before, then it is new to me, even though it may be seventy or eighty years old. At the other extreme, there are those works of art that are new to all of us; if Norman Mailer were to write another novel, it would be such a case. Within these two extremes, there are those cases that are new to some of us, but not new to others; Eskimo art was new to most Canadians

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We take this word from T. Brunius, "The Uses of Works of Art", Aesthetic Inquiry, Beardsley and Scheuller, eds., Dickenson Publishing Co., (Belmont, California: 1967), pp. 12-15. Also, our treatment of expectations conforms in large measure to Brunius. It should be noted that we owe much to this article, which, in conjunction with the Ziff and Weitz articles already referred to, was very influential in the initial thinking-through of this thesis.



fifteen years ago, but it certainly was not new to the Eskimoos. A similar case is that of African masks. A different but related use of "new" in connection with art works is exemplified in the following kind of statement: "I used to think I understood King Lear, but after reading Dover Wilson, it's a whole new play." It is not clear, however, that any of the above uses is identical with Weitz' use when he talks about "a new case with its new property." Such a new case calls for a decision; but as we pointed out above (p. 40), Weitz does not make it clear what it is about such a new case that makes it problematic. If we can see how we deal with other kinds of new cases, and see what happens to an unproblematic case, then we will better be able to see how some cases are different.

What happens, then, when I come across an old work of art that is new to me? Well, several things can happen. In the first place, I may just not bother with it. Or, I may pay more attention to it. What happens next depends on several factors. It may be that the new work causes me no problems. What this unpacks to mean is that as I spend some time contemplating the work--i.e., treating it as a work of art in various appropriate verbal and non-verbal ways; cf. Chapter III above--I find that I can heighten and intensify my experience of the object such that the interests I habitually expect to have satisfied by such a kind of work of art are satisfied. When I come across a representational painting, for example, I expect verisimilitude to be maintained such that pictures of horses look like horses and pictures of trees look like trees. I also expect the painting to be balanced, and search for the techniques by which the painter has

established the balance--by framing, or balancing colour tones one against the other, or symbols one against the other, etc. Thus by understanding the picture in these and many other ways, I can come to appreciate it better, more fully, to the satisfaction of more and more interests. It is to be noted, however, that both the level and kind of expectations that I have when I come across a work of art that I can readily deal with on the basis of established, habitual patterns of activity vary from one type of art to another. Thus although I expect verisimilitude in a representational painting, and am pleased to find upon further study that my original classification of the painting is borne out, I do not expect verisimilitude from modern art. In other words, I interact appropriately with the work in question in terms of what is appropriate to the work and in terms of what is appropriate for the satisfaction of my admittedly ethnocentric interest in increasing the intensity and enjoyment of the experience. Not everyone has such an intellectually hedonistic interest in art as I do; others want political or physically hedonistic or religious or other kinds of satisfaction; among none of these is there a specifically and essentially aesthetic satisfaction or experience.

On the other hand, the satisfactions of such interests may not come so easily, especially if I am not familiar with the kind of art with which I am faced. I can not do the obvious--what I habitually do--

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By way of contrast, cf. J. O. Urmson, "What Makes a Situation Aesthetic?" in Philosophy Looks at the Arts, J. Margolis, ed., Scribners (New York: 1962), pp. 13-26.

because that leads to dissatisfaction. For example, the search for representational elements in modern painting can frustrate an appreciative experience of it; Pope's didactic poetry in heroic couplets is not satisfying to someone interested in love lyrics. Thus we have a problem: our established ways of dealing with art are inadequate for dealing with the work, and similar works, with which we are faced. There is a gap in our critical apprehension of the object brought about jointly by the failure of the object to fit into traditional patterns of treatment and our inability to see just how to go about changing those traditional patterns to accommodate the work. We are faced with an understanding gap. But we do know that others have found that this work, and ones like it, can be used to the satisfaction of certain aesthetic interests. Otherwise they would not have bothered to continue to treat the object as a work of art, by anthologizing it or collecting it or displaying or whatever.

What we have to find out is what kind of special interests this kind of work satisfies. So we go to the critics, to see what they say. We find out how they classify it, how they describe its technique, how they relate it to contemporary and historical developments, to the intentions of the artist, to the sociological, political and economic situation--practically any information that is even remotely related to the work in question may help us to re-condition ourselves to have the appropriate expectations, though it is usually impossible to say in advance what will "do the trick" for us for this and similar works. Sometimes the insight comes as a result of the accumulation of a great deal of work; sometimes it comes in a flash of insight. Another way

that we might try to come to grips with art that we do not understand is to try to create something like it in the important respects. Thus one way to try to understand Pop art is to try to create some Pop art. The result of all these efforts, usually, eventually, is that we come to appreciate the work and others like it, although there are some kinds of art we can never seem to understand. And of course this process continues; we come to see works we already know in new lights, we get deeper insights, etc. And we also forget a great deal; cf. "I don't know what I saw in that play."

In none of what we have been describing above, however, is there a decision of the kind Weitz is talking about. Although we have a break-down in an habitual pattern of interaction with art, the break-down is not one that we would describe as a decision situation; rather it is one that we would characterize as coming from the demand for understanding, whether that be purely intellectual, physical, religious, political or whatever. Furthermore, our activities in this case are not destructive of the concept of art, even though they are destructive of our own habitual activities in the face of art. For although the concept of art is based on those habitual activities, it is not identical with them. In fact, what we are doing in such a situation is breaking down our habitual patterns the better to conform our habits to the established rules of the concept of art. Far from contributing to a revolution in artistic taste, we are contributing to a firmer entrenchment of the conventional wisdom.

The point made in the last paragraph is in the broad region between relatively purely empirical and relatively purely conceptual

points. It could have been made much more quickly by treating it as a conceptual point, and "deducing" (not entirely accurate, but graphic) it from our starting point. The importance of our having come to it through an analysis of what does happen when we interact with art is to show that the conceptual scheme we are using does have the resources needed for dealing with observations. In other words, the fact that the same point can be made by working "up" from observations or "down" from the conceptual scheme, that the first crystallized into the second, and the second unpacks into the first, shows that the conceptual scheme is working. Having shown this, we will restrict ourselves pretty much to conceptual points from here on in, always with the understanding that their ultimate justification would be an unpacking that would conform to empirical observation.

Two elements in the above situation militated against the use of the concept of decision. First, since the work was an old one, new only to me, there was already an established group of rules for understanding it and similar works which I as an individual in the situation, did not decide upon so much as discover. Thus, for another example, I do not decide to extend the concept of Cubism to include "Les Damoiselles d'Avignon"; I discover that the concept does include it. Secondly, although the concept of art has its ontological roots in my habits, it has many other roots as well, in the habits of many others. Concepts are interpersonal. Thus a decision to change the concept of art will have to be a group decision, not a personal one. A third point that emerged, although not as crucially, was that it is a work and others like it, and not just an individual work, that we

fail to be able to deal with. Taking these elements together, it seems to be suggested that the concept of decision will be useful in describing situations in which a group interested in art comes across something new to them in such a way that they do not have an established conventional wisdom by means of which they can satisfactorily deal with it or with similar cases. Avant garde art is perhaps the purest source of instances of such situations.

Avant garde art is new art of a special kind; it is new art that does not fit well into the established patterns of expectations. We could say that avant garde art is not yet art, but that is not clear enough. What makes avant garde art art is that some people, at least, are willing to treat it as art. Some people have found the appropriate patterns of interaction that lead to some kind of aesthetic satisfaction, although the number is limited--perhaps to the artist alone. In other words, the object in question has sufficient similarities to traditional art that the expenditure of some effort on it promises to be fruitful--although that promise is not always kept. As more and more effort is expended on the avant garde--criticisms, shows, performances, etc.--that is, as various patterns of behaviour are presented as alternatives for being incorporated into habitual patterns, with some being rejected, others accepted, much of what was avant garde is classical after a generation or two. It is not so much that the object gradually moves into the mainstream of tradition as that the mainstream changes course to include it.

There is much old art that is not classical art. This point is not an entirely evaluative one; it <sup>is</sup> more a comment that certain patterns

of interaction become so strongly entrenched in our cultural conditioning that certain works--eg. Shakespeare's tragedies--continue to provide us with a great deal of satisfaction. Since there is certain conditioning that comes from just living in a physical and social environment, it is no wonder that some art seems to be "true for all mankind". The number of different kinds of social organization man has tried remains small; some artists have created works that provide satisfying releases from some of the pressures that all men, as a matter of fact, share.

It is here, on the level of the assimilation of works into traditional mainstreams that the decisions that influence change in the denotation rules of the concept of art take place. They are in a broad sense group decisions, for as certain kinds of works become considered to be art by larger and larger segments of those interested in art, the concept of art gradually changes so that eventually it is obvious to everyone that, for example, the Mona Lisa is a work of art. But that did not have to happen to the Mona Lisa; there is nothing intrinsically aesthetic about it. We just all decided, as a group, that the Mona Lisa is worth looking at.

Within this broadly cultural decision process there are more limited decision processes that contribute to the over-all process. On this intermediate level the situations shade from decision situations to discovery and increase of understanding situations. For example, the introduction of something like Eskimo art into the mainstream of Canadian (mainly European-oriented) art denotation was more of a discovery that the Eskimos create small statuary than a decision to treat

Eskimo statuary as art. The strain on traditional classification and other traditional patterns of interaction was small because of the great number of similarities of Eskimo statuary to established, accepted, "decided-upon" art forms. The display of African masks at an art gallery causes more of a rupture with tradition; hence continued display of and aesthetic commentary upon African masks would be evidence that a decision has been made, and not just a discovery. This kind of cultural cross-fertilization is going on all the time; hence decisions affecting the denotative rules of the concept of art put those rules in constant flux. There is rarely homogenous art usage throughout an entire linguistic group; homogeneity is rather found in smaller cultural sub-groups of various sizes. The classics are those works that achieve a kind of super-cultural prestige.

Avant garde art movements rebel against and abrogate tradition in various ways and at various levels, with different kinds of innovations causing different kinds of problems. Technical innovations-- a new kind of paint or plastic medium, a novel way of using language (eg. increased punning on the etymological roots or contemporary associations of words), a new combination of musical instruments, or the use of new instruments (eg. electronic instruments, or the use of tape recorders and echo chambers, etc.)--call for new genre distinctions based on traditional art form distinctions. That is, Finnegan's Wake is certainly literature (this statement is a factual "yes" report, to use Weitz' phrase) and ipso facto art, but is it a novel or what? Electronic rock music is music (evaluative issues aside), but what kind of music? Sometimes we cover up this genre problem by asking, "But is



it really art?", as if we could deduce from establishing that it is art, what kind of art it is. Such occasions are to be distinguished from those occasions what the question, "Is it art?" is a legitimate question; such times are those when fairly high level generic or even art form distinctions themselves seem to be inadequate. We do not ask this question of an object qua individual work of art, however, but of the object qua representative of a more general classification of putative art works. A single new and dissatisfying work of art is not an avant garde work, but a curiosity in the history of art unless more works are created that are dissatisfying in a similar way. One work does not make an avant garde movement but a dead end. Thus we are not called on to decide whether a given Bergman film is a work of art, that is, to extend the concept of art such that its denotative rules include the (definite description) Bergman film in question, but whether films are works of art, or, whether the film is an art form. In these cases, the concept of art is over against non-aesthetic concepts.

In the eclectic, expanding period of the last century or so, we have made many such decisions incorporating photography, films, African masks, collages, posters, mobiles, motorized and sounding sculptures, electronic music, modern dance, audience-participation drama and many others as mainstream art forms. At the same time, some things that were once considered art--eg. landscape gardens--are no longer considered art. There is no point, I think, in saying that the Eighteenth Century made a mistake in considering landscape gardens to be an art form. Tastes have changed; new patterns of

interaction have developed and others have been left by the wayside. That is just an empirical fact and a metaphysical statement about things being art and ceasing to be art obscures the openness and relativity of the concept of art.

We are now in a position to see more clearly the importance of the disputes that are endemic to so many parts of the aesthetic form of life. We have already accepted the view that at least one of the functions of the critic is to enable the more or less puzzled art observer to interact with art in terms of alternative rules that may enable the observer to have new kinds of appreciative insight into the works and art forms in question. In this function he is presenting alternatives open for the future development of the concept of art. Frequently, as Weitz and others point out, this activity is carried out by the presentation of honorific or persuasive definitions. Criticism is of course not limited to new works of art. As the concept of art changes and develops, new expectations arise which enable the critic to go back into the history of art and re-interpret classical art in the light of these new patterns of interaction. Sometimes neglected works of art are resurrected as those interested in art find satisfactory patterns that were not available to their predecessors--witness the "discovery" of El Greco with the advent of modern art. But it is clear that the critic sitting in his studio can not decide upon the future development of the concept of art. What is important is not what he thinks so much as what he does. The behavioural manifestation that is needed for the making of a group decision--the "head-nodding" communication we referred to in

the last chapter--is in this case found in critical efforts to persuade others to accept one's own view. The critic may personally decide that Finnegan's Wake should be treated as a novel--on the other hand, he may not so decide; it may be obvious to him, although not to others, that Finnegan's Wake should be treated as a novel--and that there should not be a new concept invented to deal with it, and that he will try to bring about a change in the concept of the novel such that it is extended to include Finnegan's Wake; he may further make tactical decisions to effect this change. But it is only in the power of the critical community as a group to make the decision to so extend the concept.

It is to be noted that in art history at any rate the decision process is far from a democratic one. Some voices count for far more than do others. The reason for this shows the somewhat complicated dialectical relationship between the artist, the critics and the society. The raw material on which the critic has to work is those things created to be considered works of art. He is thus restricted in what he can present and argue for as art. But he also has to be mindful of the extent to which established patterns can successfully be challenged, that is, of the extent to which people interested in art in his society are willing and able to try to understand the alternatives he may be presenting. A critic in the Eighteenth Century would have been a voice in the wilderness trying to promote El Greco because the culture was just not ready. Thus the critic is the focus of the dual pressures of an expansive and revolutionary artistic community and a tradition that has a great deal more inertia than

than do the artists. In critical literature one can see the tension between the future-oriented artist and the past-oriented culture, and usually the critic as the interpreter of the artist to the culture, is mistrusted by both. The result is a mutual causation: the decision of a cultural group to extend the concept of art to cover a new kind of case spurs artists to new endeavours in the now co-opted, formerly avant garde art style, which in turn leads to further pressure as the artists extend, ramify and try to change the tradition. In a sense, Stuart Hampshire<sup>25</sup> is correct when he says that the critic is going against the main trend of the language. But this is only in response to the artist, who would, if he could, even more radicalize the attack on the established order. Finally, it is to be noted that not all artists are revolutionaries. In fact, few are.

Summary We agree with Weitz in the claim that the openness of the concept of art is based on the fact that questions of the extension of the concept are answered by decisions and not by an inspection with a definition in mind. However, such decisions--to extend the denotative rules to cover a new case, to invent a new group of rules, to refuse to do either of the latter, or even the decision to maintain the extension of the concept or to restrict it such that it no longer covers an established case of a work of art (the latter three being kinds of decisions Weitz misses completely)--such decisions take place

only when works of art put pressures on the borders of the established concept-rules, and when they do occur, they are broadly based cultural group decisions, and not personal ones.

## CHAPTER VII

In this final chapter we try to say in a more general way what art is, not of course by defining it, but by giving a general characterization of the concept of art, with special reference to the relativity of the concept. It must be remembered that the ultimate test of the truth of our observations about art is further scientific research into the nature of our interactions with those things we from time to time consider art. The rigour of the empirical side of this thesis leaves much to be desired; however, all we could do within the scope of such a thesis was to indicate a framework that looks promising, and to show how the observations we have made can be understood within such a framework. There is much work yet to be done.

The first point is that the word "art" does not denote a group of objects with a peculiar ontological status as do, for example, "colour" and "material object". In other words, art is in no sense a "grade of actuality"; there is no "way of being" that is uniquely and distinctively aesthetic. The ontology of art has to be done piecemeal. Nor, in the other extreme, are works of art completely unique and mutually incomparable, each having its own indefinable "magic". No work of art is completely new and astonishing; all works of art are part of one tradition or another, linked by complex strands of similarities to what goes before them, and usually to what comes after. Thus the ontology of art is not done work by work, but art

form by art form.

There is no such thing as "art-in-itself" or "work-of-art-in-itself". Neither art nor a work of art exists independently of a cultural setting. In Categories, Aristotle defines a relative as follows: "Those things are relatives for which being is the same as  
<sup>26</sup>  
being somehow related to something". In this sense, the concept of art is a culturally relative concept; to use a phrase of Professor Simpson's, a work of art is "something undistinguished except for the eye of man"--man, that is, as a cultural animal. Another way of saying this is by saying that what art is can only be expressed by means of a relation. To be a work of art is to be related to certain cultural interests that make up the aesthetic form of life, which is that part of our lives that we organize by means of the changing rules of the concept of art.

The concept of art, moreover, does not persist by self-identity. What we mean to express by that dark saying is that self-identity is an inadequate a priori assumption for any attempt to give a complete description, for all time, of the concept of art. But self-identity is not the only model we have for persistence through time. What grounds the continued identity of the concept of art--that is, what allows us to speak of the Egyptian and the modern concept, as opposed to concepts, of art--is the persistence of strands of similarities that

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<sup>8a</sup>31; cf. Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione, trans. J. L. Ackrill, Oxford University Press, (London, 1963), p. 22. Italics Ackrill's (if not Aristotle's).

have various temporal and geographical life-spans linked together, as Wittgenstein would have it, like strands in a rope. Some of the strands link objects by their similarities to each other, and other strands link similarities among ways we treat objects when we consider them to be art. The former strands gain their importance in virtue of their relationship to the latter ones, which are rooted in the cultural habits of men--in the patterns of interaction that typify the kinds of treatment a culture evolves for those things it considers to be art. Starting with the modern Western conception of art, we can work our way back through time, and outwards in space, seeing some strands dropping out for good, or recurring, and seeing other strands starting and ending in the past or in other places. Some kinds of cultural conditioning are very deeply rooted, being almost entirely resistant to change; but no cultural interest of man has a <sup>2</sup> guaranteed future. The idea, for example, that works of art should be preserved is a very long strand that links many stages in the development of the concept of art. There are, however, breaks in it. Plato would have destroyed art that frustrated the development of the ideal state, and we have had our modern "book-burners" in Nazi Germany. Others strands are shorter. The idea that art should serve an overtly religious purpose had its hey-day in Western culture in Medieval Europe; today, I think, almost no one would hold that art must be religious to be art, even if they hold that much apparently secular art has religious overtones. If someone does hold that art must today be religious, then what he says is false.

The issue of the truth or falsity of statements about (not in) art is a very vexing one indeed. First of all, we want to say, as above



that the person who holds today that art must be religious is mistaken, that what he says is false. But if he had said it eight hundred years ago, then there is a good chance that what he said was true: to be considered a work of art, an object had to be taken to have religious implications. Even if this last statement is not true, it could be. Another way of looking at the problem is this: our comments on Airport suggest that while we recognize a temporally and culturally relative central factual core in our denotative use of the concept of art, whereby classical works and new works created within well-understood, clearly established traditions are as a matter of fact works of art of a certain type, we also recognize that there is a revolutionary boundary zone in the denotative rules of the concept. Works on the boundary are not yet (or, are no longer) full-blooded works of art. The process by which an object is moved from the boundary to the centre is, as we have said, a process of cultural decision-making. In this context, how can it be false at one time that X is a work of art, then at another time be a fact that X is a work of art?

The way out of the difficulty is, I think, as follows. It is clear that the meaning of the phrase "work of art", as a denotative phrase, is not identical with its extension. It is determined by the reigning cultural rules for dealing with art. As those rules change, the meaning of "work of art" changes: as the rules remain the same, so too does the meaning of "work of art". This means that the statement "It is a fact that X is a work of art" is a culturally relative statement that can not be understood independently of a reference to a cultural setting (contrast "X is red" or " $2+2=4$ "). In other words,

the above statement states a cultural fact, analogous in many ways to the statement "X is a foul ball", which states what Searle calls an "institutional fact". Thus the truth-value of the statement "X is a work of art" can change without any natural change in the "X"; it can also remain the same, in some cases, with a great deal of natural change in the "X"; cf. the (definite description) play "King Lear."

It might be suggested that our treatment of the concept of art entails that anything could be considered art, and thus that we are forced to say that "work of art" means the same as "real thing", which of course is not true. It does follow that anything could be treated as a work of art with sufficient change in the concept of art; we will just have to wait and see how the concept develops in the future. For if a cultural group as a whole decides to treat an object as art, then it is art. But it does not follow from this that everything at the same time could be considered art. Part of the usefulness of the word "art" comes from the concept being over against other concepts like handicraft, entertainment, mere technique, and, more remotely and less evaluatively, history, philosophy, psychology, and science in general. Although there are no clear-cut borderlines separating these various interests, with each sharing much of the others, if it came to pass that all of these other concepts were absorbed into the concept of art, so that the rules whereby we deal with history, for example, were the same as those whereby we deal with art, the result would be a large-scale breakdown in the efficiency with which we interact with the world, and the demand for understanding would reassert itself by making distinctions between

aesthetic and other interests. It is thus not a factual possibility that we should at some time in the future treat everything as art.

In this thesis, we have tended to stress the diveristy of the ways we interact with those things considered to be art in order to avoid imposing an arbitrary a priori unity on art based on the assumption that there must be something that Art really is. We have tried to look at the ways we call things art to see if there is such a unity. The result has been that we have concluded that any unity art has is grounded in cultural unity. If it were to be discovered that there is some cultural interest that is essential in man, and that art alone could satisfy that interest, then we would have to allow that art could be defined. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine whether there is such an interest, we have already suffieiently expressed our doubts about it. Beyond this, our conclusion that art is culturally relative is far from original; many others have said the same thing--but not many philosophers.

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