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**The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics**

1 Philosophical Aesthetics: An Overview

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**Abstract:** The Domain of Aesthetics – Five Problems in Analytic Aesthetics

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**1. The Domain of Aesthetics**

**1.1 Introduction**

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy devoted to conceptual and theoretical inquiry into art and aesthetic experience. In this chapter I offer first an outline of the structure of philosophical aesthetics as a whole, and then a selective sketch of the development of Anglo-American aesthetics over the past fifty years, focusing on five central topics: the concept of the aesthetic, the definition of art, the ontology of art, representation in art, and expression in art. These topics are, of course, also addressed at greater length in corresponding chapters elsewhere in this volume.

One may usefully think of the field of philosophical aesthetics as having three foci, through each of which it might be adequately conceived. One focus involves a certain kind of *practice* or *activity* or *object*—the practice of art, or the activities of making and appreciating art, or those manifold objects that are works of art. A second focus involves a certain kind of *property*, *feature*, or *aspect* of things—namely, one that is *aesthetic*, such as beauty or grace or dynamism. And a third focus involves a certain kind of *attitude*, *perception*, or *experience*—one that, once again, could be labelled *aesthetic*.

Not surprisingly, there are intimate relations among these three conceptions. For example, art might be conceived as a practice in which persons aim to make objects that possess valuable aesthetic properties, or that are apt to give subjects valuable aesthetic experiences. Or aesthetic properties might be conceived as those prominently possessed by works of art,

or those on which aesthetic experience is centrally directed. Or aesthetic experience might be conceived as the sort of experience that figures centrally in the appreciation of works of art or the aesthetic properties of things, whether natural or manmade.

The question of which of these three foci is the most fundamental, and in particular whether it is the idea of *art* or the idea of the *aesthetic* that is conceptually prior, has been much debated (Scruton 1974; Wollheim 1980/1968; Danto 1981). In any event, the three conceptions can claim to be naturally related in that art, in its creative and receptive dimensions, plausibly provides the richest and most varied arena for the manifesting of aesthetic properties and the having of aesthetic experiences. There is also no denying that contemporary analytic aesthetics is in very large measure the philosophy of art, even if the analysis of aesthetic phenomena outside of or apart from art is by no means neglected.

What might seem to be major concerns of aesthetics that do not immediately fall under one or another of the three conceptions are, first, the aesthetics of nature; second, the theory of criticism; and third, the nature of craft. But on closer inspection, the first of these can be seen to fall comfortably under the second or third conception noted above, and the second and third of these, under the first conception noted above. The aesthetics of nature can be understood to concern itself either with certain distinctive properties of natural phenomena that can be classified as aesthetic, e.g. beauty, sublimity, grandeur, or profusion, or with certain kinds of experience distinctively provoked by nature, or certain kinds of attitudes appropriately brought to nature. The theory of criticism can be understood as a study of part of the practice of art: that part concerned with the reception of artworks, including their description, interpretation, and evaluation. And craft can be readily conceived as art-related or quasi-artistic activity.

## **1.2 Three Foci of Aesthetics**

Let us now return to the three foci indicated above, which we may simply label *art*, *aesthetic property*, and *aesthetic experience*. Although, as we have seen, these foci can be put into relation with one another and interdefined in various

ways, without some independent anchoring of each it is not clear that more than relative illumination of the aesthetic sphere has been achieved. It is useful at this point to sketch some traditional and current conceptions of the basic content of those three foci.

What, in short, is art, or counts as an aesthetic feature, or constitutes an aesthetic experience?

## **Art**

One conception of art sees it as specially concerned with perceptible *form*, with the exploration and contemplation of such form for its own sake. This view has roots in the work of the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who thought that the beauty of objects, artworks and natural phenomena alike, consisted in their ability to stimulate the free play of the cognitive faculties in virtue of their pure forms, both spatial and temporal, and without the mediation of concepts. The early twentieth-century English theorists Clive Bell and Roger Fry took a similar line, holding that spatial form was the only relevant aspect of visual art taken as art, and that possessing significant form', in Bell's famous phrase, was the necessary and sufficient condition of something's being art at all.

Another conception of art of long standing sees it as essentially a vehicle of *expression* or of *communication*, especially of states of mind or non-propositional contents. The early twentieth-century Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce located the essence of art in the expression of emotion, underlining the indissociability, amounting even to identity, of content and vehicle in such cases. The English philosopher R. G. Collingwood developed this line further, stressing the way in which the making of works of art was at the same time a way for the artist to articulate or make clear the exact nature of his or her emotional condition. The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy advanced a view of art that identified it with emotional communication from one person to another by indirect means, that is, a structure of signs in an external medium.

A third conception of art sees it as tied to the *mimesis*, *imitation*, or *representation* of the external world, perhaps in distinctive ways or by distinctive means. This conception of art has very deep roots, and can be

located, though with some anachronism, in the earliest works in the canon of aesthetics, the *Republic* of Plato and the *Poetics* of Aristotle. The view, modified so as to allow for representation of matters beyond the visible, finds expression in the aesthetic theories of Lessing, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, among later thinkers. Modern discussions of art as representation, or, more broadly, as semiotic or symbolic in nature, include Langer (1953), Goodman (1976/1968), Danto (1981), and Walton (1990).

Other important conceptions of art regard it as an activity aimed explicitly at the creation of beautiful objects, including faithful representations of natural and human beauty; as an arena for the exhibition of skill, particularly skill in the fashioning or manipulating of objects that is capable of exciting admiration (Sparrshott 1982); as a development of play, stressing play's structured and serious aspects (Gadamer 1986); or as the sphere of experience as such, in which the interplay of active/creative and passive/receptive phases in engagement with the external world is made a focus of attention and dwelt on for its own sake (Dewey 1934).

Some more recent conceptions of art view it as the production of objects intended or designed to afford aesthetic experience (Beardsley 1981); as the investing of objects with aboutness or meaning in the context of a specific cultural framework, the artworld (Danto 1981); as a particular social institution, identified by its constituent rules and roles (Dickie 1997; Davies 1991); or as activity only historically identifiable as art through a connection to earlier activities or objects whose art status is assumed (Wollheim 1980/1968; Levinson 1990a, 1993; Carroll 2001).

## **Aesthetic Property**

Aesthetics conceived as the study of aesthetic properties evidently requires some conception of when a property is an aesthetic one. It is widely agreed that aesthetic properties are perceptual or observable properties, directly experienced properties, and properties relevant to the aesthetic value of the objects that possess them; but beyond that the demarcation of the class of aesthetic properties is subject to dispute. Some of the hallmarks of aesthetic property status that have been proposed are: having gestalt character; requiring

taste for discernment; having an evaluative aspect; affording pleasure or displeasure in mere contemplation; being nonconditiongoverned; being emergent on lower-level perceptual properties; requiring imagination for attribution; requiring metaphorical thought for attribution; being notably a focus of aesthetic experience; being notably present in works of art. (In the last two cases, obviously, the demarcation of aesthetic property is thrown back on that of either aesthetic experience or art.)

Despite debate over the status of the above marks, there is substantial convergence in intuitions as to what perceivable properties of things *are* aesthetic, as this open-ended list suggests—beauty, ugliness, sublimity, grace, elegance, delicacy, harmony, balance, unity, power, drive, elan, ebullience, wittiness, vehemence, garishness, gaudiness, acerbity, anguish, sadness, tranquillity, cheerfulness, crudity, serenity, wiriness, comicality, flamboyance, languor, melancholy, sentimentality— bearing in mind, of course, that many of the properties on this list are aesthetic properties only when the terms designating them are understood figuratively. Finally, though the class of aesthetic properties and that of expressive properties are not coincident, it is evident that expressive properties, which arguably attach only to works of art and not to natural objects, constitute a significant subset of aesthetic properties (see Goodman 1976/1968; Tormey 1971; Scruton 1974; Beardsley 1982; Levinson 1990a; Sibley 2001).

### **Aesthetic Experience**

Aesthetics conceived as the study of certain distinctive experiences or states of mind, whether attitudes, perceptions, emotions, or acts of attention, similarly requires some conception of when a state of mind or mental activity is an aesthetic one. Among the marks that have been proposed as distinguishing aesthetic states of mind from others are: disinterestedness, or detachment from desires, needs and practical concerns; noninstrumentality, or being undertaken or sustained for their own sake; contemplative or absorbed character, with consequent effacement of the subject; focus on an object's form; focus on the relation between an object's form and its content or character; focus on the aesthetic features of an object; and figuring centrally in the appreciation of

works of art. (Once again, in the last two cases the demarcation of aesthetic experience is thrown back on that of either aesthetic property or art.) Whether these criteria, either individually or in some combination, manage adequately to mark out the boundaries of aesthetic experience as a distinctive state of mind remains a matter of ongoing controversy. (For scepticism, see Carroll 2001.)

### **1.3 Problems and Issues in Aesthetics**

As is evident from the preceding, among the problems of aesthetics are the interrelated characterizations of the nature of art, the nature of aesthetic properties, and the nature of aesthetic experience. But those broad problems radiate out into many more specific ones, including those making essential reference to particular artforms or aesthetic phenomena.

From a concern with the definition of art as such, one moves naturally to a concern with the ontology of art, with the process of artistic creation, with the demands of artistic appreciation, with the concept of form in art, with the role of media in art, with the analysis of representation and expression in art, with the nature of artistic style, with the matter of authenticity in art, and with the principles of artistic interpretation and evaluation. It is unsurprising, in light of most of these concerns, that the philosophy of art is sometimes conceived of as *metacriticism*, or the theory of art criticism (Beardsley 1981).

It is necessary to at least touch on some of the problems falling under the concerns just enumerated. The *ontology of art* centres on the question of exactly what sort of object a work of art is, and how this might vary from artform to artform. Philosophers have asked whether the work of art is physical or mental, abstract or concrete, singular or multiple, created or discovered, notationally definable or only culturally specifiable, and have queried what its authenticity consists in (Collingwood 1938; Goodman 1976/1968; Wollheim 1980/1968; Wolterstorff 1980; Currie 1989; Levinson 1990, 1996*d*). Interest in creativity in art revolves around the question of whether there are any sustainable generalizations regarding it, and on the question of the relevance of knowledge of the creative process, and of the historical context of creation more generally, to appreciation of works of art (Wollheim 1980/1968; Beardsley 1982; Currie 1989; Walton 1990; Levinson 1990*a*, 1996*d*). Issues about artistic

form include those having to do with the defensibility of formalism as a theory of art, about the different kinds of form manifested in different artforms, and about the relation of form to content and of form to medium (see Kivy 1990; Budd 1995; Carroll 1999).

Among the modes of meaning that artworks exhibit, the most important are *representation* and *expression*. (Goodman 1976/1968, however, argues for *exemplification* as an equally important mode.) Theorists have offered accounts of representation, usually with special reference to pictorial representation or depiction, in terms of resemblance between object and representation, perceptual illusion (Gombrich 1960), symbolic conventions (Goodman 1976/1968), seeing-in (Wollheim 1980/1968, 1987), world-projection (Wolterstorff 1980), make-believe (Walton 1990), recognitional capacities (Schier 1986), resemblance between visual experience of object and representation (Peacocke 1987; Hopkins 1998), and information content (Lopes 1996). Theorists have offered accounts of artistic expression, usually with special attention to the expression of emotion, in terms of personal expression by the artist, induced empathy with the artist, metaphorical exemplification (Goodman 1976), correspondence (Wollheim 1987), evocation (Matravers 1998), imaginative projection (Scruton 1997), expressive appearance (Kivy 1989; Davies 1994), and imagined personal expression (Levinson 1996*b*).

Concerning artistic style, attention has focused on the distinction between individual and period style, on the psychological reality of style, on the interplay between style and representational objective, and on the role that cognizance of style plays in aesthetic appreciation (Gombrich 1960; Wollheim 1987; Lang 1987). Concerning the interpretation of art, attention has focused on the relevance of artists' intentions, on the diversity of interpretive aims, on the debate between critical monism and critical pluralism, on the similarities and differences between critical and performative interpretation, and on the relationship between interpretation and the maximizing of value (Currie 1990; Davies 1991; Budd 1995; Goldman 1995; Levinson 1996*d*, Stecker 1997). Finally, as regards the *evaluation of art*, attention has carried to the question of its objectivity or subjectivity, to the relation between artistic value and pleasurability, to the relation between the value of art as a whole and the value of individual works of art, to the existence of general criteria of value across

artforms, and to the relevance of a work's historical impact, ethical import, emotional power, and cognitive reward to its evaluation as art (Beardsley 1982; Goodman 1976/1968; Goldman 1995; Budd 1995; Stecker 1997; Levinson 1998b).

In addition to the foregoing, there are problems revolving around a number of concepts relevant to the understanding of many if not all works of art, and which cut across artforms—concepts such as those of *intention*, *fiction*, *metaphor*, *narrative*, *tragedy*, *genius*, and *performance*. Next, there are a set of issues that concern the relationships between art and other domains or aspects of human life. Probably the most important are those that can be encapsulated under the rubrics *art and emotion*, *art and knowledge*, *art and morality*, and *art and politics*. For example, there is the issue of how we can sensibly have emotions for characters whom we know to be fictional; the issue of whether art can be a vehicle of knowledge and of what kind; the issue of whether art can contribute to moral education; and the issue of whether art is rightly subject to censorship or other forms of societal control. There are, of course, also problems specific to individual artforms, such as painting, poetry, or photography. For example, there are the issues of whether film is an inherently realistic medium; of whether poetry can be usefully paraphrased; of whether the basic form of music is local or global; of whether painting is essentially two-dimensional; of whether narration operates similarly in literature and film; and of whether music or words should dominate in a hybrid artform such as opera.

A concern with the nature of aesthetic properties leads naturally to concerns with *realism* about such properties, with the *supervenience* relation between aesthetic properties and the properties on which they appear to depend, with the range of aesthetic properties to be found in the natural world, with the special status of *beauty* among aesthetic properties, with the difference between the beautiful and the *sublime*, with the degree of *subjectivity* or *objectivity* of judgements of beauty, with the relations between *artistic beauty*, *natural beauty*, and *human beauty*, and with the relationship between the aesthetic properties of artworks and what may be called their *artistic* properties, e.g. originality or seminality or revolutionariness, which, although appreciatively relevant, are not directly perceivable in works in the manner of aesthetic properties (Levinson 1990a; Goldman 1995; Sibley 2001). Finally, a concern

with the nature of aesthetic experience opens up into discussions of the nature of various *mental states*—e.g. perceptions, imaginings, reasonings, feelings, memories, moods—that figure in response to art or nature, and so into discussions on the bearing of cognitive science on the analysis of such experience.

## 2. Five Problems in Analytic Aesthetics

### 2.1 The Concept of the Aesthetic

The term ‘aesthetic’ in something like its modern sense dates to Alexander Baumgarten, a German eighteenth-century philosopher, who defined aesthetics as ‘the science of how things are cognized by means of the senses’ (1735). In modern thought, however, ‘aesthetic’ clearly has a more specific meaning than that of having to do with sensory perception in general. The British eighteenth-century taste theorists, notably Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Burke, helped to shape this more specific meaning by emphasizing a mode of sensory perception not centrally driven by personal desires or concerns, and characterized by an absorption in the object for its own sake.

This line of thinking culminated in the Kantian conception of aesthetic perception as *disinterested* perception, or perception of something without regard for its real existence or connection to one's interests, but just for the appearances it affords, and the Schopenhauerian conception of aesthetic perception as *objective* perception, or perception of something in abstraction from its relation to one's will, and thus merely for the type it instantiates.

Two twentieth-century conceptions in the same vein are Edward Bullough's account of aesthetic perception as involving psychic *distancing* of the perceived object, or a disengagement of the practical self in relation to it, and Clive Bell's account of aesthetic perception as focused exclusively on *form*, or the arrangement of elements in a sensuous medium, independent of all knowledge of the world.

The idea of the aesthetic as marking a distinctively disinterested, objective, distanced, and form-focused manner of perceiving still has currency, but it has detractors as well, including some who are wary of the element of

disinterestedness on political grounds, and some who are sceptical of there being any such distinctive manner of perceiving at all. In addition, the qualifier 'aesthetic' is sometimes thought to apply more fundamentally to attitudes or experiences or pleasures or judgements or evaluations or properties, than to modes of perception. In what follows I review some modern attempts to capture the essence of the aesthetic, sometimes in relation to one, sometimes in relation to another, of these substantives to which the qualifier 'aesthetic' can be attached.

Discussion of the idea of the aesthetic in analytic aesthetics begins with Urmson (1957). While denying that there were any specially aesthetic properties or emotions, Urmson proposed that an evaluation could be considered aesthetic if based primarily on how an object looks or sounds or presents itself to the senses, rather than on how it is actually is, a conception of the aesthetic that does not significantly depart from the Kantian idea of aesthetic judgement as concerned exclusively with appearances.

Also in a Kantian vein is the proposal of Stolnitz (1960), that aesthetic attention be understood as attention that is disinterested, discriminating, sympathetic, and intransitive—that is, not aiming beyond the object but instead terminating on it. The key notion in attempts to theorize the aesthetic by Beardsley, beginning in 1958 and continuing into the 1980s, is that of *aesthetic experience*. Beardsley (1981) characterizes such experience as involving firmly fixed attention, relative freedom from outside concerns, affect without practical import, exercise of powers of discovery, and integration of the self. Such experiences have value in virtue of sharing the unity, intensity, and complexity of the objects—notably artworks—on which they are directed, and such objects have aesthetic value precisely in so far as they have the potential to afford such experiences.

Dickie (1964, 1965) represent powerful attacks on traditional conceptions of the aesthetic attitude and aesthetic experience such as those that Stolnitz, Beardsley, and others had proposed. Dickie (1964) makes a strong case that the aesthetic attitude as traditionally conceived is a 'myth', that there is nothing more to it than simple attention. In particular, Dickie tries to show that the putative differentiae of aesthetic perception, such as disinterestedness and distancing, concern only the motivation and not the nature of the perception

involved, and that the differences between one case of perception and another can be accounted for entirely in terms of objects and degrees of attention. Dickie (1965) charges that Beardsley's suggestion according to which valuable features of perceptual objects, such as unity, intensity, and complexity, are standardly paralleled in the experiences had of such objects, giving them a corresponding aesthetic character, is in effect a category mistake. Experiences do not admit of features of that sort, Dickie claims, and Beardsley has simply confused 'the experience of completeness' with 'the completeness of an experience'. The debate between Beardsley and Dickie is pursued in Beardsley (1969), Dickie (1974), and Beardsley (1982).

Despite Dickie's attacks, accounts of what is distinctive about the aesthetic attitude and aesthetic experience continued to be elaborated, often with an emphasis on cognitive elements therein. For instance, Scruton (1979) insists that aesthetic experience is necessarily permeated by imaginative thought, that such experience always involves conceptions of objects or their features under certain descriptions. An object not consciously conceived in one fashion or another cannot, for Scruton, be an object in which one is finding aesthetic, as opposed to merely sensual, satisfaction. And Levinson (1996c) proposes an account of aesthetic pleasure in which the cognitive is similarly central: pleasure in an object is aesthetic, says Levinson, when it is grounded in a perception of and reflection on the object's individual character and content, both for themselves and in relation to the structural base on which they rest. In that light, the core of specifically aesthetic appreciation of an object, whether the product of art or nature, might be said to be a focus on the relation between its perceivable form and its resultant character and content. (For recent turns in the debate over distinctive aesthetic states of mind, see Carroll 2001 and Goldman 2001.)

Analytic philosophers have also tried to elucidate the concept of the aesthetic by focusing on what counts as an aesthetic *property*, sometimes going on to explicate other uses of aesthetic in relation to that, for example construing aesthetic perception or experience precisely as perception or experience of aesthetic properties.

Work on aesthetic properties in analytic aesthetics begins with Sibley's seminal paper of 1959, 'Aesthetic Concepts', which was followed by several other essays

of importance (see Sibley 2001). In Sibley's view, the distinctive feature of aesthetic concepts is their *non-condition-governedness*, or non-rulegovernedness: that an aesthetic term is true of some object cannot be justifiably inferred from any description of the object in non-aesthetic terms. The non-condition-governedness of aesthetic concepts does not, however, prevent aesthetic properties from being dependent on and determined by nonaesthetic properties; the relation between those sets of properties, however, remains broadly causal rather than conceptual. Sibley also claimed that a special capacity—*taste*—was required to perceive aesthetic properties, and so to apply aesthetic concepts correctly. Sibley's analysis was challenged by Cohen (1973), which questioned whether any principled distinction could even be drawn between aesthetic and nonaesthetic properties, and by Kivy (1973), which attempted to show that at least some aesthetic concepts were indeed condition-governed. Many writers, even those who acknowledge aesthetic properties as a distinct class and non-conditiongovernedness and supervenience as marks thereof, balk at the idea of a special faculty of taste being needed to discern them. The problem of the demarcation of aesthetic properties from non-aesthetic properties, exacerbated by Cohen's critique, has generated a fair amount of discussion. It is widely agreed that aesthetic properties are perceptual properties, dependent on lower-level perceptual properties, directly experienced rather than inferred, and linked in some way to the aesthetic value of the objects possessing them. In addition, most would follow Sibley in finding aesthetic properties to be non-conditiongoverned. But beyond that, matters are open to dispute. Some of the further marks of aesthetic property status that have been proposed are: having regional character (Beardsley 1973); being value-tending or value-contributing (Beardsley 1973); being implicitly evaluative (Goldman 1995); being evaluatively relevant (Levinson 1990b); being the subject of terminal attributions (Kivy 1975); and requiring imaginative or metaphorical thought for their attribution (Scruton 1974; Gaut 1997). Despite debate over these marks, there is substantial intuitive convergence as to what perceivable properties of things are aesthetic, as noted earlier.

Mention must also be made here of Goodman (1968), a rather different approach to theorizing the aesthetic, which offers five symptoms, not of aesthetic propertyhood, but of *aesthetic functioning* on the part of a symbol

system: syntactic density; semantic density; relative repleteness; exemplificationality; and complex reference. On such a multi-dimensional conception, aestheticness obviously becomes very much a matter of degree.

Walton (1970), in a highly influential paper, follows Beardsley and Sibley in taking aesthetic properties to be perceptual, gestalt-like, non-rule-governed, and dependent on an object's lower-level perceptual properties. But Walton insists, developing a suggestion in Gombrich (1963), that aesthetic properties depend as well on the perceptually distinguishable *artistic categories*—for instance, ones of style or genre or medium— under which works of art can be seen to fall. The consequence is that a work's aesthetic complexion is not a function of its lowerlevel or structural perceptual features alone, and that its aesthetic appreciation must thus involve bringing the right categories into play in one's experience of the work. Rightness of category, in turn, is partly a matter of the surrounding *arthistorical context*, including factors such as the artist's intention, the artist's oeuvre as a whole, the artistic traditions in which the artist worked, or the artistic problems to which the artist appears to be responding. (For related discussion see Wollheim 1980/1968; Levinson 1996d.)

The question of whether aesthetic attributions are objective or subjective, and, relatedly, whether it is realism or anti-realism about aesthetic properties that is justified, have been importantly addressed in recent literature (see Scruton 1974; Budd 1995; Goldman 1995; Bender 1996). Two further issues concerning the aesthetic much discussed at present are, first, that of the relation of the aesthetic to the *artistic*, and whether this is a relation of inclusion, exclusion, or partial overlap (see Goldman 1995; Stecker 1997; Levinson 1998b); and second, that of the relation of the aesthetic to the *moral* or *ethical* and, once again, whether this is a relation of inclusion, exclusion, or partial overlap (see Levinson 1998a).

## **2.2 The Definition of Art**

Discussion in analytic aesthetics of the problem of defining art begins in scepticism, scepticism rooted in the anti-essentialism of Wittgenstein. Weitz's (1956) 'The Role of Theory in Aesthetics' as proved seminal. (But see also, in a similar vein, Ziff 1953.)

Weitz argued convincingly that earlier modern theories of art, such as those of Tolstoy, Bell, and Collingwood, were in effect disguised recommendations in favour of particular kinds of art, or briefs for what good art consisted in, and not really accounts of the phenomenon of art with any claim to descriptive adequacy. But that, said Weitz, was as it should be, for two reasons: first, the evaluative component of ascriptions of arthood is central and ineliminable, and second, the concept of art is inherently open, and so always resists circumscription in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions of application. Thus, according to Weitz, there is no stateable essence of arthood, and all the things called art exhibit at best only a 'family resemblance' to one another.

Two of Weitz's arguments for the conclusion that the concept of art is inherently open and so resistant to definition were that the creativity that is inseparable from the idea of art necessarily dooms to failure any attempt to close the concept of art in terms of determinate conditions; and that the boundaries between the sub-categories of art (e.g. poem, painting, opera) are constantly in flux, and so the same must be true of the broader category of art itself, which it would thus be futile to attempt to define. But neither of those arguments is compelling. With respect to the first, the fact that creativity must be allowed to characterize the in principle ever changing objects of art in no way entails that creativity must therefore characterize the concept of art itself in such manner as to forestall the possibility of definition. With respect to the second, the fact that boundaries between genres of art may be fluid or permeable in no way entails that the concept of art encompassing them all must therefore have a constantly changing outline, if only because the domain of art is broader than, and not equivalent to the union of, all existing artistic genres. (For further criticisms, see Carroll 1999.)

Later writers, notably Dickie, have also challenged the first of Weitz's conclusions—that art is an eliminably evaluative concept—by making a case for a classificatory or descriptive concept of art, one with respect to which the idea of bad or even worthless art is not an oxymoron. But a prior response to Weitz was Mandelbaum (1965), which importantly suggested that the reason Weitz failed to discern any properties common to all and only artworks was that he had focused on exhibited and intrinsic properties (such as beauty or form or material), rather than on non-exhibited and relational properties, for example

intentional and causal ones, such as connect works to their contexts or their creators. Mandelbaum also underlined, ironically, that a characterization of artworks as displaying 'family resemblances' at least suggested underlying unifying links of a genetic or historical sort.

In the wake of the exchange between Weitz and Mandelbaum on art's definability emerged institutional theories of arthood, which proposed that a non-manifest relation to a social framework was what made something an artwork, not its manifest or observable properties. According to Danto's celebrated 1964 essay, 'The Artworld', directly inspired by the Dadaist ready-mades of Duchamp and the Pop Art simulacra of Warhol, an artwork is an object that bears an appropriate relation to a background framework of critical theory—what Danto dubbed 'the artworld'.

This account was later elaborated at length in Danto (1981), where emphasis is put on artworks acquiring aboutness and meaning in virtue of their relations to the artworld that surrounds them. According to Dickie (1969), developed further in Dickie (1974), an artwork is an artefact offered as a candidate for appreciation by someone acting on behalf of the artworld, the social structure invoked by Danto, and alternatively dubbed 'the republic of art' in Diffey (1969). According to Binkley (1977), in the most minimal of institutional theories, an artwork is merely something indexed in accord with artworld practices of indexing, i.e. indicating or identifying, objects. Finally, Dickie (1997, first published 1984), a revamped version of Dickie (1974), holds that an artwork is an artefact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public. It is evident in all such definitions that a great weight is implicitly placed on the artworld as an institution identifiable apart from identification of objects that are artworks in relation to it, lest vicious circularity result. Some institutional theorists, however, do not regard such circularity as fatal, taking it instead to be an inevitable reflection of the 'inflected' nature of art (Dickie 1997). Mention should also be made here of more traditional attempts to define art relationally, by appeal to aesthetic projection rather than institutional connection, as for example in Beardsley (1981), which takes an artwork to be something created or intended to afford aesthetic experience. Another sort of relational definition of art, the historical definition of art, prompted by some brief remarks in Wollheim (1980/1968), first appeared in Levinson (1979). (See Levinson 1993

for further development.) On that account, an artwork is roughly anything intended for regard or treatment in the way some past artworks were correctly regarded or treated. Like institutional definitions of art, Levinson's intentional-historical definition does not locate arthood in any intrinsic properties of the object; but, unlike institutional definitions, it holds as crucial not the connection of an object to the social framework of the artworld, but rather the connection an object bears to the preceding concrete history of art taken as a datum—a connection intentionally established, in one way or another, by the would-be artmaker. By in effect characterizing the present *intension* of 'art' only in terms of the past *extension* of 'art', the charge of circularity is circumvented, since the meaning of 'art' is not presupposed in the course of defining 'art'. (See Carney 1994 for replies to problems raised by this style of definition generally.) If the historical definition of art is on the right track, then the domain of art might be said to have a roughly *recursive* structure, but the historical definition is not as such a strictly recursive one. (For criticism of the historical definition, see Carroll 1994, 1999, 2000; Stecker 1997; Davies 1997; and Currie 2000; for responses to some of those criticisms, see Levinson 2002.)

In the same spirit as the historical definition, though explicitly renouncing its definitional ambition, is Noël Carroll's *narrative* theory of arthood (see Carroll 2001), which principally aims to explain how we *identify* objects as artworks. Arthood, for Carroll, resides in connections to the past, ones that can be exhibited in a coherent and convincing narrative showing how a candidate object is related, either by repetition, amplification, or repudiation, to artworks that preceded it. If such a narrative is constructible, the candidate object is an artwork, or has a claim to art status; if not, then not. Note that, so elucidated, the *narrative* theory of art might be more accurately labelled the *narrativizability* theory of art.

A useful higher-order classification of theories of art is provided in Davies (1991), which also reviews and criticizes a number of contemporary accounts. Davies divides theories of art into *functional* ones, which see art as definable in terms of some essential function that its objects fulfil or are intended to fulfil (examples of which would be Beardsley's aesthetic definition or the traditional definition of art as representation), and *procedural* ones, which see art as definable in terms of the performance or occurrence of certain procedures

internal to a social practice (examples of which would be the institutional definitions of Dickie, Diffey, and Binkley). Unfortunately, not all current theories fit under one or the other of these headings, notably historical and narrative theories. In addition, some current theories, of hybrid character, incorporate procedural, functional, *and* historical considerations (Stecker 1995). Finally, reminiscent of Weitz's 'family resemblance' view of art is the *cluster concept* account of art, a view that is also difficult to classify as either procedural or functional. According to that account, though the concept of art resists classical definition, there are, none the less, a variety of conditions that are yet conjunctively sufficient and disjunctively necessary for arthood (Gaut 2000).

### **2.3 The Ontology of Art**

The ontology of art is concerned with the question of what kinds of entities artworks are; what the identity and individuation conditions of such entities are; whether the metaphysical status of artworks is uniform or diverse across artforms; what work authenticity amounts to in different artforms; and whether a reductive or eliminativist position regarding artworks can be justified. Philosophers have asked whether works of art are physical or mental, abstract or concrete, singular or multiple, created or discovered. Perhaps the most fundamental distinction in the metaphysics of artworks is that between artforms where the work of art appears to be a concrete particular—a unique spatiotemporally circumscribable object or event—as in painting, drawing, carved sculpture, and improvised music, and artforms where the work appears to be rather an abstract entity—a type, kind, universal, pattern, or structure—as in etching, engraving, cast sculpture, composed music, poetry, and film. Philosophers have also queried the status of forgeries, reproductions, copies, versions, translations, transcriptions, and adaptations of works of art, and the extent to which interpretation is involved in producing instances of works in the performing arts.

The agenda of ontology of art in analytic aesthetics was largely set by three works: Goodman (1976/1968), Wollheim (1980/1968), and Wolterstorff (1975) (see also Wolterstorff 1980). Goodman introduced the distinctions of *singular v. multiple* artforms, *one-stage v. two-stage* artforms, *autographic* (or

forgeable) *v. allographic* (or non-forgeable) artforms, and the idea of a work-defining *notation*, applicable in at least certain arts. (For discussion, see Levinson 1990a.) Goodman's moderate nominalist conception of a musical work, in particular, is that it is a class of performances compliant with a score, scores being complex symbols in a notation. Wollheim argued against identifying all artworks with physical objects, and against the opposite conception of artworks, perhaps attributable to Croce, Collingwood, and Sartre, according to which works of art are mental entities. Wollheim also introduced the idea of musical and literary artworks as *types*, rather than classes, and analysed the way in which properties of an artwork type are transmitted to or inherited by its *tokens*. Wolterstorff proposed that musical and literary works were types of a special sort, which he called *norm kinds*, meaning that they, like biological kinds, could have correct and incorrect, or properly formed and improperly formed, instances (for example performances containing wrong notes).

In addition to those seminal writings, we may note Margolis (1974, 1977), which suggest conceiving of artworks as *abstract particulars*, ones culturally emergent and embodied in concrete objects, and the related conception of artworks in Danto (1981) as creatures of theory distinct from the 'mere' objects that incarnate them, thus allowing for distinct works that stand in a relation of *perceptual indiscernibility* to one another. Though the proposals of Margolis and Danto strive explicitly to be adequate to works of avant-garde visual art of the late twentieth century (pop art, ready-mades, minimal art, and conceptual art), their validity is presumably not restricted to avant-garde modes of artmaking. An important suggestion regarding avant-garde musical works, but perhaps applicable to traditional ones as well, can be found in Tormey (1974), construing them as akin to *recipes* or prescriptions, not for sounds as such, but rather for actions to be undertaken by performers.

More recent accounts of the ontology of art are those of Currie and Levinson, which emphasize the importance to the identity of a work of the historical context in which the work arises, and stress, *pace* Goodman, the insufficiency of a work's observable structure alone to fix that identity, even in artforms where notation plays a crucial role (Currie 1989; Levinson 1980, 1996d). Currie views artworks as *action types*, where the action in question is the complex sequence

of steps by which the artist, with certain objectives in mind and working in a given creative context, arrives at a given manifest object: that which we ordinarily, though mistakenly, identify as the artwork itself. Currie believes that all artworks are types, even those that, like paintings and drawings, are ostensibly unique particulars (see also Zemach 1986). Levinson, on the other hand, insists on the traditional distinction between particular (singular) and type (multiple) arts; but like Currie he eschews a structuralist view of artwork types for a historicist one. According to Levinson, a musical or literary work is an *indicated structure*, a species of *initiated type*: roughly, a tonal or verbal structure-as-indicated-by-X-in-arthistorical- context-C. On that conception, musical works are both creatable and entities in which creator and context figure essentially.

Four very recent studies may be mentioned which go in the same historicist and contextual direction as Levinson and Currie: D. Davies (1999), S. Davies (2001), Howell 2002a,b). These studies also effectively underline how only a pluralist ontology of works of art can be adequate to the great diversity of existing artworks, artforms, and art traditions—from high art to folk art, primitive art to technological art, and western art to non-western art in all its manifestations. Apart from their all being artefacts, artworks are very many kinds of things, and are thus not all encompassable within a single metaphysical category. (For objections to historicistcontextualist proposals, see Dodd 2000 and Predelli 2001.)

## **2.4 Representation in Art**

The topic of representation in analytic aesthetics has for the most part been pursued with reference to *pictorial representation* (or *depiction*). Work was prompted most significantly by the 1960 publication of *Art and Illusion*, a landmark book by art historian Ernst Gombrich. Gombrich famously argued against ‘the innocent eye’ model of picture perception, and for a view that acknowledged the history of pictorial representation, which Gombrich conceptualized as a progressive march towards ever more realistic, illusion-sustaining images, arrived at through a protracted process of ‘making and matching’. This was followed in 1968 by Goodman's *Languages of Art*

(Goodman 1976/1968), which, while accepting Gombrich's thesis of the historicity of representation, rejected his emphasis on illusion, arguing that pictorial representation was entirely a matter of denotation, conventionally established, and had nothing to do with illusion or its psychological cousin, perceived resemblance.

Subsequent theorists have offered accounts of depiction, and of our responses to such depictions, in terms of seeing-in (Wollheim 1980/1968, 1987), world-projection (Wolterstorff 1980), make-believe (Walton 1990), recognitional capacities (Schier 1986), resemblance between visual experience of object and Representation (Peacocke 1987; Budd 1993; Hopkins 1998), and information content (Lopes 1996). I next sketch the two currently most influential accounts: Wollheim's 'seeing-in' theory (Wollheim 1987) and Walton's 'make-believe' theory (Walton 1990). Wollheim's theory is a development of Wittgenstein's idea of aspect perception, or perceiving one thing as another, e.g. a gnarled tree as an old woman. But instead of seeing-as, Wollheim proposes a variant notion, seeing-in, as the core of pictorial perception. Seeing-in differs from seeing-as in at least two ways: first, the former applies to the parts of a picture, the latter only to the picture as a whole; and second, the former involves awareness of the picture's surface simultaneously with awareness of the picture's depicted content. (Wollheim calls this feature of seeing-in 'twofoldness'.) Seeing-in is thus for Wollheim a primitive visual capacity, at first exercised on natural phenomena, e.g. stained rock faces, and later harnessed for deliberate image making, explicitly aimed at such seeing-in. So for Wollheim a picture is essentially an arrangement of marks intended for seeing-in which in fact supports such seeing-in. A large part of the aesthetic interest in pictures is tied to the basic twofoldness of seeing-in, wherein we necessarily appreciate what is depicted, in a fictive three-dimensional space, in relation to the real two-dimensional pattern of marks that underlies it.

Walton's theory understands pictures as props in visual games of make-believe, where making believe is in turn understood as an activity of guided imagining. Confronted with a picture, we are prompted to imagine that we are seeing such and such an object *by* the configuration of marks that constitutes the picture, and we imagine precisely *of* our seeing those marks that it is a seeing of the object the picture depicts. Pictures generate fictional worlds ('work-worlds'),