Chapter Three

The Definition of Art

1. The Institutional Definition

Up to this point I have been talking about some of art's properties, semantics, and values. But what is art? Shouldn't we first define it before entering further considerations? What we should be looking for here, and what analytical aestheticians have been looking for during the last few decades, is a real definition with a descriptive and an evaluative aspect to it. A definition, that is, which does not merely describe common usage of the term 'art' but is recursive in specifying how it can be used to recognize (and create) future art works. Analytical aestheticians seem to have made it their job to deny the possibility of such a definition and they may be right. Nevertheless this is how the problem of defining 'art' presents itself. Asking for such a definition is asking for a specification of the definiendum's essence. Such a specification should consist of a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. In 'Art is or contains X' X is a necessary condition if all art is or contains X—and if everything that is or contains X indeed is art—then X also is sufficient for an object or event to be art. The problem with art seems to be that there is no such X that novels, paintings, performances, bottle dryers and music have in common. According to Morris Weitz, 'art' is an open concept, one resembling the concept of 'game' which too entails no essential characteristics shared by all games. Games at best possess what Wittgenstein has called a family resemblance: every member resembles one or other member but none resembles all of them.1 According to Weitz none of the

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1 Weitz, ‘The Role of Theory in Aesthetics’, 1956. The—vicious—circularity of the concept of family-resemblance shows from its paradigm example, the resemblance between members of a family. The sole reason to watch for these resemblances and ultimately find them lies in our knowledge of a genetic relationship. When confronted with a group of people assembled randomly we might find an equal amount of resemblances. So for the concept to be functional one must already possess some criterion of classification that does not depend on the perceptual. Cf. Mandelbaum, ‘Family Resemblances and Generalizations concerning the Arts’, 1965
definitions of art prevalent in his time was successful. Either they included
or they excluded too much. Even the definition that attributes artifactual
to all art specifies a condition that is neither necessary—certain (modern)
works are natural objects—nor sufficient—obviously there are artefacts that
are not works of art. Instead, the definitions that Weitz found were merely
aggrandizements of valued properties of exemplary works of art. If, for
example, you adore abstract art you might then propose a definition of art as
‘significant form’. However, since not all art works amount to significant
form (supposing we understand this property), and not all significant forms
are art works, such definition is merely ‘honorific’ or ‘persuasive’.2 Honorific
definitions are interesting only in the degree to which they induce us to
appreciate different aspects of works of art; they do not really furnish a
definition. According to Weitz we should keep classification and evaluation
apart: a broken vacuum cleaner may not be a good exemplar but it is still a
vacuum cleaner. Weitz thinks that no true definition of ‘art’ is possible, and
that the best we can do is procure an enumeration of existing works. Evidently, enumerative classifications lack the advantage a definition has of
specifying a priori what properties a work of art is supposed to have to merit its
status.

Accordingly, George Dickie proposed the ‘institutional conception’: “A
work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) upon which some
person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the
Artworld) have conferred the status of candidate for appreciation.”3 From
hindsight most of the time this conception of art may be just fine, but then
again it hardly alleges more than the simple answer to the question “Why
should this thing be an art work?” “… because people say so”. As a definition,
enabling people to create or recognize new works of art, however, it is highly
inconsequential. Participants in the art world who confer art status to new
non-art objects must be ready to provide aesthetic reasons for such conferral.
In this they cannot fall back on the conventions of the institution, because
these have obviously not yet conferred art status to these objects. Thus the
institutional definition does not allow one to introduce a new work of art,
exact because it deviates from the art that has been recognized. Whence do
art institutions derive the authority to make objects into works of art, if not
from aesthetic reasons? In most cases the conferral of art status will be

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2 The latter term was introduced by C.L. Stevenson, e.g. Ethics and Language, 1944.
1969.
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defended in terms of the works' conforming to some established stylistic tradition or genre (say, a new—cubist or realist—painting, a cast sculpture, a sonata, etc.). This, however, does not support the institutional conception of art. Puzzle cases for this conception rather lie in works which significantly deviate from such traditional ways of art making, and to confer art status upon such things or events is bound to need aesthetic reasonings.

Dickie's definition has two parts, but only one has received fair attention in subsequent discussions. The meaning of the part that attributes status conferring powers to members of the art institutions seems well established by now. However, the part describing the function of such ascription remains mostly neglected. What can it mean to be proposed as a candidate for appreciation? It is part of the nature of being a 'candidates' that an object can be judged non-eligible, but where does this possibility leave the procedural character of the definition? Art institutions' procedures must introduce criteria of aesthetic evaluation. As a consequence the definition cannot remain classificatory in the long run. If on the contrary, the lack of appreciative success were irrelevant for an object's being a candidate then why should 'being a candidate' be part of the definition? Why not make it into the idle formula that apparently it is: "an object is a work of art if some art institution says it is a work of art." Evidently, such reformulation decreases to nil the importance of the institutional definition and of the domain it is supposed to define. Notwithstanding problems like these, however, the institutional conception does introduce the mind-boggling problem of how else to define art. What to do with the evident arbitrariness of this procedural definition? Surely art serves a point? Dickie does not say what a work of art is supposed to look like, what it is supposed to achieve. He thus provides the concept 'art' with an extension—rather than with an intension with which we might fix this extension. One wants to include in the definition of art the value that some art works obviously have, as well as their effects on people, and the reasons we provide for liking them.4 As Weitz alleged, however, these elements fall outside the definition. I disagree with this thesis, believing, on the contrary, that these evaluative aspects ought automatically to fall within the definition. It is my thesis that 'art' can be defined recursively: something is a work of art if it conforms to acknowledged artistic procedures (not art world procedures of status attribution), and these procedures are or should be acknowledged as artistic

4 It is only evident that such reasons are related to existing works of art. Cf. Levinson, Music, Art, & Metaphysics, 1990.
once certain of their typical instantiations occasion some specifiable experience. This experiential effect I shall have more to say about in the chapters to follow—however, not in the name of an empirical identification. I do not propose that aesthetic experience is definitory of art, because that would lead to arguments from authority: Q: “Can’t you see that this is an art work? A: “But it isn’t. Q: “Yes it is. I just had an aesthetic experience which proves it.” A: “No it isn’t. I had no such experience.” Et cetera.5 The sheer disposition of occasioning an aesthetic experience may be a necessary condition for an object’s status as a work of art—which is not saying much—but it certainly is insufficient. Some objects cause aesthetic experience, without being works of art. On the other hand the art-status conferring role—if sufficiently specified so as to include the aesthetic evaluations that necessarily inhere it—assigned to ‘art world’ institutions may be sufficient for an object to be a work of art, but it isn’t necessary—unless, of course, one is willing to broaden into empty tautologies the concepts of 'institution' and of 'art-world' so as to include everything that has ever led to an object's being an art work. What should interest us here is the reciprocity between the general concept ‘art’ and its individual instantiations, art works: how does knowing what ‘art’ in general means help us to recognize individual works and how does understanding individual works of art help us to define art in general? With artefacts in general this reciprocity is typical, in that the concept not only specifies what each instantiation of the definiendum looks like, but also why it should be like that; the relevant concept also specifies the goal to be served by the object falling under it. One should wonder whether with art and its instantiations a comparable reciprocity can be secured, and if so, to what extent.

2. Definitions and Purposivity

It is either problematic to provide closed definitions of artefacts because it is hard to incorporate both past and future instantiations of the artefact, or such definitions are of their definiendums' essence merely stipulative. Artefacts are specified not only by the aims they serve but also by the procedures with which we produce them. A functional definition relates the definiendum to its goal; a procedural one relates it to the procedures according to which the

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5 This argument from Douglas Dempster, ‘Aesthetic Experience and Psychological Definitions of Art’, 1985 knocks down instrumental, psychological definitions of art, such as those proposed by Beardsley (e.g. ‘Aesthetic Experience Regained’, 1969) and Schlesinger, ‘Aesthetic Experience and the Definition of Art’, 1979. Cf. also Davies’ discussion of the functionalist definition of ‘art’ (in Definitions of Art, 1991.)
definiendum has been produced. If we can bring together procedural and instrumental aspects of the definiendum we may succeed in recursively defining artefacts. Kant would say: the concept of an artefact describes the internal purposivity of the object, i.e., the properties it should have; and its external objective purposivity, i.e. the aim it should serve, its use.\textsuperscript{6} Specifying an object’s use already more or less specifies its internal purposivity. Starting from the aim of the vacuum cleaner it is only logical that we fix a manoeuvrable hose to it. However, our goals or their specifications may change over time and this will have an effect on the way the artefact is produced. This may even separate the procedural and functional elements in the artefact’s definition. For example, there exist dust sucking animals, and ‘dustbusters’ that apparently answer the external purposivity of the vacuum cleaner but are not seen as such because they have not come into being according to the right procedures of production. This is an important distinction. Normally the internal purposivity of an artefact fits the external in seamless manner, because the artefact is developed to serve its aim best. A broken-down vacuum cleaner shall still be a vacuum cleaner due to its internally purposive build, which was originally geared to serve its goal even though it no longer does so.

Works of art, evidently, come in many different guises and forms, and we admire them for their singularity. Nevertheless, they can be classified into genres, styles, and techniques, all of which, for the sake of the argument, I take to be artistic procedures. I defend the thesis that it is these classificatory characteristics, these artistic procedures that are or are not admitted into the temple of art by (something like) the art world. Each of these procedures has its own inner purposivity, which ideally should conform to a specifiable and, I think experiential, external functionality. As with the vacuum cleaner though: an art work that we would want to deny aesthetic or artistic value may nevertheless, due to its sharing in this or that style or genre be a work of art. A thing is an art work if it answers the inner purposivity specified by some or other procedure pronounced to be artistic. A strictly procedural definition might have it that this internal purposivity suffices, and that no external compliance with goals or effects typically ascribed to successful art works is needed. However, this is like accepting the broken down vacuum cleaner as the paradigm exemplar of this artefact. In the context of this argument Paul Crowther has remarked that there exist distinct ways to

\textsuperscript{6} Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, 1974, § 15.
attribute a status to an object.\textsuperscript{7} For example, you can attribute the status of ‘hammer’ to an object by fixing something heavy onto a manageable piece of wood. One has then changed the materials so that the resultant object deserves the status of being a hammer. If one calls this object a hammer one merely recognizes its status. Contrary to this, attributing status to some object is an entirely different practice. One now does not change the materials but merely supplants a semantical dimension onto the object involved. As is done for example by relating a pair of shoes to ‘the scene of the crime’: the shoes don’t change but they now have the status of ‘evidence’ attributed to them. Such attribution is contingent, and external. This is exactly what Dickie in his institutional conception suggests the art world does to objects in giving them the art status. Such attribution is far too contingent: art should merit its status. It is an intelligible question to ask: “Should we automatically accept whatever the art world proposes as an art work?” Indeed, the answer is “no”, and, therefore, the institutional conception does not suffice. This conception, in short, is not recursive: it does not specify why (the first) works of art deserve their status, nor does it teach what criteria a member of the art world is supposed to apply in his attributions, or, for that matter, if he can possibly ever succeed in introducing a new work. Moreover, what status did an acknowledged work of art possess before it received its status? Surely it was already an art work (the realist replies)? The institutional conception does not help us to decide whether a new work or procedure is artistic or not, so we may seriously wonder whether this is a definition in the first place. This objection appears to have been admitted from the beginning in that Dickie’s theoretical pretence has merely been to classificatorily specify art. We should then only wonder whether this is the kind of approach to art that we prefer.

3. Artistic Procedures and Exemplars

Should the definition of art be applicable to individual art works, or rather to the artistic procedures and techniques artists make use of in creating their works? By the way no answer to this question is going to help the institutional conception, since either way it shall be incapable of explaining how and why new instances are introduced by members of the art world, irrespective of whether these members are individual works or artistic procedures. Benjamin Tilghman in his book But is it Art? describes a gentleman confronted with a pile of rubbish in a museum of modern art,

wondering whether this is or isn’t a work of art:8 “But is it art?” One must seriously wonder whether this gentleman would be satisfied if someone were to explain that the pile is indeed a work of art because the museum’s director said so and because there is a sign next to it specifying the year and place of creation. The man would still want to know why the director should have done that. In other words, he is not asking for the institutional attributive statement, but for its legitimation. He wants to know, in Tilghman’s words, how he is supposed to appreciate the work. It seems to me that however convincing an argument against the institutional conception this is, it also confuses the issue in seeming to imply that a work should be evaluated before the status of art is conferred upon it. This, I believe, would be going a step too far. Following Tilghman’s analysis this gentleman might experience a comparable despair when confronted with his first cubist painting or non-narrative novel or film. However, difficulties in finding out how to appreciate a work do not necessarily imply that it is impossible to do so, or that the relevant thing or event is not art. One might merely be a conservative who does not accept the very possibility of new artistic procedures. Partly agreeing with Tilghman then, I think that indeed our gentleman is not asking for a definition of art, but nor does he merely want to know how to appreciate this singular work. Instead, he is asking how one ought to appreciate works like this, constructed following unrecognizably artistic procedures, and lacking known artistic properties. A realist answer must ensue explaining the procedures involved, and specifying the aesthetic reasons for allowing them to enter the domain of procedures yielding art works. Not coincidentally our gentleman would have no problems with a landscape painting of poor aesthetic quality, even though it lacks the ability to move him. Each acclaimed work of art shall have to participate in artistic procedures, such as genres, styles, or kinds of works of art to be acknowledged as a work of art. Next, however, it shall have to deviate from these procedures to be sufficiently original. The definition of art is at risk when we are confronted with things or events that deviate too much to form part of the relevant procedure. Cubism deviated from the art form of ‘painting’, but not so much as to fully step beyond it. It made the forms in the painting more geometrically shaped, it changed the materials by including sand and pieces of newspaper, et cetera, but it didn’t leave the plane. It did, however, sin against realist depictive procedures, and was accepted only after it itself produced works of sufficient aesthetic quality. It is, therefore, procedures that are accepted into the world of art, not individual works, and

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8 Tilghman, But is it Art?, 1984.
once one understands the reasons why something new has been accepted one should find no deep problems in trying to appreciate a singular work partaking in it. So there really are two levels at which one might ask: “But is it art?” There is a question about what kind of appreciative activities one ought to undertake, and one about how the appropriate kind of activities is supposed to heed aesthetic satisfaction. Only the first question points at the general conception of art; the second presupposes an answer to it, and points instead at the actual appreciation of an individual work.

The rather obvious idea defended by Catherine Lord that works of art are appreciated for their singularity’s sake and not for their pertaining to some genre or style sustains this argument. She suggests understanding works of art as rigidly designated individuals, in the terminology of Kripke. Contrary to what Kripke might want to argue, Lord thinks the rigidly designated identity of works of art is not based on material but on aesthetic considerations. She argues that Michelangelo could have produced the very same David from a different piece of marble. According to Kripke the resulting David would then not be ‘the’ David, simply because it is based in a different ontological entity. Lord on the contrary argues that the identity of the David depends on the aesthetic considerations of its sculptor: it depends on Michelangelo’s decision that it be finished. It is this decision that fixes the properties of the sculpture that are relevant for our aesthetic appreciation. Not every perceptual difference should for reason of being visible also lead to an aesthetic difference. Aesthetic difference is in terms of expressive properties, not of secondary or primary qualities. Thus the aesthetic identity of the David ensues from decisions made after the work has been carved out of the stone, however much these carvings will be related to the stone’s characteristics, its veins and colours, et cetera. Evidently, this position presupposes an account of aesthetic evaluation’s relation to the object evaluated. What to do with the so-called hard cases of anti-art, such as Duchamp’s Fountain, and Cage’s 4’33’’?

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9 The introduction, in the seventies, of the ‘performance’ as a new artistic means went like this, I think.
11 Kripke, Naming and Necessity, 1972.
4. Anti-Art and Four Orders of Artistic Intentionality

In the past, works of anti-art gave those trying to define art the greatest trouble. Duchamp’s Fountain, for example, was not constructed by the hands of the artist, and it does not comply with convention D (for depiction) or convention E (for exemplification), although by being what it is, a urinal instead of a conventionally produced work of art, it does make us think about the power of museums. It derives its art status merely by being in the museum, not by having us appreciate its primary or secondary qualities. Because of this it did not partake in any of the acknowledged artistic procedures, nor, however, did it initiate a new one. The same goes for Cage’s 4’33’’, whose sounds were not invented or even structured by the composer or the performer, and no artistic procedures have been followed in making them. Instead these sounds are caused by the public. If the audience were to start singing a jazz ballad, they would be giving the musical performance, not the pianist. Moreover, they would have then performed a jazz ballad instead of Cage’s 4’33’’. Since in this ‘work’ the public cannot comply with any artistic procedures either, 4’33’’ cannot possibly have an artistic follow-up. The same argument would arise if we were to try to make a recording of the performance. Which sounds ought one to record? If Cage’s specifications include that the sounds to be heard must be produced by the public that listens to the work, then a piece of silence should be reproduced, and the piece recorded will not be a recording of any specific performance of the work, and, in the end it will not be an instance of Cage’s 4’33’’. If, however, Cage had specified that the sounds of the public present at the performance by some pianist, say Peter, form the work, then most of its significance would evaporate, and only one singular performance should be made of it. What might the meaning of this work be? Since it is impossible to establish which exact sounds are supposed to be heard during a performance of 4’33’’ this question cannot be answered relative to the work, but only to some specific performance of it. Therefore, there is no avoiding the conclusion that the meaning of this work must be sought at a level transcending the musical or audible. Notwithstanding these far-reaching ontological problems, Cage’s 4’33’’ does function within a traditionally artistic setting: the music theatre, and in this it resembles Fountain. It is in the theatre that the pianist enters the stage, that he is seated at the piano, and that he

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12 For those who are unfamiliar with ‘4:33’; this ‘work’ is ‘performed’ in a music hall by a pianist who enters the stage, bows to the audience, takes his seat behind the piano, opens it, waits for four minutes and 33 seconds, closes the piano, bows again, and leaves the stage.
delves for a certain amount of time. But neither he nor the composer intentionally creates anything audible, which would have been the only appropriate thing to do given this specific setting. Thus, even though the work makes ample use of aspects of musical performance, these aspects in themselves are non-musical and do not comprise what makes a performance into a performance of music: 4'33'' is not a musical work. There is no artistic intentionality in 4'33'' or Fountain, only causality, and the effects of these works of anti-art are restricted to philosophers trying to find out how to devise a definition of art that might accommodate them without expelling more traditional procedures. If only we were smarter. It is my thesis that most confusion regarding the definition of art stems from our failing to distinguish between four levels of choices, only two of which are definitory for 'art'. Although the story of art is much more complex than this, this distinction should provide us with a better understanding.

First-order choices regard classifications within the arts, and artistic genres. Is one embarking on the creation of a work depending on conventions D (for depiction) or E (for exemplification), or whatever other artistic conventions can be established? Upon such decisions further first-order choices present themselves more or less automatically: what genre should the work be in, what style is going to be realized (or used and changed)? Once these decisions are made and one has started to produce the desired work, second-order choices will surface, which eventually have to be made in the light of third-order, aesthetically evaluative decisions.

Second-order choices aim at the actual application of the material to be used to realize the work opted for: what colours to use, how thick should the paint be applied, what brushes to use? More importantly: where exactly to put this or that daub of paint, how much stone must be carved out, et cetera. In practice it will be difficult to distinguish first- from second-order choices, and we may never be able to suggest some knock-down standard, if not for the very fact that what were once first-order choices (such as setting out to paint a Madonna) are now second-order ones (nowadays, one who chooses to paint a Madonna restricts his use of material rather than choosing a subject matter), and the other way around. The questions I identify here as secondary are answered in the light of the desired aesthetic effect of the resulting work. One wants it to possess this or that representational or expressive property. These I call third-order choices. The paradigm third-order choice is the

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13 Such as convention M (for music): abstract from real-life sounds and listen to the sounds heard in their mutual sequential relationality—or something to that avail.

decision that the work be finished. Evidently, these three types of artistic choice are mutually enhancing and delimiting. Nevertheless some specific, and hierarchical, relation exists between them in that the third-order choices are the ones that enhance the first- and second-order choices, and that put an end to these. Not unimportantly, it is third-order aesthetic decisions that enable an audience to re-enact a work of art. People may share only aesthetic choices, not first- and second-order ‘material’ ones. Of course, it is the effects of ‘material’ choices that are perceived, but they are not shared. Because third-order choices put an end and an ending to second-order choices made within the genre and type of work emanating from the first-order choices made, the sharing in these third-order choices presupposes a perceptual awareness of these first- and second-order choices. Lastly, fourth-order choices regard a work of art’s relational properties. They involve art criticism, frames, lighting conditions, museum conditions in general, other people’s pointing and remarks, et cetera. Choices based upon these activities are made in order to bring to the fore certain aspects or properties of the work of art rather than others. As such, a curator may change the way in which we regard a painting by putting a different frame around it, a red, wildly-adorned one, say, instead of a green, sober one. However, fourth-order choices do not change the work of art itself, notwithstanding their possibly striking influence on how we perceive it. We saw in our discussion of Goodman’s argument regarding the aesthetic difference of a ‘perfect fake’ that having people watch in different ways does not automatically lead to aesthetic differences. Aesthetic differences must be based in primary and secondary qualities of the work inasmuch as these enact third-order choices. Although there exist no absolutely trustworthy conditions for perceiving a work of art, its objective properties, or primary and secondary qualities, do form the last resort for an aesthetic interpretation of the work. A frame may change our perceiving the colours of a work, but ‘in themselves’ these colours do not change, and if they themselves do not sustain some changed appreciation then the frame in question can be seen as inappropriate. In short, they may be hard to sort out, but there are certain criteria of appropriateness for fourth-order choices. If the artist painted his painting with a specific frame in mind, then the frame will form part of the second-order choices guiding the artist in the creative process.

There can be no aesthetic evaluation without perception of material orchestrations. As a consequence this four-level theoretical reconstruction of art production sustains the acquaintance principle. Because artistic techniques come with a goal to be understood in terms of third-order considerations and decisions, we now can incorporate the alleged experiential ‘functionality’ of
art within our conception of artistic procedures. Notwithstanding the theoretical importance of making this four-level distinction, no artist performing all three kinds of choices in his creation of a work is fully ‘in charge’ of his choices. Artistic procedures have a dynamic of their own and are embedded in cultural processes that cannot be fully supervised. Moreover, and this follows directly from the distinction proposed here: only those choices that enter into the resultant work and can be perceived and experienced by an audience are artistically relevant. I am not proposing that we consider the artist’s intentions; in fact, I’m proposing the contrary. Crowther’s distinction referred to above between recognizing the status of an object and merely attributing it can now be explained in terms of my four-level model. Among the art world’s attributive procedures—which Dickie thinks are definitory of ‘art’—there are those that consist of artistic first-, second- and third-order choices. These are status recognizing. Then there are those that are strictly on the fourth level: these are attributive in Crowther’s pejorative sense. They can never autonomously make something into a work of art. As a consequence, they should be excluded from the conditions that are either necessary or sufficient for a thing’s artistic status. It is necessary for a thing or event if it is to be a work of art, then, that it be the result of a mixture of first-, second- and third-order choices. Thus by definition a work of art must consist of primary and secondary qualities functioning in an aesthetic manner. This corresponds to the principle of acquaintance: it is for reason of the necessary implication of second-order choices informed by third-order aesthetic ones that the audience must for the sake of an aesthetic valuation be acquainted with the work itself, that is, with its primary and secondary qualities (and then something). To wind up the ‘necessary’ part of the definition of art we need an account of aesthetic appreciation and of the aesthetic properties that allegedly supervene upon secondary and primary qualities that make up a work of art. This will be part of my argument in a later chapter.

5. Art’s Characteristics

Can we provide the sufficient conditions which together with the named necessary ones add up to a decent definition of ‘art’? One simple answer would be: if an object is the result of manipulations on all four levels then it most certainly is a work of art: taken together, the four levels of choices are a sufficient condition. Indeed this goes for all traditional works of art. But can we think of a thing answering all four types of choices that is not a work of
art? No—at least, I can’t. How many acknowledged works of art are excluded by my definition? I consider Fountain to be a piece of anti-art. It does not embody artistic second- or third-order choices. Perhaps it does embody a first-order choice in resembling a sculpture, but even this may be denied because supposedly no object is a sculpture that is not the result of second-order manipulations. What about concept art? What about Oldenburgh’s refilled hole in the ground? There appears to have been second-order manipulation but we cannot appreciate it because it has annihilated itself. What to say of a Rembrandt painting no-one has ever set eyes upon, because it was destroyed the minute Rembrandt considered it finished? Is this painting a work of art? With no work available to the senses, such questions seem meaningless. Moreover, Oldenburgh seems to have destroyed his so-called work with no third-order aesthetic aim in sight: no acquaintance is necessary for a proper evaluation of this work; knowing of what it supposedly consists suffices to understand it. Only philosophers may appreciate it, but these for the most part are bad appreciators of art. Yet it seems that forcing the audience to think about some piece of non-art—what is known as concept-art—has evolved into a kind of artistic procedure. If anywhere, then, this concept-art ‘procedure’ takes place solely at the first- and fourth-orders: the artist shows the museum director where his idea is supposed to be located, and where to put the sign. Which idea, and which sign are indeed the artist’s choice. If we want to include this in the temple of art because the instructions include some materiality, then it seems to be poor art at best. Its visual, temporal, spatial or literary impact all are nil: we are provoked only philosophically.

Art as we know it is a modern, western invention brought to life for the sake of providing people with certain appreciative experiences. However, this does not mean that aesthetic experiences define art, because many an object clearly and indisputably is a work of art, without perhaps ever having provided one person with an aesthetic experience, and even if some work sometimes did provide one person with an aesthetic experience, it will most certainly not do so continuously. Ideally only works of art are supposed to provide certain experiences. It ensues from our characterization of art that we should not attempt to define a specific object’s artistic essence, as there is no such thing as a general essence of individual works of art. Instead, there may be an essence to its ideal of experiential functionality, and I shall attempt to employ this thought in what follows. In the present section I opt for a characterization not a definition of art.

Dickie said: “A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) upon which some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social
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institution (the Artworld) have conferred the status of candidate for appreciation.”

15 My amendment would be that for a thing to be a work of art it must be produced according to artistic procedures whose aesthetic relevance has been established by members of the art world. This would be my specification of art’s most characteristic traits. It is not really a definition because it begs the question of sufficient conditions by relating art status to aesthetic evaluations, and by historicizing the introduction of artistic procedures. I put it this way:

1. Artworks exemplify some artistic procedure. 2. A procedure is artistic only if it includes second and third order choices as specified (because artworks must admit appreciations answering the principle of acquaintance). 3. A procedure is artistic once it has been shown to be aesthetically rewarding, i.e., it must have been shown to license exemplary works. 4. These exemplary works’ exemplarity is to be established by appropriate aesthetic evaluations.

Thus, art status attribution in the end is based in aesthetic evaluation. We now have a classificatory characterization that does not specify the conditions of singular works but those of artistic procedures, and bases this specification ultimately on the aesthetic evaluation of actual art works. In response to Weitz’ formulation of the problem: evaluation cannot be kept out of the definition of art, but it should not be brought in bluntly as a means to assess the value of individual works. Instead, evaluation should function as a means to establish the capabilities of artistic procedures which can subsequently be applied as a classificatory means. Weitz’s is a false dilemma. Evaluation precedes classification as much as it precedes honorific definition.

Returning to the argument of the previous chapters: works of art of all kinds involve a reduction of the polymodality characteristic of our embodied perceptual access to the world. Some modality, however, must remain in position if the work of art is to make up for this reduction. This is why the inclusion of second-order material—stylistic—choices should be such an important element in artistic procedures. I am aware of the density of these remarks at this stage of the argument, but I will return to them in the third part. We are faced with the theoretical task of accounting for the aesthetic evaluation of singular works of art in such manner as to argue for the foundational role of these evaluations with regard to the successful introduction of the relevant artistic procedures. Before we address this issue (and to strengthen the objections raised against ‘cognitivism’ in Part I) an historical intermezzo will be undertaken in Part II. It will investigate just

what two philosophers arguing on the brink of the modern period have brought to bear on the art practice that we are acquainted with. First I shall return to Immanuel Kant, who, two centuries ago, developed a systematic, and philosophically sophisticated, aesthetic theory. Kant made ample work of establishing the non-viability of cognitivist reductionisms, and defended a non-relativist subjectivism. If art is supposed to depend upon events of aesthetic evaluation grounded in our aesthetic experiences, Kant’s theorizing about the transcendental characteristics of what is involved in these evaluations and experiences becomes of tantamount importance for a critical assessment of our artistic practice. We shall find reason, however, to more or less doubt the effectiveness of Kant’s critique of cognitivism as it was allegedly professed by one his predecessors, Alexander Baumgarten. Therefore, after we have assessed the value of Kant’s contributions, we shall go back a little further in time, to the founding father of modern aesthetics, Baumgarten.